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Pt. 1

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IN FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT

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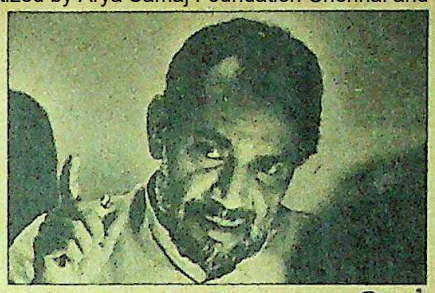
A Historic Mandate

In what has been the most one-sided election result in Indian history, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi led his ruling party to a brute majority in the eighth Lok Sabha. However, the sheer size of the mandate poses new problems that must be tackled.

COVER STORY 16



A Dignified Exit

Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde turned his electoral setback in the state into a major moral victory by tendering his resignation and paving the way for dissolution of the Assembly. A report and an exclusive interview with Hegde.

ELECTION SPECIAL 45

Election '84

Last fortnight's elections were a kaleidoscope of colour and contrast and a cacophony of sound and fury that eventually signified a great deal. INDIA TODAY's photographers capture the flavour of the most momentous election campaign of them all.

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Ripples of Fear

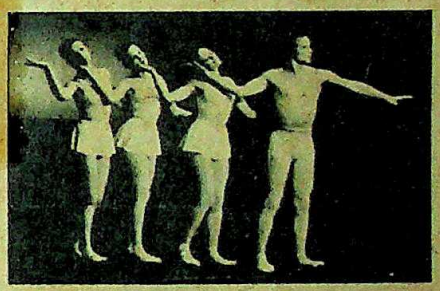
In the aftermath of the riots following Mrs Gandhi's assassination thousands of Sikhs have started moving into Punjab in search of greater security. Unofficial estimates put the number at 40,000. The exodus has put the state Government in a tight spot.

CURRENT EVENTS 110

Hoping for Change

Even as it became clear that the ruling party was heading for a landslide electoral victory, INDIA TODAY sought opinions of businessmen all over the country on what their expectations are from the new government and what changes they envisage.

BUSINESS 124



A Legend Comes to Town

Last week, the living legend of dance, Rudolf Nureyev, arrived for performances with the Paris Opera Ballet. Nureyev's ascendancy to stardom is a fascinating story that rivals his fictional roles on stage. A profile and an exclusive interview with the star.

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Cover Photograph by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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A MOMENT comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance." How apt are these words in the present context. Spoken by Jawaharlal Nehru, the present prime minister's grandfather, 37 years ago on the eve of Independence, they may well come to describe the period that is now starting. India now has for the first time a leader at the helm who belongs to the post-Independence generation and one who has been elected by an unprecedented mandate—truly a case of a phase ending and the electorate finding a new voice.

The psychological importance of having a youthful prime minister cannot be underestimated and the change in approach will soon become evident as he begins to grapple with the country's problems. It is reason for hoping that a new spirit will prevail, and equally a warning that if it doesn't, then disillusionment will fast set in. Although Rajiv Gandhi did not specifically campaign for change, his youth and personality personified it more than anything else, and there is little doubt that the massive victory is a vote for change.

FOR INDIA TODAY, *the result was a sort of vindication. Our opinion poll correctly indicated that the Congress(I) would win by a landslide and secure the largest share of votes in its history. The forecast said the party would get 366 seats but also hinted at a still higher figure when it said: "The poll contains some indications that the Congress(I) might even win more than 366 seats. With its allies, the party could command over 400 seats in the Lok Sabha."*

When this was published, it was blasphemy to mention any figure of over 300 in politically "well-informed" circles. And once the poll was published, INDIA TODAY *was, predictably, the target of a campaign of vilification. Money was supposed to have changed hand. The foreign hand was seen to be at work. Even after the results were announced, we were accused of having influenced the election with our forecast.*

Flattering though it may be, we have to confess that in spite of our large readership we cannot claim any such fame. There is no indication of how opinion polls influence voting behaviour. Madhavrao Scindia, who we had predicted would roundly defeat Atal Behari Vajpayee, bemoaned: "When your poll came out, half my party workers sat back because they said it was a foregone conclusion." And there was poetic justice in the fact that certain opposition politicians who derided the poll as "Congress(I)-manipulated" later sought a meeting with our pollsters to try and understand what hit them.

INDIA TODAY *published a Lok Sabha election forecast, as it did in 1980, because of its commitment to scientific methodology. Election forecasts are not infallible devices, they suggest how things might turn out. The method we used is the best method we know though we are quite aware that had we been totally wrong it might have been the death of serious election forecasting in the country.*

Since the cover story was scheduled to be on the winning party and that information could only be available on December 29, INDIA TODAY *decided to work on the assumption that our forecast was correct and asked our correspondents to speak to people about what they would expect from the Congress(I) in its new term. The result is a story which not only deals with the outcome of the election, but the tasks that lie ahead for the new prime minister.*

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SHARAD 722

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DCM LIMITED

Speech by Dr. Bharat Ram, Chairman, at the Annual General Meeting of the Company held on December 26, 1984 at New Delhi.

Dr. Bharat Ram

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this annual general meeting of your company.

The 96th annual general meeting of your company is for me a very special occasion. Lala Charat Ram and I have been working all our lives in the DCM. The Board has rightly taken a decision that we would retire as Managing Directors from the end of March, 1985 making way for the younger generation. The Board has decided that Bansi Dhar be appointed as the Chairman and Senior Managing Director and Vinay Bharat-Ram as the Managing Director from April, 1985 onwards.

I will be addressing you for the last time as Chairman. Being a man of sentiment, I cannot help recalling the joy and toil that Lala Charat Ram and I have shared in steering the affairs of this company for more than four decades. The sixties was a period when we initiated major diversification of this company from textiles and sugar into fertilisers and tyre cord. The seventies was a period when our emphasis shifted towards building a new generation of managers, who could bring both stability and growth to the company. Achieving such a balance between stability and growth, I believe, is the perpetual challenge before top management. Some have handled it better than others, and those who have handled it better have taken their corporations to new heights. In this respect, I believe that DCM on the whole has been eminently successful. Despite the fact that it has been weighed down by an ageing textile industry, it has succeeded in spawning new ventures with growth potential for the future. Having made these general remarks, I would like to underscore the central theme of my speech, which I shall call the 'management of transition'.

Management of Transition

It gives me great pleasure in informing you that Bansi Dhar will be taking over as Chairman and Senior Managing Director and Vinay Bharat-Ram as Managing Director of this company from Lala Charat Ram and myself on our retirement in March, 1985. I would like to take you in confidence by saying that your present top management had prepared for this transition well in advance by exposing both Bansi Dhar and Vinay Bharat-Ram to various areas of responsibility within and outside the company. The result is that they will be taking over as a team of seasoned and experienced business leaders. I have full faith in them, and am sure you will extend to them the same support and co-operation as Lala Charat Ram and I have received from you.

Tasks Ahead

At any point of time in the history of an enterprise there always remains some unfinished business despite the harbingers of hope and confidence. As I have been saying for the last two or three years, the textile industry continues to pass through a crisis. Mills continue to be closing down. Unfortunately, we also have had to close down one of our Mills. While our Hindon River Mills, which is a modern Mill, is doing well, I do not know what will happen to the other two old Mills.

One does not close down a Mill unless circumstances make it absolutely unavoidable. Under these circumstances sometimes, it is financial prudence on the part of management to take this unpleasant step. Whether we actually may have to close any of our old units will be for the new management to decide. However, if this step is necessary, it would be with a view to put up a new and modern textile Mill by utilising the real estate on which the old Mill is located for commercial purposes. There is every reason to believe that such a programme of property development and re-location of the textile facilities will be possible.

A Valuable Legacy

The major factor which has given stability to the company in its difficult years is the continued good performance of the sugar, fertilisers and chemicals divisions. They have remained a model of managerial efficiency, and I am confident that they will prove to be pillars of strength in the years to come. On the side of growth in the direction of new technologies, as I had stated last year, DCM's thrust towards modern technology began

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in the late sixties. It was spurred on by the benefits derived from DCM's association with Shri Ram Institute for Industrial Research. Consequently, the company is now involved in the development and introduction of new technology in the areas of high polymers, irradiation technology, sugar manufacturing technology, bio-technologies, as well as the development of fire retardant fibres, etc.

The computer division is now well established with a research and development programme, which has enabled the export of software, production of Indian language computers, micro processor-based controls for energy saving and a whole range of mini and micro computers. DCM's automotive foundry at Ropar, in spite of some setbacks on account of an unfortunate political situation, is now poised for supplying sophisticated castings to the new DCM Toyota commercial vehicles project with the help of valuable expertise from Japan.

On the human side, our management training schemes deserve special mention. No company can preserve its vitality without an orderly programme of management development. DCM's tradition of inducting groups of bright young people at different levels of management into the company are only too well-known. It is important to note that these programmes are updated from time to time, with the result that our training schemes have the finest reputation in the country. It is not surprising therefore that many of the men, who joined us as trainees more than a decade ago, now occupy senior positions of responsibility.

Likewise, Lala Shri Ram's labour philosophy with its representation of a Labour Director on the Board of the company has become legendary. It is our belief that the company's concern, extends beyond the statutory eight-hour working day of the employee. Consequently, the creation of a suitable social as well as educational environment for his children is a matter of company concern. As a result, DCM has done its best to contribute towards housing, schooling, cultural events and sports, which culminate in an annual meet, representing all units of the company.

Perspectives for the Future

These are valuable legacies on which a company can build a bright future. They are far more durable than buildings and machines, and if understood in the right spirit can be a company's most valuable asset. They refer to the human dimension which is not easy to put down on a balance sheet, and yet it is this human dimension which in the final analysis marks the character and true worth of a corporation. I have full faith that the new management will build on this legacy.

The National Scene

It is ironic that while I speak of the management transition, this very concept applies with equal relevance to the nation. India has recently witnessed one of the grimmest tragedies in the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This catastrophe could have easily thrown India into a whirlpool of uncertainty. However, contrary to the prophesies of doom, this did not happen, and we saw one of the smoothest transfers of political power. That the leadership of the country has fallen on such young shoulders, though inconceivable in the eyes of some, in my opinion, is in tune with the laws of nature. In this ancient land of ours, we sometimes find it difficult to believe that India is a young nation with more than half its population below the age of 30. It is possible therefore that the agonies and aspirations of such a young nation will be better understood by a leadership, which is closer to it in its own age profile, than by those who are well past middle age. Furthermore, a youthful leadership is required to cope with the compulsions of a fast changing world. These compulsions demand swift and unorthodox solutions for newly emerging problems, in areas like pollution, security and terrorism. They also require swift responses to opportunities and challenges posed by fast changing technology.

Some echoes of the political philosophy of the new leadership are already in evidence. A courageous confrontation with corruption, a commitment to efficiency and a focus on national integration have done wonders to raise the morale of those, who had doubts about the future of our society.

I have in the past been reviewing the economy of the country in my speech. But this time, I would only say that while we have achieved a moderate growth rate of 5 per cent in the past, I have every hope that the new leadership will make appropriate changes in the industrial, fiscal and monetary policies to increase the growth rate to a much higher figure which this country is capable of achieving.

To conclude, I look forward with great hope and optimism to the future. The transition of responsibility in our company has come at a fortuitous time when the country itself is about to embark on new initiatives. I therefore stand before you with the satisfaction of having devoted the best years of my life to a company of which we can justly be proud.

Before I close, I would like to thank all our workers and staff for the exemplary manner in which they have worked throughout the year.

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the annual general meeting.

DCM

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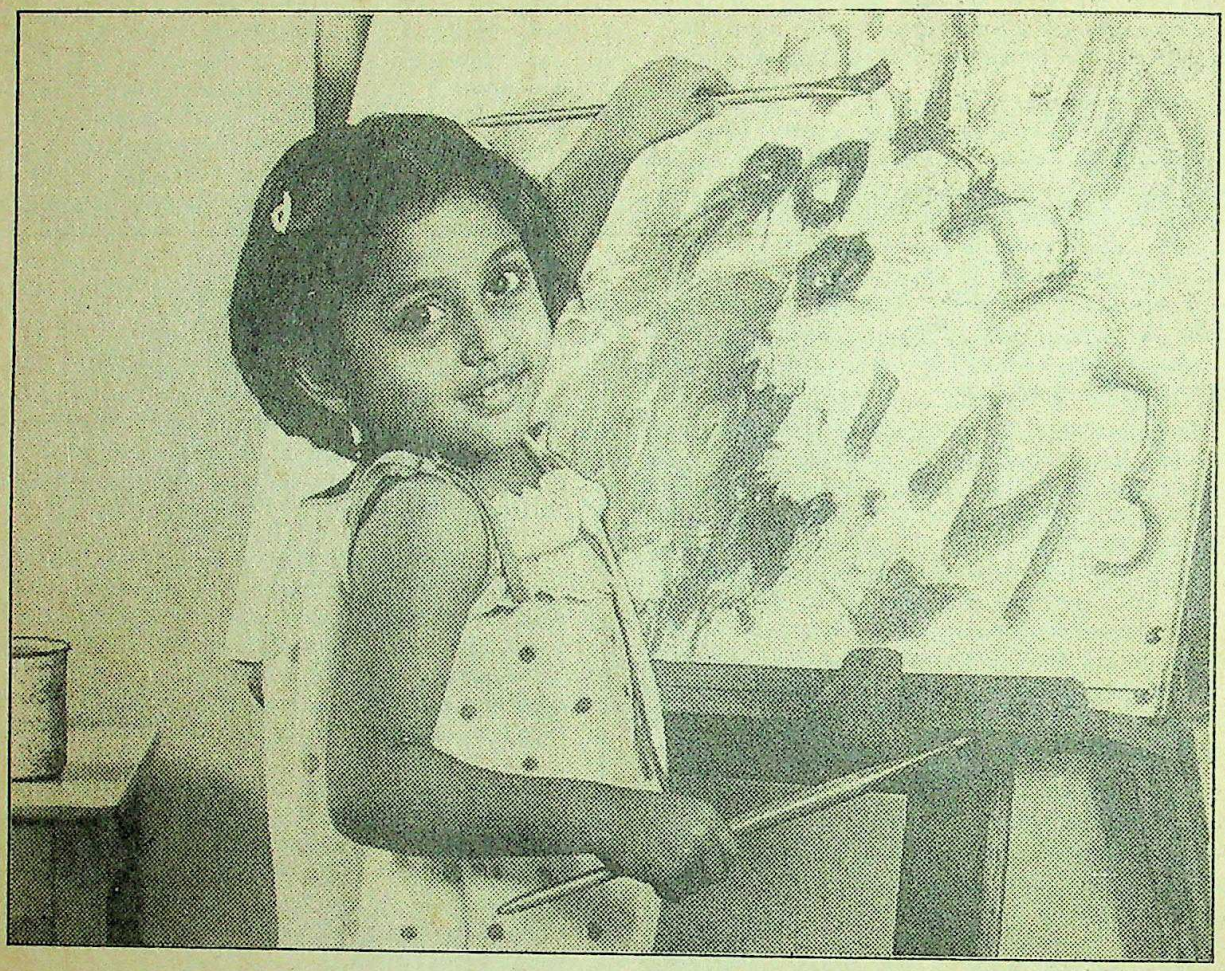
A close brush with art!



Random memories. Life is full of them. Memories of happiness, love, pride and fun. Fleeting moments that you just have to capture. They can happen any time. They may not happen again.

Take a picture.

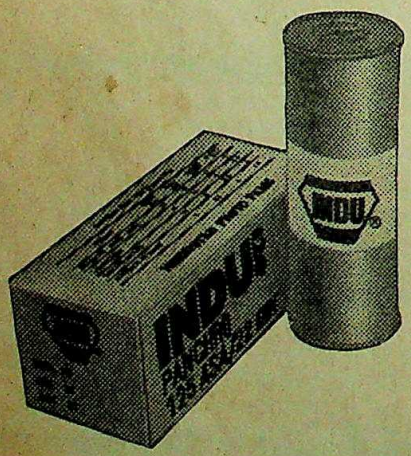
In black and white.

Only black and white pictures don't fade for years and years.

Keep the pictures in the family album.

Later, you can share your memories.

And relive the happy times.



Capture the moment

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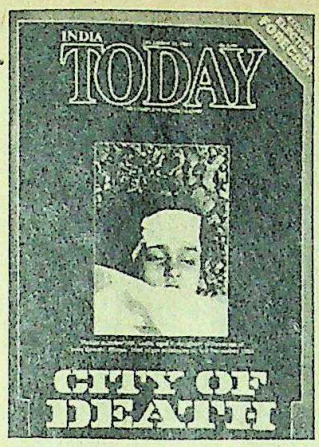

BHOPAL'S TRAGEDY

The single picture "A caring hand brushes dirt..." in the Bhopal cover story "City of Death" (December 31) sums up the tragedy of the people of Bhopal in a way no words could.

Ramasamy Raja Nagar,
Tamil Nadu — S.N. RAMA RAJU

■ Now that huge amounts are being claimed as compensation for the victims it is the duty of the Union Government to ensure that all funds granted by the courts reach the actual victims instead of being siphoned off by middlemen.

Ernakulam — R. POTHA

MR CLEAN

Your cover story "Rajiv Gandhi: A Cautious Beginning" (December 15) is a sincere endeavour to cover up his inefficiency which is evident from his association with people like Arun Singh, Arun Nehru, R.K. Dhawan and the like. Before attributing "Mr Efficient" to Rajiv Gandhi you should have verified whether he has at least preserved the "Mr Clean" image till this day. Had you done that the statement "Mr Clean through a complex chemistry of power and circumstance, was fast turning Mr Efficient" would not have found place in the cover story. Not all Indians have forgotten Rajiv Gandhi's recent words and deeds. To mention a few, he found the recent *coup d'etat* in Andhra Pradesh valid, assured legal support to A.R. Antulay, and headed the demented NSUI conference at Nagpur.

Trivandrum — P. VIJAYA CHANDRAN

■ Rajiv Gandhi need not follow the old tactics which have stopped paying dividends. He has asked the people to choose between Bharat Desam and Telugu Desam. Who told him that the Telugu people want a separate state? N.T. Rama Rao has always emphasised the unity of Bharat Desam of which Telugu Desam wants to remain an integral part. Rajiv has also made several reckless statements, including the accusation that the Opposition helped destabilisation and violence and created conditions which led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi. In fact when army action was taken in Punjab the opposition parties supported it, Morarji Desai even said that it should have been taken earlier.

Hyderabad — LAXMI NARAYAN TERALA

■ At a time when more than half the people of India do not even have one meal a day, and the number of people below the poverty line is increasing by at least 3.7 million a year, Rajiv in his election speech says that people are demanding airports. He may not be able to feed the crores of beggars in the country, but he should not insult their self-respect in this fashion. The ruling party and the Opposition are the two sides of the same coin. Having no socio- economic programme to change the present system of exploitation the leaders of the parliamentary parties are resorting to all sorts of such political gimmicks. It is time people built a movement to establish a 'genuine democracy'.

Orissa — ABIR PADHY *convenor, PUDR*

HEINOUS MATRICIDE

Your investigation "The Assassination: Unravelling the Threads" (December 15) covers all aspects except one. Why have the five head priests not excommunicated Beant Singh (posthumously) and Satwant Singh? They excommunicated President Zail Singh and Santa Singh. Are these people worse than Beant and Satwant, who are guilty of heinous matricide leading to major tragedy for several thousand innocents?

Lucknow — LT COL S.K. MUSHRAN (RETD)

■ Indira Gandhi's assassination has revealed another unfortunate aspect of our national character, viz the tendency to deify a person after his/her death beyond all norms of reason. The past few weeks have seen Indira Gandhi placed on the same pedestal as Mahatma Gandhi, Joan of Arc, and for good measure, Jesus Christ and Lord Krishna.

An objective assessment of Indira Gandhi and her impact on India is sorely overdue. Those who draw a parallel between the two assassinations—that of Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi—are perhaps more emotional than rational. The Mahatma was assassinated for preaching love and compassion between two different communities while Mrs Gandhi was eliminated by the very cult of violence which she encouraged.

Bahrain — J. RAVI

BORED PISTOL

In your report "Envoy's Death" (December 15) while it is said that four 9mm bullets were recovered from the car in which Percy Norris was shot, I fail to understand how a .32 semi-automatic pistol could have been used. 9mm is otherwise referred to as .38 and in no way can a .32 cartridge be fired from a 9mm bore pistol/revolver.

New Delhi — SUEZ AKRAM

The error is regretted. —Editor

DOWN THE CORRIDOR

In your article "Punjab Crisis: Is There a Way Out?" (May 15) you have stated that "the transfer of Abohar and Fazilka to Haryana under the decade-old award given by Mrs Gandhi will involve the creation of 55 km corridor through Punjab linking these areas with Haryana which is hardly a practical proposition." In fact, the length of this corridor which is to be provided through the territory of village Kandu Khera is approximately 8 km and this can easily be dispensed with if this territory is transferred to Haryana to provide contiguity of Abohar-Fazilka Hindi-speaking areas with the Haryana.

The population of this village is overwhelmingly Hindi-speaking and in fact this village was a part of Fazilka until 1956 when it was transferred to Muktsar tehsil on the eve of the decision taken by the Punjab Government for dividing the state into Hindi and Punjabi-speaking regions. This decision was then taken by leaders of Punjab in order to disrupt the contiguity of the tehsil of Fazilka with the tehsil of Sirsa which is a part of Haryana. It was precisely on account of this lack of contiguity disrupted by the transfer of this village to Muktsar tehsil in 1956 that the Shah Commission could not include Fazilka in Haryana. In view of these facts it would be reasonable to transfer Kandu Khera to Fazilka. Since Abohar-Fazilka are predominatly Hindi-speaking they should be transferred to Haryana

Chandigarh — ANIL RAZDAN
director, Public Relations, Haryana

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The Dangers of Arrogance

PRIME Minister Rajiv Gandhi was right when he said that the massive mandate for the Congress(I) last week was a vote for a better future. In the days and months ahead, there will be many interpretations of the result, of the lunge rather than the swing towards the ruling party and the humiliating decimation of the opposition parties. But in essence, there is no mystery in what the Indian voter in his collective wisdom has done. He has given a clear signal that he is for an India that is independent, secure, unified and prospering, uncluttered with dissension, freed from the threat of fragmentation, governed by an uncorrupt, clean, effective and efficient government. And he has unambiguously given Rajiv Gandhi the strength and opportunity to deliver this changed future.

The ruling party deserves the accolades that have poured in with its impressive victory. There is justification for the euphoria. But if it allows this to go to its head, it will be letting down the voter who has given it this unparalleled plurality. It is well that the new prime minister struck a cautionary note in his first public utterances on the election result, emphasising the enormous responsibility that the election had now imposed on him and his party. Such restraint in the wake of such overwhelming success augurs well. For power can easily breed arrogance, and arrogance can distort the party's perception of the electorate's mandate. And that is a sure formula for failure. It cannot be stated too strongly or too often that every election is ultimately the victory of the electorate, that the result irrevocably reflects what the electorate—and not any political party—wants done.

POWER CAN EASILY BREED ARROGANCE, AND ARROGANCE CAN DISTORT THE PARTY'S PERCEPTION OF THE ELECTORATE'S MANDATE AND THAT IS A SURE FORMULA FOR FAILURE.

The Congress(I) and its youthful leader should be sobered in this hour of triumph by the thought that the massive mandate is an investment of hope in that better future, and that there can be no alibis if the hope is belied. There is no longer any parliamentary opposition worth the name, none certainly that can be offered up as an excuse for failure. The Congress(I)'s own foe is itself, and if it does not deliver, it will have only itself to blame.

Fortunately, the party has no reason to feel insecure. It must, consequently, resist any temptation to use its brute majority to steamroll hasty changes in the Constitution, or tinker with the idea of a presidential system of government, or resort to the premature dismissal of state governments. Such a step would be self-defeating in the long run. The election results contain few surprises, but they do show that the Rajiv Gandhi whirlwind has abated at the Banihal Pass in Jammu & Kashmir, and on the ramparts of the Telugu Desam fortress in Andhra Pradesh. One reason is that both Farooq Abdullah and N. T. Rama Rao are charismatic leaders. Another is that in their own ways, they stand for the aspirations of their people. But a third reason is that their electorate has obviously not forgotten the Congress(I) assaults on them in the last one year. The clean sweep by the Abdullah National Conference in the Kashmir valley is a powerful repudiation of the Congress(I)-supported regime of Chief Minister G.M. Shah whose son, Muzzaffar, was roundly defeated. And the Telugu Desam's impressive tally of 28 of Andhra Pradesh's 41 seats to which elections were held is a strong thumbs-down signal on last August's crude and eventually unsuccessful attempt to dislodge Rama Rao.

The absence of a credible Opposition in Parliament will also provide temptation to convert that institution, which is so central to a strong democracy, into a rubber stamp at precisely the time when it is necessary to strengthen institutions such as parliament, the judiciary and the executive. The absence of an effective Opposition is deplorable because it is necessary to remember that at least half the electorate did not vote for the Congress(I). This does not diminish the election victory or tarnish the mandate. What it does mean is that in spite of the lack of effective opposition, a gift of the parliamentary system's method of converting votes into seats, there is no less of a need to govern by consensus. Ineffective and unsuccessful it might be, disloyal the Opposition is not. And it would be pertinent to remember Disraeli's prophetic words: "No government can be long secure without a formidable opposition."

India's own recent past tells us that large majorities have in themselves never ensured the success of governments. This was true in 1971 and 1980 as much as in 1977, when each election swept in regimes with strong majorities only to see them falter in a couple of years. The pattern can and must be broken. It will be if Rajiv sees his massive mandate not as an end in itself but as a starting point for the bigger struggle that lies ahead. There are enough solutions available even to the most intractable problems. There is enough talent and goodwill to find others where none exists.

What is needed is a clear-sighted will to act, to plumb for what is right and see it through. If power remains concentrated in the hands of a coterie around the prime minister—a coterie made up of an all-powerful secretariat and advisors who seek to control access to him—he will lack the flexibility and flow of information he needs to make up his mind. But if he bends his efforts to strengthening the Cabinet and the bureaucracy, gives his ministers at the Centre and in the states the authority and means to get on with their jobs and holds them responsible, if he keeps himself open to ideas from the outside and deliberately sets out to build a consensus, then he will have an historic opportunity to give this country the decisive push towards modernity that it desperately needs, and to endow it with a reformed polity. It won't be easy, but that is why he has been given this historic mandate.

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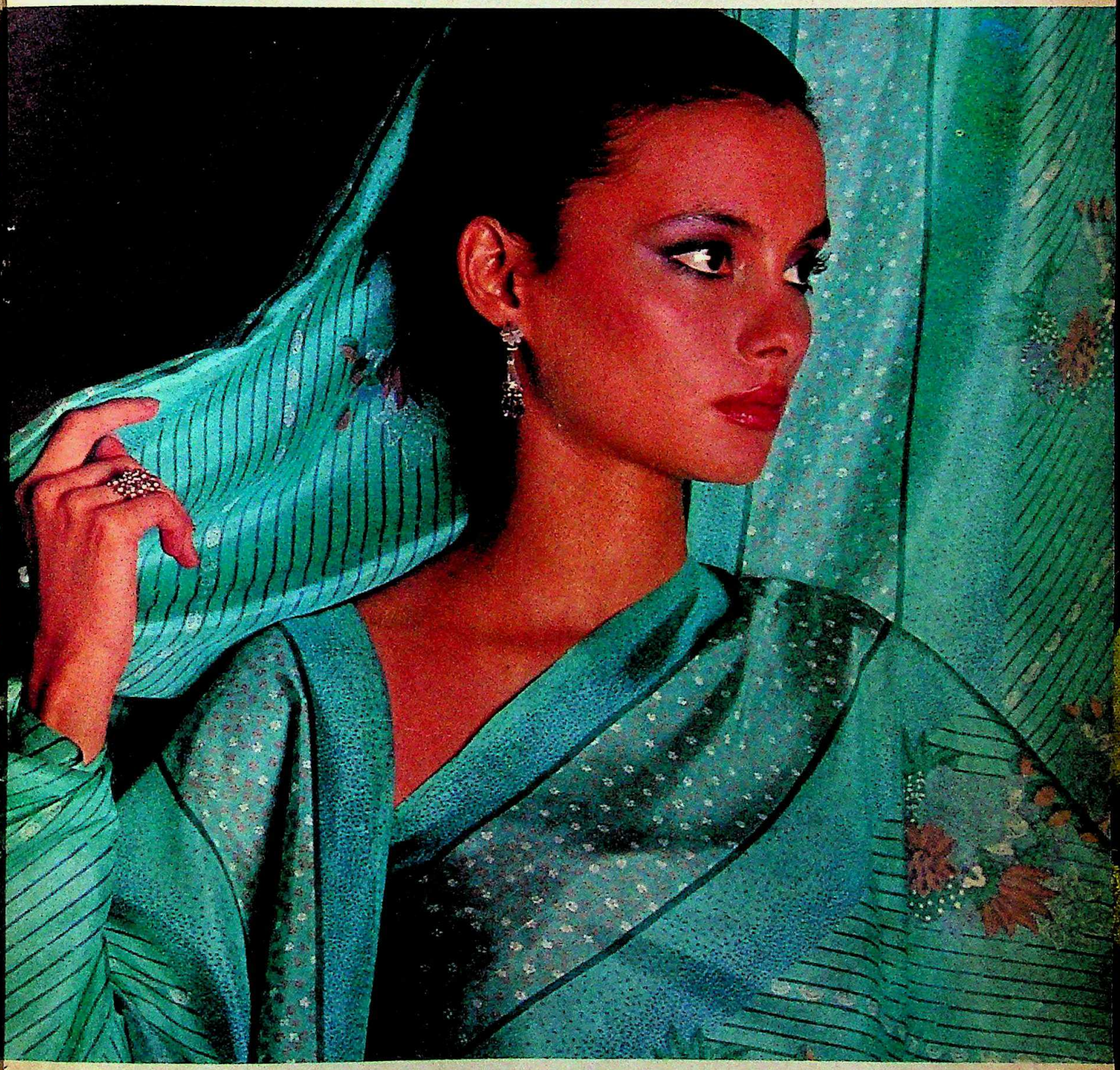

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• *So what if I have defended smugglers. It is my duty as a lawyer to defend anyone who comes to me. But I have to say that I have represented more Congressmen in court than smugglers and the smugglers are better individuals anyday.*

■ RAM JETHMALANI quoted in *Bombay*

• *Mr Antulay is trying to rationalise his conduct simply because he has been denied the party ticket. Should we say his loyalty is only just a ticket deep?*

■ HARI JAISINGH in the *Indian Express*

• *In the current popularity contest Rajiv Gandhi has a natural advantage which comes off well on the TV.... Youth and a photogenic face do help.... Needless to say there should be more to a prime minister than a "matinee idol" look and swadeshi veneer....*

■ RAVINDRA NATH in *The Week*

• *The one thing I wish I could tell you is what happened over there (in Bhopal). We simply don't know.*

■ WARREN ANDERSON, chairman, Union Carbide, to newsmen in Institute

• *If the world felt especially close to Bhopal...it may be because the world is Bhopal, a place where occupational hazard is modern life.*

■ ROGER ROSENBLATT in *Time*

• *I thought I had seen everything, but this is worse than war.*

■ Subedar A.B. BHOSALE about the Bhopal gas tragedy

• *When the political contradiction sets in, the army can never win. Political belief is something that is in the mind, not in the barrel of a gun.... However strong the Indian Army is, they cannot win the conviction of a man.*

■ LALDENGA, Mizo leader in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *If India's destiny is to be ruled by a political dynasty, we should draw some consolation that Mrs Gandhi's successor has been Rajiv and not Sanjay.*

■ K.R. SUNDER RAJAN in *Debonair*

• *Mr Gandhi is trying to make history without reading it.*

■ JAGJIVAN RAM at a meeting

• *The names of those two assassins (Beant Singh and Satwant Singh) will be read into the scroll of martyrs for years to come. It is the greatest honour for the Sikh to give his life to preserve the sanctity of the temple.*

■ KHUSHWANT SINGH in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*

• *The Congress(I) will show the hand and I will show my (injured) foot.*

■ ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE to newsmen

• *When I was an actor and I was mobbed, I used to go home and measure my head and felt it has grown a couple of inches because it used to feel nice. And I felt the day it stops, that was the time to get worried.... Now when I am mobbed I feel a kind of responsibility.*

■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *The Sunday Observer*

• *The fear that a presidential form of government would usher in hereditary rule or authoritarian rule is not only baseless but absurd.*

■ VASANT SATHE in *Gentleman*

• *Politics is so drab. Such a non-creative, dangerous, heartless field.... It's too complicated. There is no fun in being a politician. But they are the true actors.*

■ REKHA in *Filmfare*

Compiled by ANITA KAUL BASU

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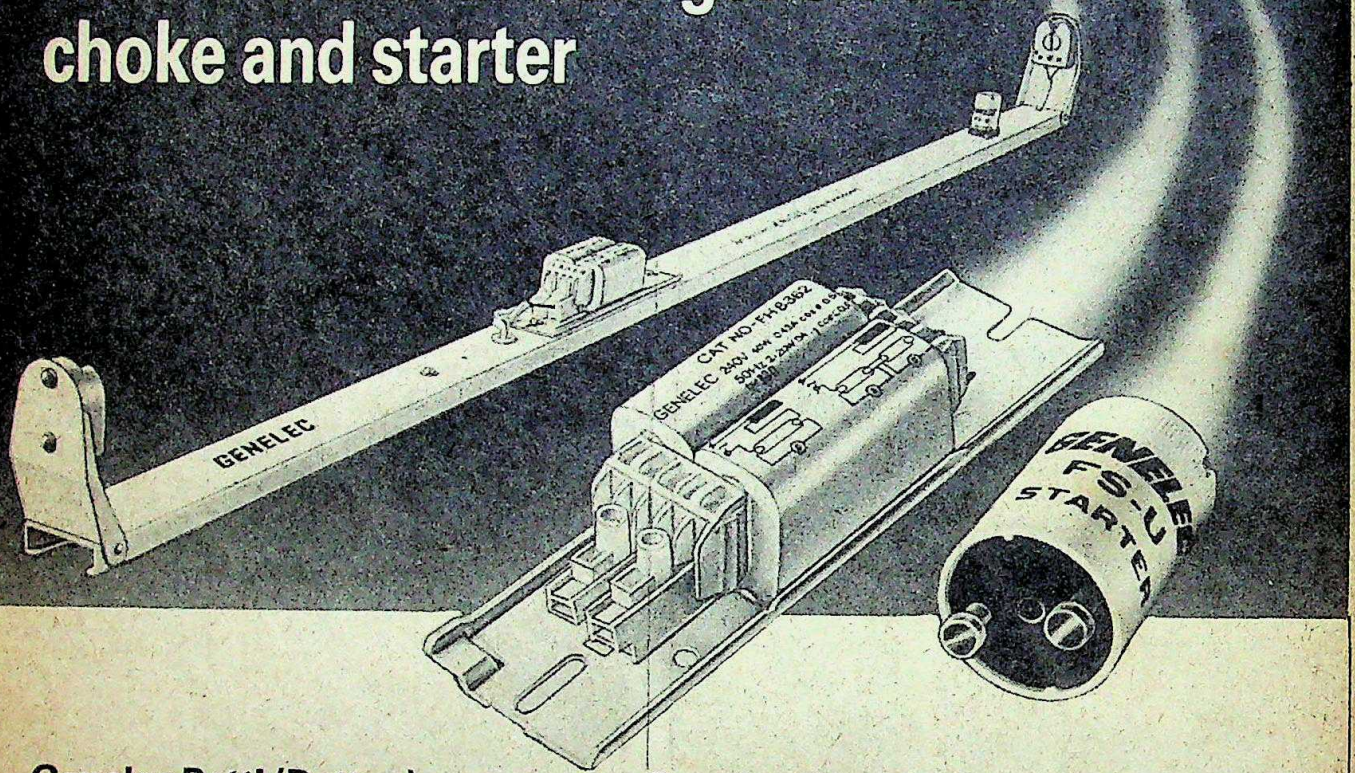

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CONGRESS(I) A HISTORIC

THIS was the eye of the storm. Betraying none of the excitement of an electoral tornado all around, Rajiv Gandhi sat quietly in Puma sneakers, light-coloured slacks and a dark green sweater with leather shoulder patches. Munching a toasted sandwich, the prime minister took a few congratulatory telephone calls, baited Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal for not delivering 11 seats out of 10, and seemed mildly embarrassed when a visitor said this was his personal victory, bigger and better than anything his mother or grandfather had ever achieved. "What can I say," he demurred.

The words were to come later, appropriate for each occasion, but almost banal nevertheless. At a victory rally the morning after, he spoke of the responsibility thrust on him and the party, and of projecting a new future. At the meeting of the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party two days later, when he was unanimously elected its leader, he said the party's electoral victory was the result of the effort put in by grassroots workers, and that this was a fitting way to begin the party's centenary year. That first day, there had at least been the air of a relaxed man savouring an expected and welcome victory. Now he was once again a bland inheritor, showing no signs of just having touched a nation's deepest chords to bring out the most overwhelming response of support in eight general elections.

In his campaign speeches he had forecast that "There will be no Opposition after the election." With outrageous forecast becoming sobering fact and unprecedented political achievement, the Opposition lay completely buried under an avalanche of votes. But Rajiv Gandhi could

Rajiv Gandhi at a victory rally: riding a wave

BHAWAN SINGH

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MANDATE

only say on one public occasion after another: "What is there for me to say." Words were finally superfluous.

There were few of them at the business-like 20-minute session of the Parliamentary Party. The sideshows seemed more of a giveaway than the loud shouts of 'no' when Buta Singh asked whether any candidates were being proposed other than Rajiv Gandhi: Kamal Nath eagerly offering his seat to Arun Singh as he walked by, Amitabh Bachchan staring unseeingly ahead in collected calm, moving just once to gently tap the desktop in acclamation.

BY THAT evening, it was time for action, and the first gentle let-down. Perhaps there was not enough new talent at hand, but the new Cabinet had too many old faces, and at least one of the new ones harked back to a shoddy past: Bansi Lal. There was also the unwelcome hangover of his mother's habit of leaving key portfolios vacant, and of leaving portfolios dangling in somebody's temporary charge. The new blood was largely at the level of Ministers of State: Arun Nehru, K.R. Narayanan, K. Natwar Singh, Madhavrao Scindia. Quite apart from the torch not being fully handed to a new generation, there was also the sloppy sight of ministers-designate being called out from the assembled gathering in Rashtrapati Bhavan's chandeliered Ashoka Hall to be made to sit with those due to be sworn in.

The only change of genuine significance was the welcome abolition of the post of deputy minister, while all three new Cabinet inductees—K.C. Pant, Abdul Ghafoor and Vishwanath Pratap Singh—can be considered 'clean'. Few can also question the dropping of the boorish and unpalatable A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, or of the ineffective Sheila Kaul, though Pranab Mukherjee's noticeable absence smacked more of internal power struggles than balanced judgement of his abilities as a minister. Also significant was the de-linking of Personnel and Administrative Reforms from the Home Ministry and the enormous concentration of power in the prime minister's hands: 17 portfolios in all. Finally, there was the unbalanced geographical character of the Cabinet: the 14 Cabinet ministers come from eight states. Of the 17 MP's from Haryana and Delhi, four find a place in the Cabinet, but of the 71 MP's from the south, only two are in the Cabinet—both from Karnataka. The east too has only two Cabinet ministers out of around 90 MP's.

On the plus side, the new incumbents had been intelligently slotted: Bansi Lal could bring some of his drive for efficiency to bear on the railways without wrecking too many things around him. Arun Nehru would be less of a controversial political stormtrooper and more of a high voltage junior minister in an important portfolio. S.B. Chavan made sense as home minister, and so on down the line. But equally noteworthy was the prime minister's induction of two more parliamentary secretaries to assist him, and there now seemed little indication that he would try to reduce the role of the prime minister's secretariat and add substance to the form of Cabinet government.

On the whole, therefore, this was very much a mixed bag, and fell well short of marking a new beginning. There was continuity here quite definitely, not enough change, and a slight wilting of the hope that the new government would really be very different.

Whether change or continuity would mark the new government's functioning in the weeks and months ahead remains to be seen. But nothing would characterise the closing days of 1984 as much as the unprecedented and overwhelming nature of the election results. The Congress(I) won a staggering 80 per cent of the seats it contested, and along with its allies, it would occupy four of the five blocks of seats in the new Lok Sabha, leaving one last sliver of seats in the extreme left of the House for a decimated Opposition.

The figures would have been laughable if they had not been tinged with pathos: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) contested 226 seats, and won two. The Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP) contested 168 seats and won three. The

The Congress(I) winning streak

B.K SHARMA

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Janata Party fought 207 seats and won 10. And the Congress(S) got four.

Between them, the four national opposition parties had 19 seats in the Lok Sabha, less than 5 per cent of what the Congress(I) now commanded. And the bulk of the Opposition now comprised two essentially regional parties: the unlikely creation of film actor, N. T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam, and a newly humbled Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). Finally, close to two-thirds of the total opposition in the Lok Sabha would be from the two states, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

If all this marked the creation of the most one-sided Parliament in the country's history, raising the spectre of near one-party democracy, the Congress(I) was not losing any sleep over the subject.

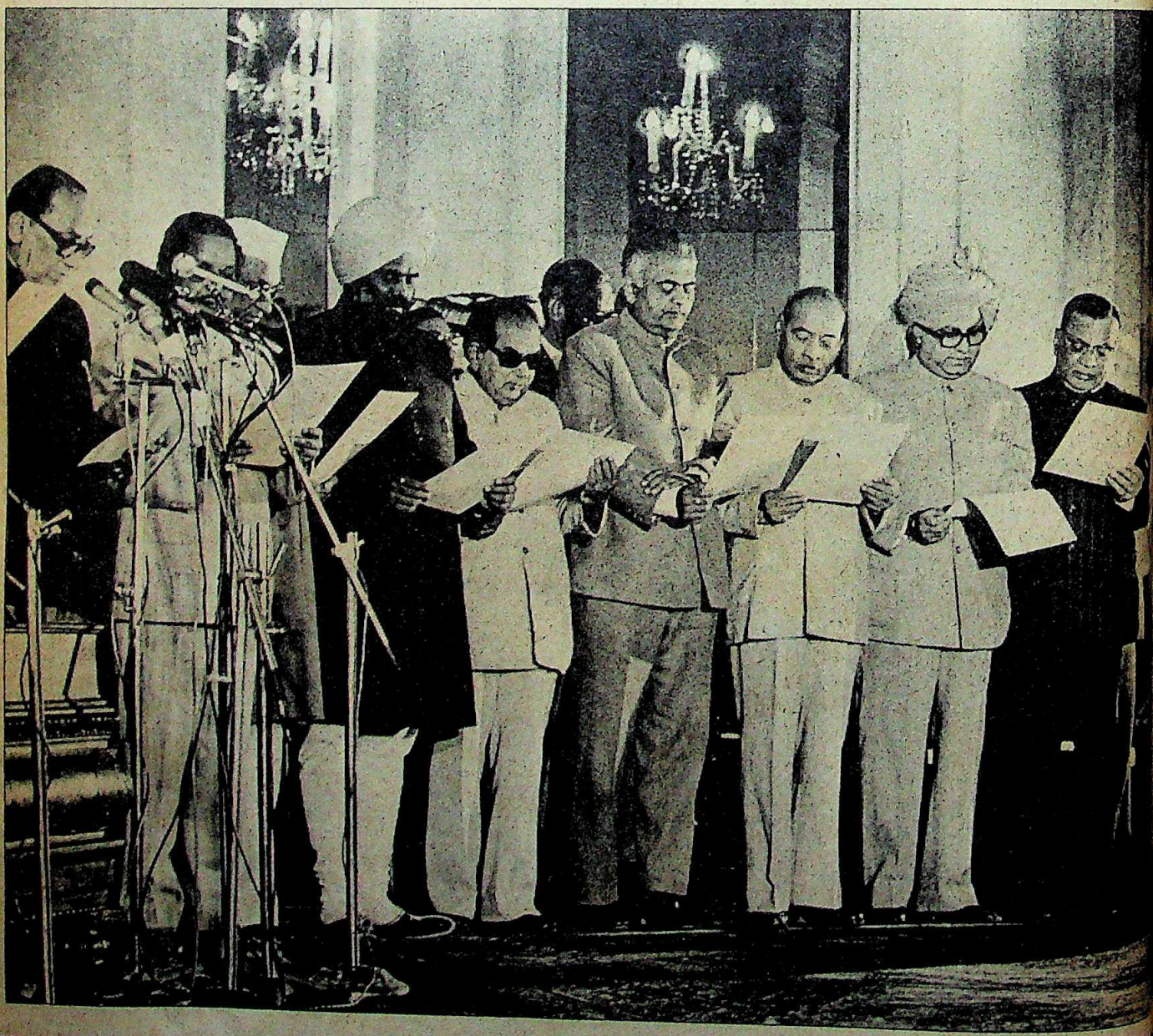
The AICC(I) headquarters on New Delhi's Akbar Road was illuminated for three days as the reports of successive triumphs poured in through 25 newly installed hotlines. And Rajiv Gandhi announced a two-month bonus for the entire AICC(I) staff.

IN THE states, the victories surprised even party leaders. Gujarat Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki's spirits had been anything but high a few hours before counting started, and he had confessed to senior party functionaries that he did not expect more than 18 seats out of the 26 in the state, compared to the 25 in the seventh Lok Sabha. The final tally of an absolutely unexpected 24 was therefore a handsome bonus.

In Calcutta, the crowds outside the counting centres howled like Romans at a circus every time the impassive bureaucratic voices announced that Congress(I) candidates were leading. At the centre where the Jadavpur constituency's votes were being counted, one drunk shouted: "Somnath Chatterjee's red dog has gone mad and bitten him." In her modest tin-roofed Kalighat residence, 27-year-old Mamata Banerjee, the Congress(I) candidate who had slain the Marxist giant, confessed: "I had never expected anything like this."

Across the country, the victory margins and the slaying of doughty opposition leaders by inconsequential Congress(I) candidates bore testimony to the size, sweep and power of the electoral tidal wave. Caste factors, for instance, proved irrelevant in numerous places. A Thakur

The new Cabinet: more continuity than change



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Congress(I) candidate in Hapur (western Uttar Pradesh) got 55 per cent of the vote although Thakurs account for no more than 2 per cent of the votes in the constituency. And Shyam Lal Yadav, fighting from the Brahmin-dominated Varanasi, won by a massive margin. One-fourth of the Congress(I) victors from Uttar Pradesh are Brahmins, who account for less than 12 per cent of the state's vote. Again, in Bihar, backward caste leader Karpoori Thakur was trounced, and the tribals ignored the Jharkhand appeal.

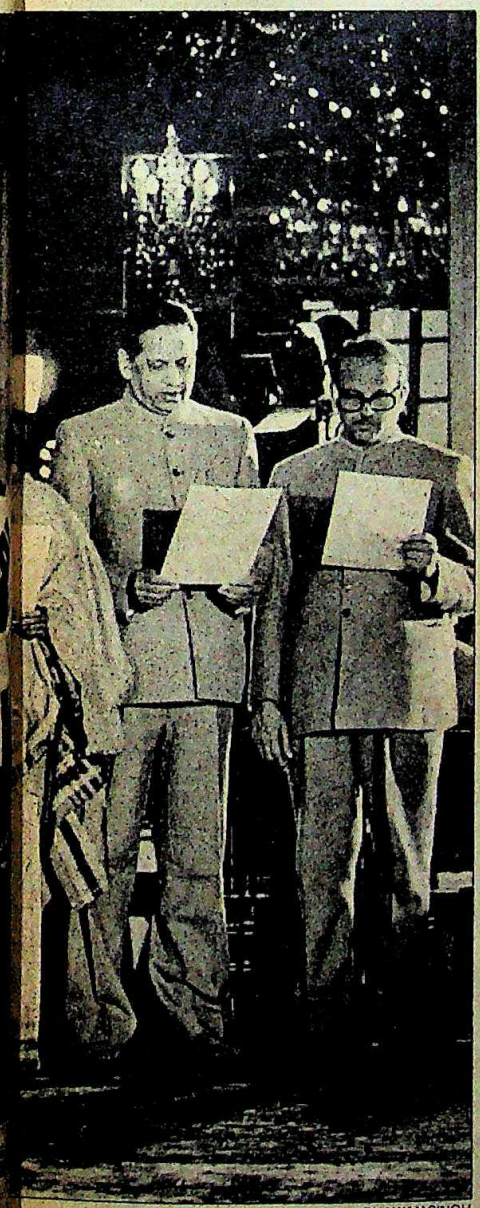
All too often, apparently weak Congress(I) candidates won over opposition stalwarts. In Tamil Nadu's Pudukottai, N. Sunderaraj got the Congress(I) ticket only after film star Sivaji Ganesan announced that he would walk out of the party unless his men got party tickets. Yet Sunderaraj trounced the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's (DMK) K. Veeriah by more than 2.64 lakh votes. And in Haryana's Sonepat constituency, the Congress (I) put up a nondescript lawyer against the Jat veteran Devi Lal, but Devi Lal lost.

It didn't seem to matter to the electorate whether the candidate was good or bad; if he was Congress(I) he won, if not he lost. So Lalit Maken won in south Delhi, and Era Sezhiyan lost to Vyjayanthimala in Tamil Nadu, despite humourist Cho Ramaswamy appealing to "vote Sezhiyan to the Lok Sabha and Vyjayanthimala to the dance sabha".

Even ruling party dissension failed to come in the way of the overwhelming sweep. In Bihar, Thakur leader Satyendra Narain Sinha, who joined the Congress(I) shortly before Mrs Gandhi's assassination, complained bitterly during the campaign that a state Bhumihar minister was sabotaging the candidature of his wife, Kishori Sinha, in the Vaishali constituency, but she nevertheless won handsomely. And in Haryana, Chief Minister Bhajan Lal was working undisguisedly for the defeat of three party candidates in Bhiwani, Karnal and Rohtak, but all three romped home successful.

Almost inevitably, then, the electoral sweep carried everything before it. In Bengal, the CPI(M) was routed in the urban and industrial centres, populated by the advance guard of the revolution. In Madhya Pradesh, long considered a BJP bastion and where the party had won a series of parliamentary and assembly by-elections apart from polls held for local

Jubilant Congress(I) supporters: unprecedented victory



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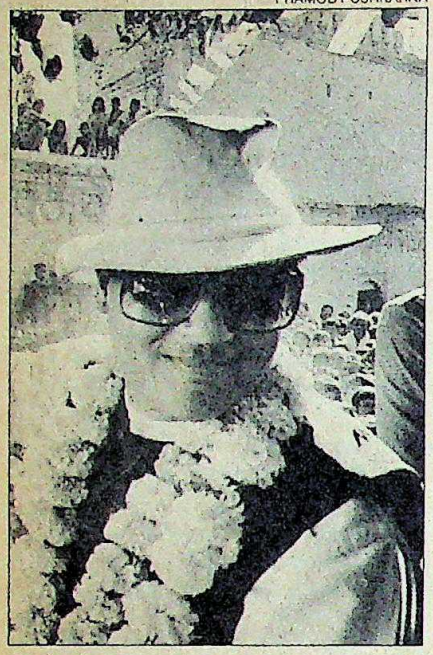

Madhavrao Scindia: giant killer

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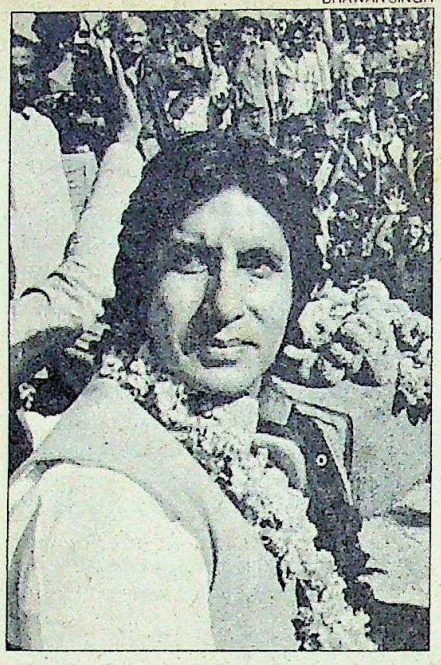
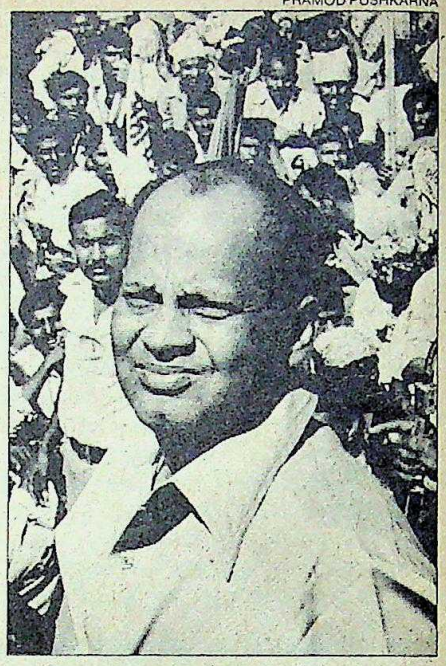


Amitabh Bachchan: new role

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Datta Samant: surprise winner

bodies, the party was routed and failed to get a single seat, including that of party President Atal Behari Vajpayee. In Karnataka, ruled by a Janata government, the Congress(I) swept 24 of the 28 seats, leaving the vitriolic George Fernandes sputtering in his own vitriol. In Delhi, the BJP got barely 28 per cent of the vote. Five years ago, the party had lost all but one seat in the capital, but at least salvaged its prestige and standing as a national party by getting 43 per cent of the vote. This time, however, there were few votes and no seats.

The trend was national. Jagjivan Ram, winner seven times from the reserved constituency of Sasaram in Bihar, barely scraped through by 1,300 votes, but he now knew that he belonged to India's political past like others who had been demolished in earlier elections: S.K. Patil, Atulya Ghosh, K. Kamaraj. And Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna, who only weeks earlier had hoped to inherit the DMKP mantle, now discovered there was no mantle to inherit and that he himself was no inheritor. Finally there was Chandra Shekhar. In the summer heat of 1983, he had sought an image larger than a politician's with his walkathon from south to north, but he now found himself lost in the dusty dirt-tracks of Ballia in a discontented winter of 1984.

Gone also were the rebels, the Sivajis and Tippu Sultans trying to stand in the way of Delhi's arm reaching outward, former satraps trying to stake out their own territory. An Antulay in Maharashtra's Kulaba, a Siddhartha Shankar Ray in Darjeeling, a Karan Singh in Jammu, a Lt.Gen S.K. Sinha in Patna.

FEW OF the vanquished had foreseen such humiliation. On December 23, a day before the first polling day, 83-year-old Charan Singh told guests assembled at his house for his birthday that he expected his party's candidates to do "extremely well". But by 2 p.m. on December 28, he had retreated into his bedroom and asked his aides not to send in any more ticker copy from the teleprinter in the house. When newsmen trooped in by late evening, age and frustration were writ large on his face. "Shoot all politicians, you, me, everyone," he declared in a fit of rage before talking of rigging, money power and "*beimani*" (dishonesty) and lapsing into incoherence. The news of his own victory at Baghpat brought little cheer, and the frustrated former prime minister withdrew under a heap of blankets and almost by way of a soliloquy mumbled on about various possibilities. The news from Gwalior seemed the final blow. "My god, even Atalji has lost. What will happen to this country?"

A stone's throw from the DMKP office, the BJP office had been bustling with activity in the morning. Party office-bearers basked in the winter sun on wicker chairs in the lawn, and the optimism remained undimmed despite the first reports of reverses. Delhi unit chief Kedar Nath Sahni talked of how the womenfolk in the houses of hardcore BJP supporters had flouted the 'directives' of their menfolk to vote for the Congress(I) this time. And party treasurer Shanti Bhushan, in a display of machismo, threatened to sue every winning Congress(I) candidate for spending beyond the prescribed limit on their campaigns.

But things changed quickly after 12.30, when Vajpayee called from Gwalior to say that he was trailing by a margin that seemed unassailable. Nobody spoke for a long time after that.

Vajpayee had in fact been anticipating defeat. "I knew what was coming the moment I went around the polling booths in Gwalior," he said. "Normally you would expect some voters to react with hostility, and others to be friendly. But in this case most people seemed indifferent. That rang danger bells. It was obvious to me that these were people who had made up their minds to vote for the maharajah." And indeed, Vajpayee got only 28.65 per cent of the votes.

But the BJP president recovered his cheer quickly, bantering with newspaper photographers about wanting to put his picture along with other losers. Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar, another opposition party chief to be vanquished, also recovered quickly from the first shock, and sat composed on his lawn with a transistor, receiving with a resigned smile the details of the rout. "Oh, they are winning everything. Absolutely everything. There will be no Opposition, only Congressmen. And what kind of men."

Predictably, Menaka Gandhi was

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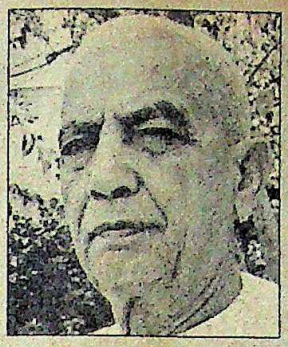
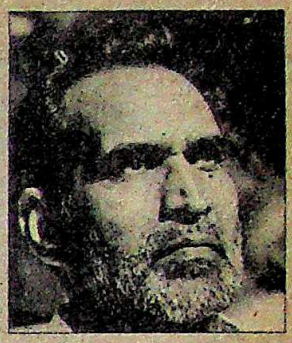


"Shoot all politicians, you, me, everyone."
CHARAN SINGH

"I knew what was coming when I went around the polling booths."
A.B. VAJPAYEE

"There was mass rigging and booth capturing."
MENAKA GANDHI



"There will be no Opposition, only Congressmen. And what kind of men."
CHANDRA SHEKHAR

the most brazen among the Opposition ranks that morning. The president of the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch (RSM) called reporters to the Press Club of India to prove that the Congress(I) had rigged the Amethi poll, and distributed loads of 'documents' while threatening to file an election petition. "There was mass rigging and booth capturing," Menaka alleged. But her words carried little conviction, and few failed to notice the tear-stains on her face.

In Calcutta, the West Bengal chief minister had already had time to absorb the shocks when he drove in his white Toyota to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) headquarters on Calcutta's Alimuddin Street. Striding in with characteristic vigour, Basu was immediately closeted with party leaders in a conference room, and then left for his office in Writers Building in the heart of the city's business district. Internal party debates centred for a while on whether the Left Front Government in Bengal should resign, but the decision was to soldier on despite the fact that the Congress(I) got only a couple of lakh votes fewer than the CPI(M).

The only cheerful Opposition camp in the country was in Andhra Pradesh, where the Telugu Desam and its allies had captured 34 of the 40 seats for which elections had been held. Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao, now heading a party which would be the largest opposition group in the Lok Sabha, hailed the Andhra results, congratulated Rajiv Gandhi and within a day was already talking of fresh initiatives for achieving opposition unity.

In another southern citadel of the Opposition, Karhataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde surveyed the shattered ruins of his party but breathed defiance for a day ("Why should I resign?") before submitting his two-year-old government's resignation and recommending the dissolution of the state assembly. A week before polling, Hegde had joked that even if the Opposition got two of the 28 seats in the state it would be a 100 per cent improvement over the lone seat it had in the seventh Lok Sabha, but as things turned out even four seats and a 300 per cent improvement was not enough to save him.

IF THE times seemed grim for the Opposition, and the future bleak, the decimated parties' leaders reacted in confused haste. H.N. Bahuguna, without even waiting for the announcement of the Allahabad result, sought an emergency meeting to form a single opposition party. Vajpayee reacted indignantly, telling Bahuguna: "What is the use talking of a single party when we could not even make an arrangement before the poll." Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, former Rajasthan chief minister and BJP chief in the state, was practical as ever: "How do we face the assembly elections in three months?" he asked plaintively, but no one around him was in a mood to reply.

There was a general disapproval of Hegde's decision to quit, and a number of opposition leaders called him to suggest that he should have dissolved the Assembly without resigning. The Centre would then have been faced with the dilemma of whether to dismiss him along with the G.M. Shah Government in Jammu & Kashmir (whose party got routed by Farooq Abdullah's National Conference).

There was also some instant talk of allowing younger opposition leaders to take the reins, and Charan Singh himself talked of stepping aside. But this seemed more out of disgust and confusion than out of any reasoned plan to project a new leadership. Meanwhile, the question in the Janata Party was whether Chandra Shekhar would be able to retain his tenuous hold on the party. But one thing seemed possible from the initial manoeuvres made immediately after: even if moves were initiated to form a united opposition party, the two ageing stalwarts Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram would be allowed no prominent role in Parliament. Ironically, they were the only two prominent opposition party presidents to retain their seats in the Lok Sabha.

While most parties waited for their national executives to meet in early January and take stock, two or three things were already clear. Though many opposition party members felt the electorate would have to be offered new, younger leaders with less of a past, the party bosses themselves felt disinclined to step down. And in the case of the DMKP, it had little choice but to continue to rely on Charan Singh as its principal vote-getter. Nevertheless, the parties would have to try and build their strength and leaders from the state level upwards, strategies would have to be worked out in the interim in order to prevent a rout in the coming Assembly polls in nearly a dozen states, and efforts would have to be made to prevent an

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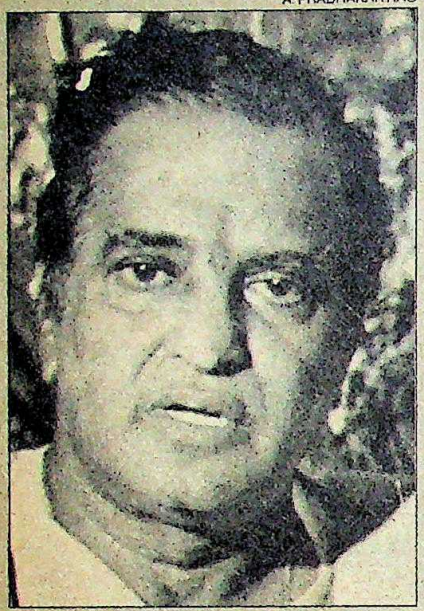
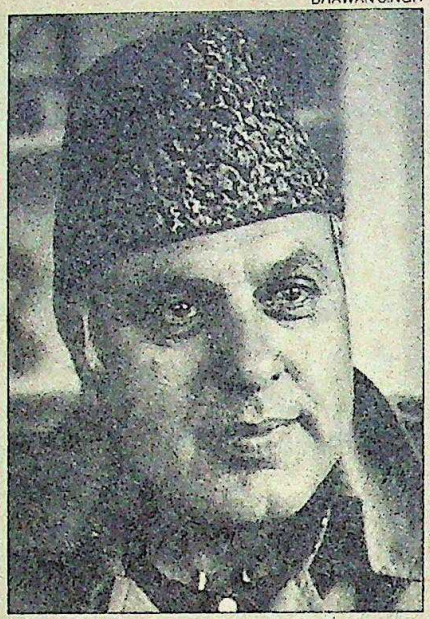
A. PRABHAKAR RAO



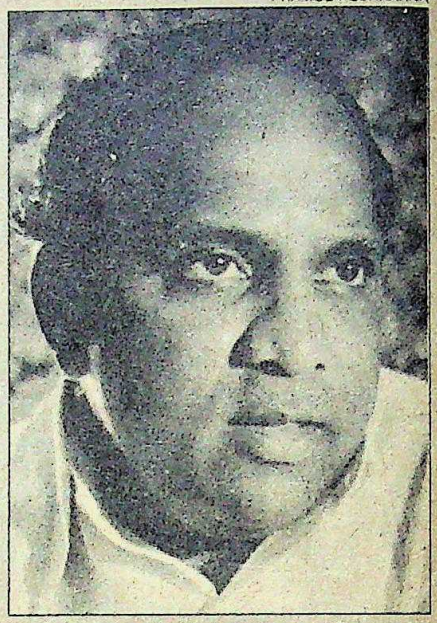
N.T. Rama Rao

BHAWAN SINGH



Farooq Abdullah

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sharad Pawar

Only those leaders with a personal charismatic following, people who could count on their supporters to vote for them no matter what the occasion or issue, could survive the wave.

exodus of party workers and the lower level functionaries.

It was a sympathy vote, said Chandra Shekhar. Indira Gandhi dead is more powerful than Indira Gandhi alive, said the CPI(M). But both missed the essential point that the vote was also a positive one for a combination of change and continuity. It was certainly a vote to hang together when the unity issue was raised, and a vote against a fractious Opposition led by discredited men who, despite more than a year of parleying, presented as disunited a front as ever when the elections came around.

There was also the largely ignored factor of economic satisfaction. Prices had been under moderate control for more than a year, the inflation rate being no more than 8 per cent. Farmers across the country were happy after three successive record harvests. The middle class was preoccupied with spending on a steadily expanding range of consumer goods, and the power position had improved sufficiently for a farmer in western Uttar Pradesh to say: "Earlier we used to get power for four hours in a day. Now we get electricity for eight hours." Industrial growth had been good for two years running, and everyone connected with trade, exports and imports, and with running businesses has been happy with the government's progressive opening up of policy and the easing of controls. The net result was that there was almost no economic dissatisfaction that the Opposition could capitalise on, no anger or frustration to tap. Unlike 1980, onion prices were under control.

THERE were other factors too. Most opposition leaders are now convinced that the Congress(I) landslide was caused partly by a massive wave of support from Hindus in northern India, especially Hindu women who identified with Rajiv as son and fresh-faced brother. There was also the switch of support from large numbers of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) cadres. Nana Deshmukh had himself endorsed Rajiv Gandhi as prime minister in November, and numerous RSS workers said they wanted to show the country that it was the majority community that elected the Government. Among other things, this pointed to an enormous erosion of support for the BJP, which will therefore have to do the most anxious soul-searching among all the opposition parties.

Among yet other reasons for the one-sided election result was the absence of any protest vote. Mrs Gandhi had built up a substantial opposition to herself, of people who distrusted her authoritarian tendencies, who saw danger in the manner she weakened the country's institutions, who disliked her efforts at perpetuating dynastic rule. But with Rajiv, it was different. As a well-known Bengali novelist Sunil Ganguly said: "I always found it difficult to accept the idea that only the members of the Nehru family are capable of ruling the country. But when Mrs Gandhi was assassinated, and with the country's integrity in question, I could think of no one but Rajiv as the prime minister."

Many opposition leaders also realised that their election campaign had been too defensive. Even on the Punjab issue, on which the Government had so much to answer for, the Opposition had been put on the defensive. At the start of the campaign, a suggestion had been made that the Congress-Bhindranwale relationship should be driven home by sticking up posters showing Zail Singh, then home minister, sitting with Bhindranwale. The move was dropped so as not to violate the dignity of the presidency. Only in the final days of the campaign, with Rajiv Gandhi hammering away at the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and the Janata treatment of Jagjit Singh Chauhan, making the Opposition look as though they were being parties to national disintegration, did the response come in the form of a few Zail

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Singh-Bhindranwale pictures. But by then it was too late to wrest the initiative.

It is doubtful, however, whether even an aggressive opposition campaign would have got very far. For this election showed for the first time that Rajiv Gandhi has an ability credited so far to only Ronald Reagan: the ability to walk away from a botch-up, politically unharmed. Like Reagan Rajiv too has a Teflon coating: nothing sticks to him. He was instrumental in mounting a wasteful Asiad extravaganza, but the poor still have faith in him. He had a hand in the undemocratic dismissal of the Jammu & Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh governments, but he is still seen as a politician without a burdensome past. He described Bhindranwale as a religious leader only weeks before Operation Bluestar, but the populace pays little heed to the possibility of political immaturity. He gets a natural gas pipeline to be extended 200 kilometres east at a cost of over Rs 200 crore so that a fertiliser plant can be located in his constituency, but he is still called Mr Clean. And he clearly relies more on a personal coterie of friends and aides than on the general party and government machinery, but he is still expected to usher in a political culture that is different from that bred by either his mother or brother.

And no matter how much mud the Opposition throws at him, nothing sticks. It is as though, in the same way that Americans wished a grandfather image on to Reagan, Indians have willed their hopes of change and improvement on a fresh face and made Rajiv their favourite son. There is a political strength here that was not revealed before polling day, but which now is all too evident.

BUT SWEEPING mandates and large majorities are deceptive as sources of political security, especially when serious and difficult issues wait to be dealt with. And Rajiv Gandhi would do well to remember that in 1971 Mrs Gandhi was at the peak of her political popularity, riding the 'Garibi Hatao' wave and cresting a still higher one following the Bangladesh war. But in less than two years of that, she was sliding into political crisis, desperation and ignominy.

The Janata government similarly was given a powerful mandate in 1977, only to fritter it away through vicious infighting. Mrs Gandhi came back in 1980 once again with a two-thirds majority, but she quickly found herself on the down-escalator. And until her assassination, many of her party stalwarts were slee-

What the people say

Atma Ram

"I HAVE no prejudice against Rajiv as such. But I object to this continuation of dynastic rule. This is a flouting of the fundamental principle of democracy," says Atma Ram, brother of the late Guru Dutt and producer of such films as *Qaid*, *Umang* and *Shikar*. Adds Gaddar, a revolutionary folk music composer and singer of Hyderabad who canvassed for a boycott of the elections: "Rajiv Gandhi will be no different from his predecessors. If anything he will make India even more vulnerable to being used as the playground for the games of the superpowers."

Ganguly

BUT FOR the vast majority of the electorate, Rajiv's family and party connections bode only good for the future. "Only a lion's cub can be born in a lion's den," says farmer Bare Lal of Madhya Pradesh. "He is Mrs Gandhi's son and belongs to the family that has ruled us for long. That is enough for me." Indeed, most of the electorate seems to be looking not at Rajiv's past but at the future, and with hope. As well-known Bengali novelist Sunil Ganguly says: "After all, we have no proof that Rajiv is useless either."

Alladin

THAT Rajiv's youth and relative political inexperience did not discourage the voter was brought out again and again by the millions who exercised their franchise. Says Bilkiz Alladin, author-journalist of Hyderabad: "Four years in politics and three weeks of tough electioneering may not be enough to develop perspective. But he is a great symbol of hope." Ahmedabad television producer Himangshu says: "Since Rajiv is young, I expect him to take a fresh approach to problems and implementation of policies." Adds Ashok Chatterjee, director of the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad: "Being young he may as well call his own tune".

Chatterjee

BUT ALONG with all hope for the future, there are some regrets. Chatterjee voiced the feelings of many when he said: "What distresses me is that though this election held out promises for change, the same candidates have been fielded again and the new ones do not signify any changes. A great chance to bring decency into our political culture has been lost." Kumudini Lakhia, the well-known dancer adds: "Everyone calls Rajiv Mr Clean. But will he be able to resist temptations? It is not enough just to keep away from dirt, he has to get rid of it."

Helblikar

SURESH Helblikar, a film director of Bangalore, says: "I don't think he knows India well. He still has to learn a lot. He looks like he wants to purge the party and he might make a good prime minister, but he must develop his mother's approach of having science in her mind and tradition in her heart." Ranjit Gupta, the former inspector-general of police of Calcutta, however, felt that: "Rajiv may run into trouble here because politics cannot be cleaned up totally anywhere. The modern Machiavelli would advise him to go slow on this."

Gupta

BUT GUPTA is pleased from his professional point of view by Rajiv's priorities, especially his resolve to strengthen law and order, fight corruption, and build up the defences of the country against external dangers. "This is the first time an incoming prime minister has said he wants to strengthen law and order. Everybody has talked about freedom and liberty without understanding that these spring from the maintenance of order through the enforcement of the law," says the former policeman. As the new prime minister steers India into the future, an informed, concerned and reponsible citizenry will be watching him, and will not hesitate to voice its opinion.

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pless with worry over the prospect of the coming election.

Clearly, large majorities do not make for good government, and mandates are useless if there is no sense of mission. Many of the country's primary institutions have taken a great deal of battering in recent years, and it should now be one of the prime minister's most important tasks to breathe new strength into them.

Parliament is a test case. Balram Jakhar, speaker of the seventh Lok Sabha, put it pithily when he told an interviewer that "You need two wheels for a cart to move, the ruling party and the Opposition." With one wheel now much smaller than the other, the responsibility for keeping Parliament on course falls more heavily than otherwise on the prime minister. There is the danger, after all, that if the Opposition feels it is not getting a voice in Parliament, it will be tempted to become irresponsible and seek extra-parliamentary methods. A.B. Vajpayee was voicing a genuine fear when he said: "May be it is just as well that I lost. What can a few leaders do in Parliament? Any time you try to raise your voice, the others will shout you down."

The large majority also carries with it certain dangers: of the party's nerve-centre becoming insensitive to impulses from the extremities, of leaders at the Centre thinking they can ride roughshod over state chief ministers and the chiefs of Pradesh Congress(I) Committees. Former Bihar chief minister Jagannath Mishra was trying to say something of this sort when he told INDIA TODAY: "This kind of a result has created a sense of fear in me too. To have such a massive majority for a party in a democracy is also dangerous. We must have some opposition leaders in the House, or outside they may create more nuisance. And you know, it is always difficult to sustain a storm. I am worried, really upset."

If not many others spoke as frankly as Mishra, many certainly shared his anxieties, especially because the election campaign had seen a clear tendency to downplay the role of chief ministers and state-level leaders. Would the party centre now arrogate too much power to itself, encouraged by the fact that Rajiv was the real vote-getter on whom everybody else depended, and would Rajiv surround himself with a coterie who cut him off from everybody else, so that he lost touch with earthy reality? While a number of party leaders spoke quietly of their growing worries, there also arose the question of groupism and dissidence in such a large parliamentary party.

In Madhya Pradesh, for instance, Chief Minister Arjun Singh has ensured that between 25 and 30 of the 39 Congressmen who won from his state are his supporters. V.C. Shukla could get only a couple of his men in, and P.C. Sethi's base has been eroded completely. In Vidha, Pratap Bhanu Sharma's candidature was opposed by most factions, but Arjun Singh saw him through. And in several villages in Vidisha, dissident Congressmen asked villagers to vote "according to their conscience". Such rivalries and differences are not likely to be easily forgotten, and the over-sized party could quickly become as fractious and uncontrollable as ever.

Also, with Arun Nehru taken away from party functioning, and two other general secretaries also inducted into the council of ministers, the key question was who would now run the party. There was speculation that Rajiv Gandhi would himself take an active interest in party affairs. There would be no room any more for kingmakers. Whether this plan would work, and whether the prime minister would find the time for everything remained to be seen.

IF THE unprecedented majority for the Congress(I) presented some manner of problems for the party, the Opposition could also find room for hope despite the enveloping gloom. For one thing, they still commanded a sizeable percentage of the national vote, the Congress(I) had got just under 50 per cent of the total votes cast, and so the support out in the countryside was far more than the pitiful representation in the Lok Sabha suggested. This dichotomy was particularly evident in a state like Madhya Pradesh, where the Congress(I) swept all 39 seats but could not prevent the BJP from attracting a creditable per cent of the vote. Similarly, in Maharashtra, the Congress(I) got 43 of the 48 seats, compared to 39 in the last Lok Sabha, but actually got a smaller percentage of the vote than in 1980: 51.2 per cent against 52.8 per cent. There was a noticeable drop in support in the Vidarbha region, where Vasant Sathe barely scraped through, and across the state half a dozen seats could have gone to the Opposition with a marginal swing in the vote. The picture was not quite so hopeful everywhere, and in the two opposition strongholds of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal the opposition victories were by small or reduced margins. Nevertheless, a base still existed on which a chastened opposition could build a future.

Some pointers on how to go about this task were available from a study of who had been able to withstand the Congress(I) wave. One simple answer emerged: those with a personal charismatic following, people who could count on their supporters to vote for them no matter what the time or the issue or the circumstance. A Farooq Abdullah in Kashmir, an N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh, people like Charan Singh and Jagjivan in their constituencies (which neither visited for electioneering), a survivor like Sharad Pawar (who won his seat

Rajiv Gandhi before his election as party leader: a challenge to deliver

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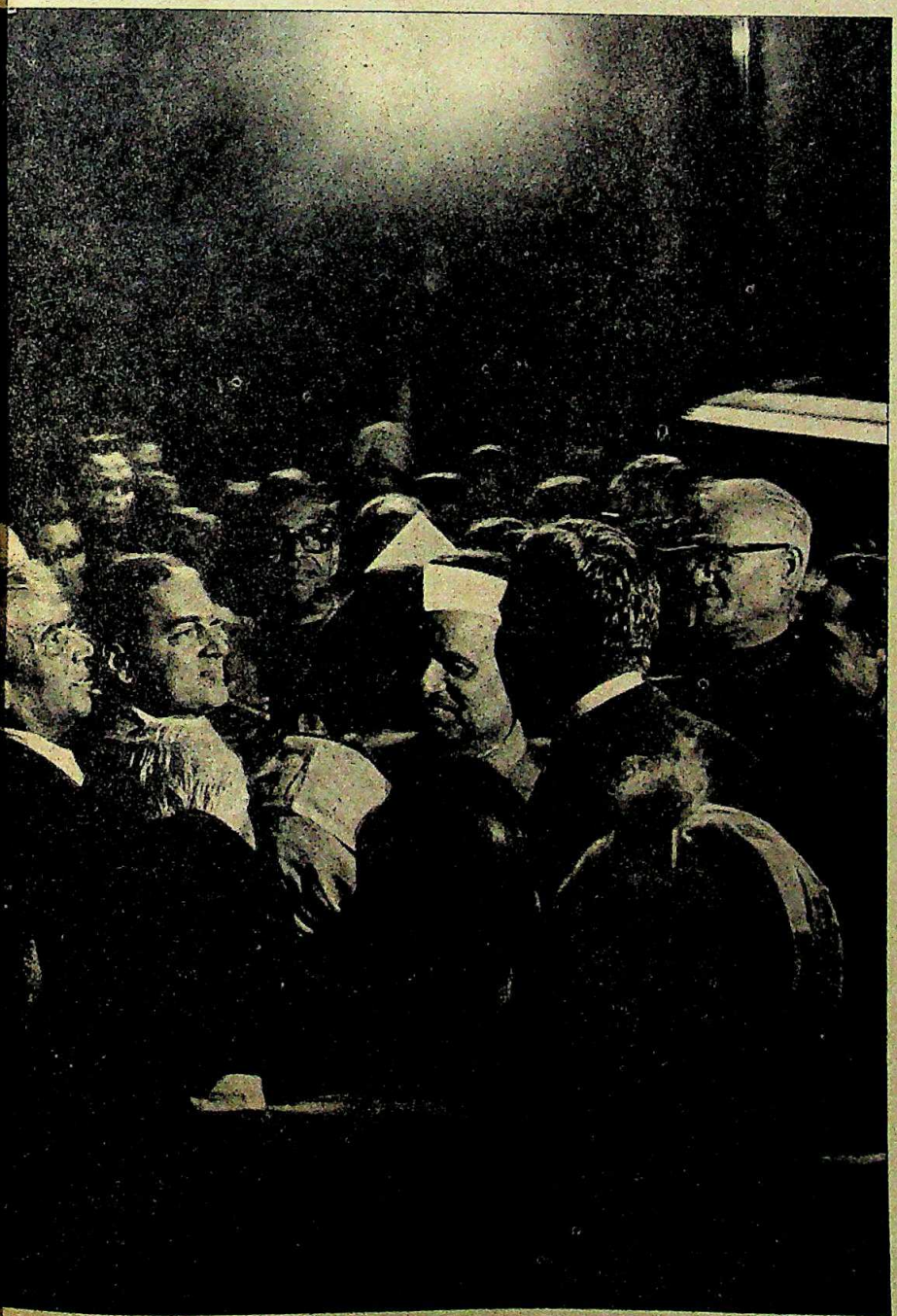
in Maharashtra's Congress-leaning sugar belt), and in a different context the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran. The importance of strong state-level leadership thus takes on a new importance, as does the fact of strong regional identities that will not be bludgeoned into submission by Delhi.

But regional appeal can offer no way out for the national parties. The Janata will have to ask itself why it has repeatedly failed to emerge as a broad-based party with sufficient strength, the Congress(S) must ponder over its marginal existence, the BJP will go through some serious soul-searching after the desertion by RSS cadres, the Left parties must seek a way out of by-water eddies into the mainstream, and the DMKP must face a crisis presented by the fact that a rural-oriented party in a predominantly rural country can neither find sufficient acceptance nor throw up new leaders. The party's base and credibility seem on the decline, the leaders of farmer agitations in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka will have no truck with the party, and its entire existence seems to be explained as no more than an extension of Charan Singh's political personality and ambition. But futures are not built around octogenarian leaders, and the DMKP can have little to look forward to if it fails in very short order to establish itself as an independent rural party undependent on Charan Singh.



BHAWAN SINGH

IF THE Opposition's task was thus cut out for it, the Congress(I) seemed anxious not to sit on its hands. Plans were already being drawn up last fortnight to ask each party member of the Lok Sabha to draw up a constituency plan of action including specific projects. Each MP will then have to submit quarterly reports on the progress in implementation, so that a clear record of work for each constituency can be claimed when next going to the electorate for votes.

But the biggest test of all was for Rajiv Gandhi. Pitchforked into power, he would deliver and solve the serious problems that lie ahead. Rajiv said often enough that the new government would get to grips with the Punjab problem right after the election. Whether this means making a unilateral declaration of what the Government is prepared to concede on Chandigarh and the river waters and then get on with healing the emotional rifts created by Operation Bluestar or releasing the Akalis from jail and restarting negotiations, he will have to show he is capable of statesmanship.

He has also said often enough that his government will be clean and efficient, committed to rapid economic progress. To give this substance, he will need to give concrete shape to the Congress(I)'s manifesto promises, move decisively against corruption and black money by reducing bureaucratic intervention in the economy and reforming the financing of political parties, open the economy more decisively to the best in technology from abroad, and allow the country's abundant innovative, entrepreneurial and managerial talent a freer hand to contribute to national growth. And, he will have to start quickly, showing the first signs of change in the next budget so that the tone of his administration is set.

A young man who was now prime minister in his own right, a battered opposition seeking a way out of the darkness, question marks over the quality of the prime minister's first major announcement, all this and more formed the mosaic of the post-election scene as the country entered a new year and a new era. But the much more notable fact was the manner in which history had just been written by the nearly 200 million people who went to their polling booths in the most remarkable democratic exercise the world has seen.

—T.N. NINAN with bureau reports

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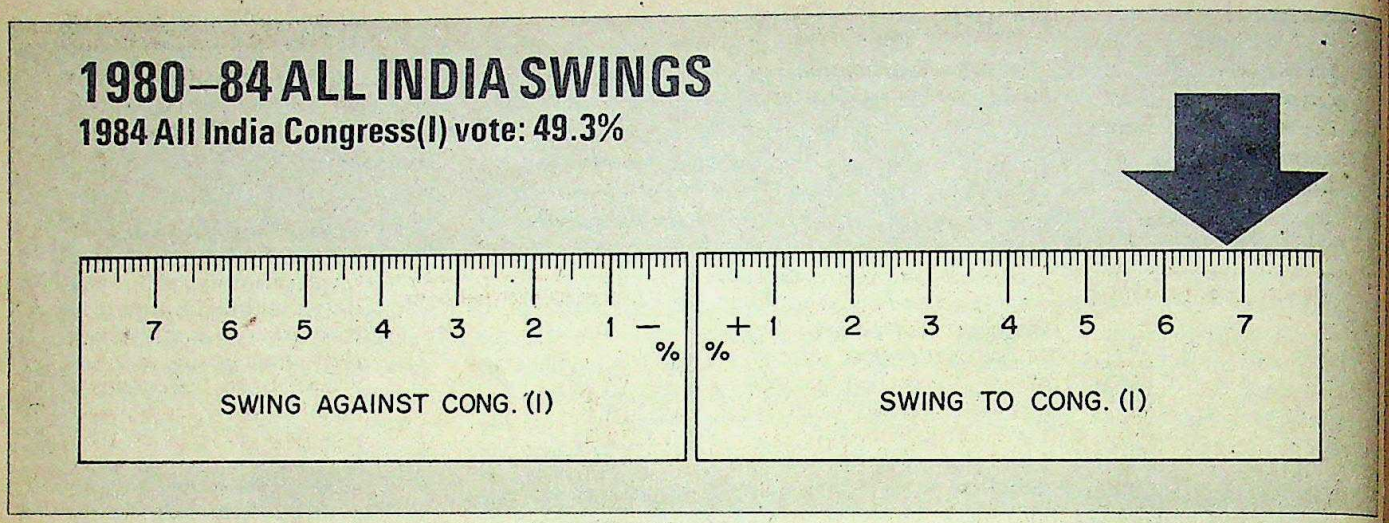


ELECTION ANALYSIS

An Unprecedented Result

TO ANALYSE the results of the election, INDIA TODAY *asked Prannoy Roy to examine the results of each state in detail. The analysis uses detailed polling figures as well as more complete returns from the* INDIA TODAY *opinion poll published in the issue of December 31, 1984. The data was still incomplete as this issue went to press, with results of 488 seats fully tabulated and another 20 to come.*

The election result shows a remarkable swing towards the Congress(I) giving it a nation-wide 52 per cent share in the seats it contested and just under 50 per cent if all seats are included. The swing towards the ruling party is 7 per cent over the already high share of votes it cornered in the 1980 election. The Index of Opposition unity, which varies between zero and 100—a higher score indicating higher unity, was 75, higher than 65 in 1980 but well below its 1977 peak of 90.

The 7 per cent swing gave the Congress(I) all the seats it contested in several states including Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and a higher swing in these states obviously would have made no difference to its seats. In other states, such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Karnataka and Maharashtra, a larger swing would have made little difference, yielding no more than an additional 18 seats. But a better share of the votes in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal would have made a substantial gain for the Congress(I).

On the other hand, the disunity of the Opposition had two effects. One was a pure arithmetical division of the opposition vote which helped the Congress(I) but by not as much as usual since in a very large proportion of the seats it contested, the ruling party took more than half the vote. The other effect, the image of a disunited opposition, was more telling and it added considerably to the swing in favour of the Congress(I).

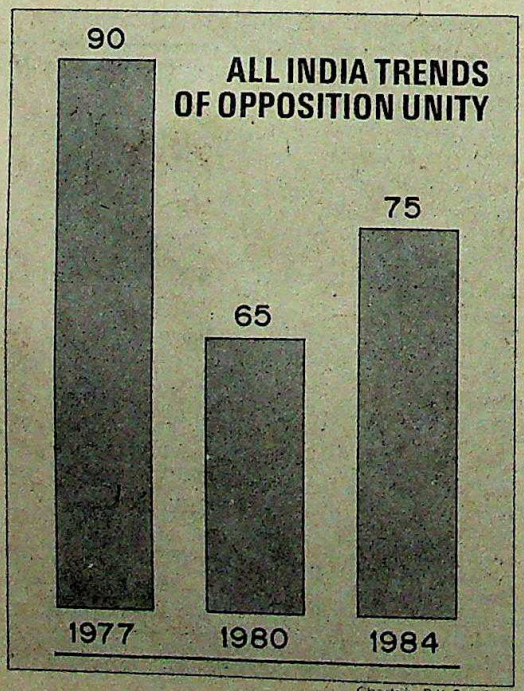
But this is insufficient to explain the magnitude of the swing. Several other factors appear to have caused this. Among them:

■ Was there a Hindu backlash? Unfortunately, this simple hypothesis is not enough to explain the entire swing because a very large proportion of Muslims and other minorities appear to have voted in favour of the Congress(I). The opinion poll showed that 63 per cent of Muslims would vote for the ruling party, and this was borne out by the large number of Muslim-dominated constituencies returning Congress(I) candidates.

■ The issue of unity. The Congress(I) slogan of unity seems to have evoked a nation-wide response, couched as it was in the campaign in terms of the situation in Punjab. This was indicated in the opinion poll and by the fact that there was a higher than usual turnout in the election, which reflected the genuine anxiety of the voter and brought out sections of the electorate that usually would not have cast their vote.

■ The urban vote. Compared with his country cousin, the urban voter was more stridently in favour of the Congress(I). The opinion poll showed the ruling party's vote to be 4 per cent higher in urban areas. This was reflected in the election results in many states. In West Bengal, for example, the major erosion of the CPI(M) vote was in the urban constituencies.

A detailed look at the results from the states reveals the magnitude of the Congress(I) victory: it got more than 50 per cent of the vote in 10 states and Delhi; in Kerala and Tamil Nadu where it fought with alliance partners it received more than 50 per cent of the vote in the seats it contested; only in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal was the tide stemmed.



Charts by B.K. SHARMA

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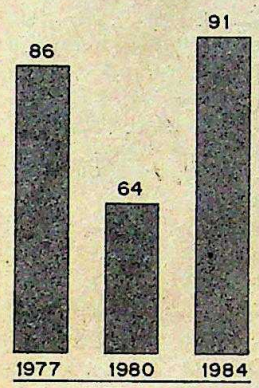
ANDHRA PRADESH

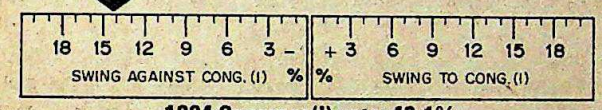
Telugu Desam	28
Congress(I)	6
T.D. Allies	5
Independent	1
Total seats	40

A swing away from the Congress(I) and a more united opposition deprived the party of 35 of the 41 seats it won in 1980. The Congress(I), however, fared better than it did in the 1983 assembly elections —recording a swing in its favour since then of 9 per cent. Corruption was a major election issue, and the Congress(I) didn't help itself by putting up the same old candidates. A poor campaign strategy counterposed Telugu Desam against Bharat Desam instead of portraying the two as complementary, suggesting that regional autonomy would be meaningless without securing national unity.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



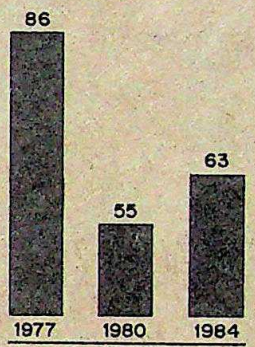
1984 Congress(I) vote: 42.1%

BIHAR

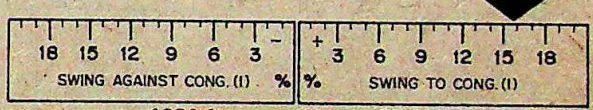
Congress(I)	48
CPI	2
DMKP	1
Janata	1
Congress(J)	1
Independent	1
Total Seats	54

The Congress(I) vote has never crossed 40 per cent in Bihar since 1967. Last fortnight's record 52.1 per cent surpasses even the previous record of 46 per cent in 1952. Opposition disunity was a major cause of the enormous gains for the Congress(I)— the IOU in 1984 was only slightly higher than in 1980 resulting in the ruling party winning an unprecedented 48 seats. Respondents in the Bihar opinion poll had overwhelmingly stated 'unity' as the main poll issue in the forecast, and 67.3 per cent of the Muslims said they would vote for the Congress(I).

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



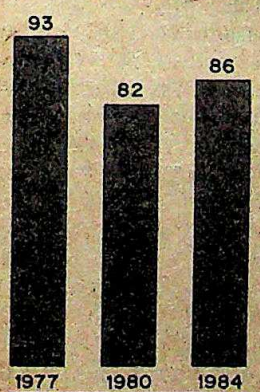
1984 Congress(I) vote: 52.1%

GUJARAT

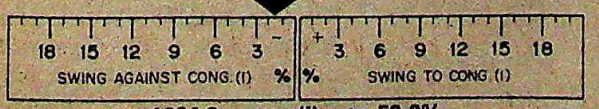
Congress(I)	24
BJP	1
Janata	1
Total Seats	26

This was one of the few states in which there was a small swing away from the Congress(I) but it didn't lose many seats because its margins of victory were very large in the 1980 elections. The party polled 53.3 per cent of the vote compared to 54.9 per cent in 1980. The IOU has traditionally been high in the state, and this time with seat adjustments in all seats except Baroda, it remained at a high level of 86, marginally above the 1980 level. In spite of the negative swing, the Congress(I) should be pleased with its performance in the state because it has retrieved a lot of lost ground that was indicated in its poor performance in the recent by-elections in the state.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



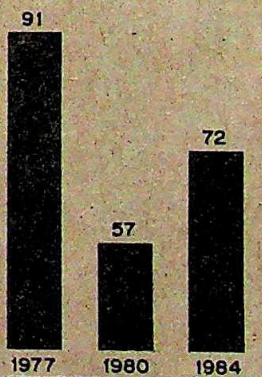
1984 Congress(I) vote: 53.2%

HARYANA

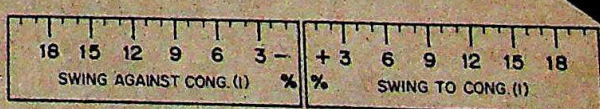
Congress(I)	10
Total Seats	10

Perhaps the most unexpected story comes from Haryana, the state which has always tended to vote solidly against the Congress(I). This time it had the largest swing of all states, a 22.8 per cent increase in the Congress(I) vote and the party swept all 10 seats at stake, undermining the strong support that the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP) had in the state, leaving it with only 19.10 per cent of the vote. The opinion poll contained another surprise in this state: the rural voter was far more supportive of the Congress(I) than the urban voter.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



1984 Congress(I) vote: 55.0%

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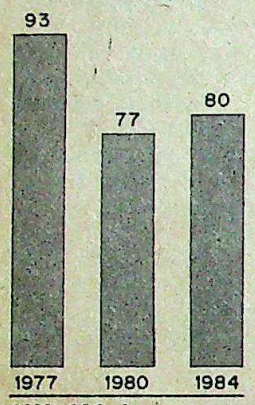
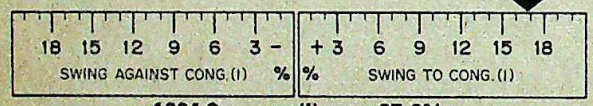
HIMACHAL PRADESH

Congress(I)	3
Total Seats	3

The Congress(I) achieved a high of 67.6 per cent of the vote but this was lower than its peak of 75.8 per cent in 1971. But at these levels of voting, there was no doubt that the party would sweep all the seats that went to the polls. The moderately high IOU of 80 was unable to dent this 16.9 per cent swing over 1980.



1980–84 Swing

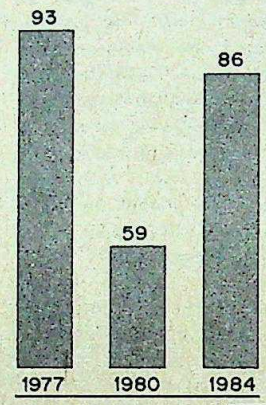


1984 Congress(I) vote: 67.6%

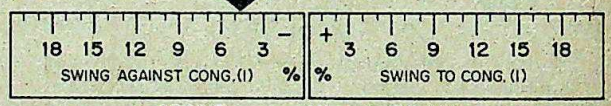
KARNATAKA

Congress(I)	24
Janata	4
Total Seats	28

The Congress(I) lost ground in Karnataka which saw a 4.7 per cent swing away from the party. There was complete seat adjustment by the Opposition in the state which resulted in a high IOU of 86 in the state. But even so, the Congress(I) got 51.6 per cent of the vote compared with 56.3 per cent in 1980 (and only 40.3 per cent in the 1983 assembly election). The party retained 24 of the state's 28 seats because of the high victory margins recorded in 1980. Last fortnight's opinion poll showed that regional autonomy was not a major issue in the Karnataka election.



1980–84 Swing

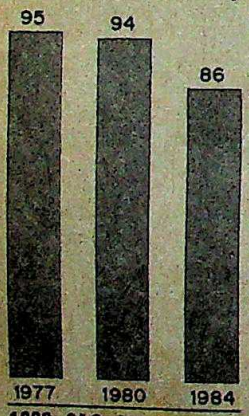


1984 Congress(I) vote: 51.6%

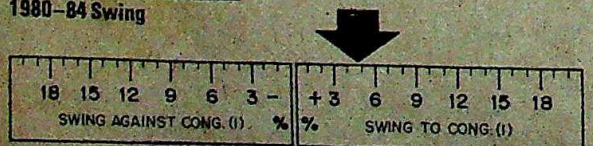
KERALA

Congress(I)	13
Janata	1
CPI(M)	1
Congress(S)	1
Kerala Cong(J)	2
IUML	2
Total Seats	20

The CPI(M) suffered a major setback in Kerala, long considered its southern bastion. The Congress(I) picked up all 13 of the seats that it contested and attracted a 4.8 per cent swing in its favour getting 51 per cent of the vote in the seats that it contested. The IOU has always been high in Kerala but dropped slightly to 86 from 94 in 1980 to help the Congress(I) in its quest for seats.



1980–84 Swing

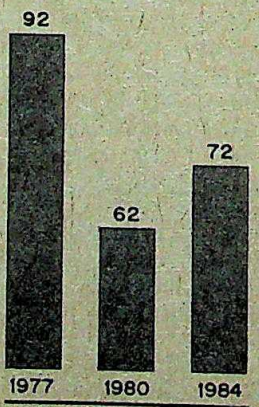


1984 Congress(I) vote: 33.2%

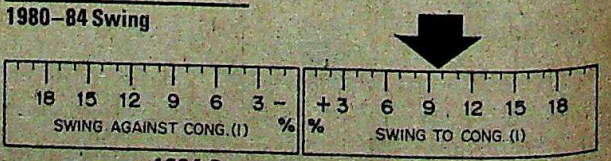
MADHYA PRADESH

Congress(I)	39
Total Seats	39

A solid 9.8 swing towards the Congress(I) decimated the principle opposition party in the state, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which had been showing a good performance in by-elections. The ruling party attracted an unprecedented 57 per cent of the popular vote surpassing the the peak of 1957 handsomely. The IOU showed some improvement to 72 from 62 in 1980. The BJP's rout in terms of seat does not, however, reflect the share of votes that it attracted which remains a respectable 30 per cent in 1984 compared with 31.3 per cent in 1980.



1980–84 Swing



1984 Congress(I) vote: 57.0%

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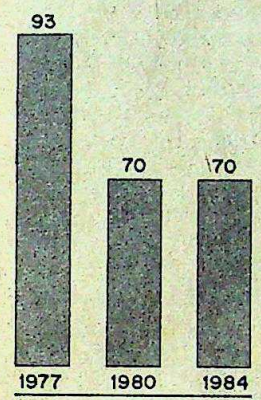
MAHARASHTRA

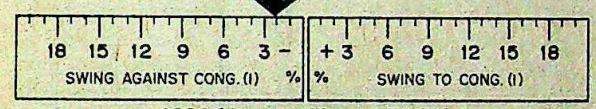
Congress(I)	43
Congress(S)	2
Janata	1
PWP	1
Independent	1
Total Seats	48

This was another state in which the Congress(I) lost ground with a swing away of 2.2 per cent with it securing 51.2 per cent of the vote compared with 53.4 per cent in 1980. In spite of this, the party gained four seats. The gains were mainly result of more votes for the party in the southern part of the state which was the late Y.B.Chavan's stronghold. In 1980 Chavan opposed the Congress(I). This time, his supporters shifted their support to the Congress(I). The state saw the defeat of one of the more controversial rebels against the ruling party, A.R. Antulay, who lost from Kulaba to a strong Peasants and Workers Party candidate though he did manage to eat into Congress votes in the constituency.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



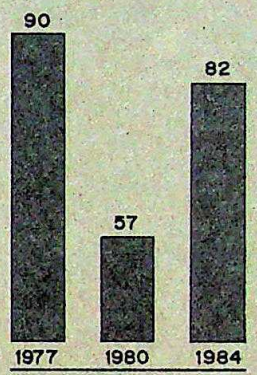
1984 Congress(I) vote: 51.2%

ORISSA

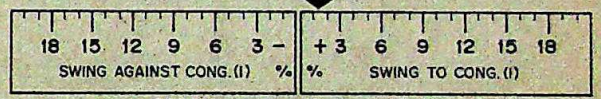
Congress(I)	20
Janata	1
Total Seats	21

In spite of a huge improvement in the IOU to 82 from 57 in 1980, the Congress(I) was able to win all but one constituency, Kendrapara, from where Janata Party leader Biju Patnaik won narrowly. The ruling party saw a small, 1.4 per cent swing towards it and despite effective seat adjustment by the Opposition leading to a high IOU of 82, the Congress(I) was able to do well because its vote has traditionally been high. It received 57.4 per cent of the popular vote cast.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



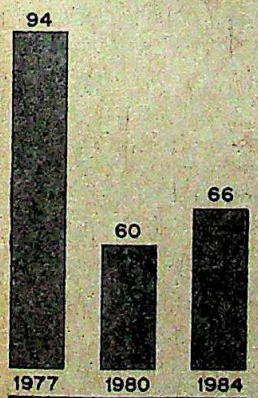
1984 Congress(I) vote: 57.4%

RAJASTHAN

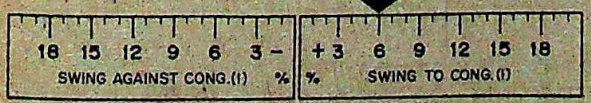
Congress(I)	25
Total Seats	25

The Congress(I)'s sweep of Rajasthan was due largely to a 6 per cent swing in its favour to give it 52.7 per cent of the vote, the highest it has received since 1957. The IOU was slightly better at 66 compared with 60 in 1980 but with the high Congress(I) vote percentage, the Opposition was able to make little impact. The BJP obtained 23.76 per cent of the vote and the DMKP 11.2 per cent. In 1980, Janata Party drew 31 per cent of the vote and the Janata(S) 12 per cent.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



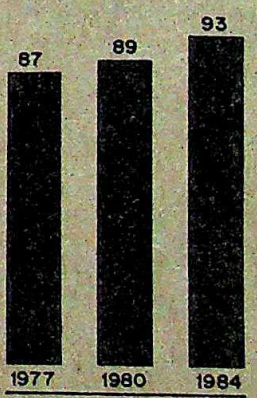
1984 Congress(I) vote: 52.7%

TAMIL NADU

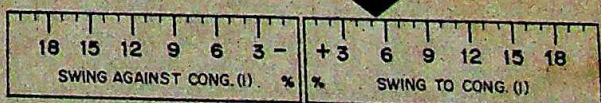
Congress(I)	25
AIADMK	12
DMK	1
Total Seats	38

The AIADMK-Congress(I) alliance proved to be much more effective than the DMK-Congress(I) alliance in 1980. There was a swing of 5.2 per cent towards the 1984 alliance giving the Congress(I) 40.4 per cent of the vote in the whole state and averaging over 60 per cent in the seats that it contested. The IOU has been traditionally high in this state with each contest virtually a straight fight between two alliances. The AIADMK received 18.8 per cent of the total vote and 61 per cent in the seats that it contested. The DMK trailed 25.3 per cent of the state vote, averaging less than 40 per cent in the seats that it contested.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



1984 Congress(I) vote: 40.4%

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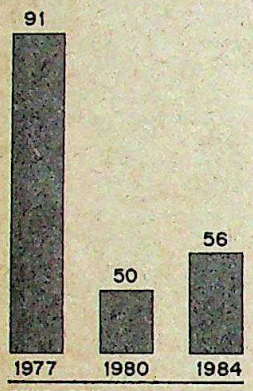
UTTAR PRADESH

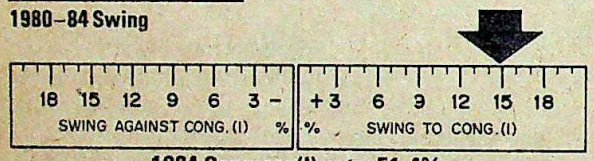
Congress(I)	82
DMKP	2
Total Seats	84

A dramatic swing of 14.9 per cent to the Congress(I) saw the party take 51.4 per cent of the vote in the 77 constituencies (of a total of 85) from which detailed results were available. The Muslims, a major electoral force in the state, were solidly behind the Congress(I) with the opinion poll showing that 68 per cent of them would vote for it. The DMKP, which expected to do well, received 22 per cent of the vote and won only 2 seats. The BJP, with 6.5 per cent of the popular vote, won no seats. These figures show that there has been an enormous erosion of their base in this key state.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



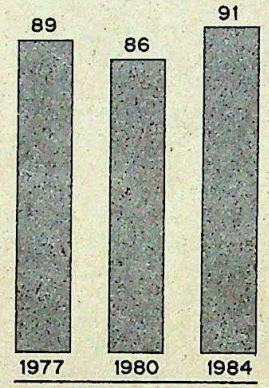
1984 Congress(I) vote: 51.4%

WEST BENGAL

CPI(M)	18
Congress(I)	16
CPI	3
RSP	3
Forward Bloc	2
Total Seats	42

The Congress(I) recorded a surprisingly large 10.8 per cent swing towards it, giving it 48.2 per cent of the popular vote, the same as the previous record in 1957, and 16 out of 42 seats. The Left Front was severely set back with the Marxists getting 35.2 per cent of the vote, the CPI 3.8 per cent, RSP 4.6 per cent, and the Forward Block 4.1 per cent, making a total of 47.7 per cent of the total vote compared with 54.3 in 1980.

Index of Opposition Unity



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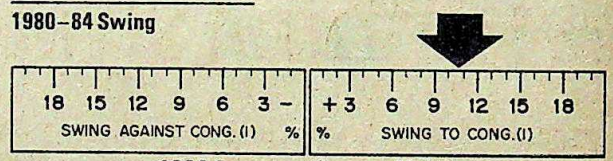


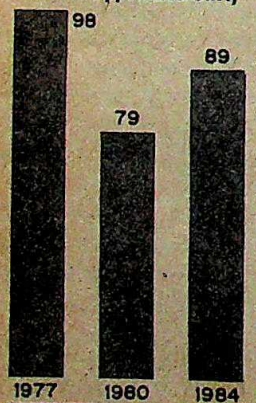
1984 Congress(I) vote: 48.2%

DELHI

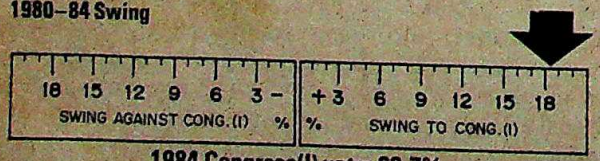
Congress(I)	7
Total Seats	7

A massive swing of 18.3 per cent in its favour gave the Congress(I) an unprecedented 68.7 per cent of the popular vote in the union territory, a good 4 per cent more than the previous peak in 1971. The BJP was eclipsed with only 18.9 per cent of the vote. In spite of a high IOU of 89 compared with 79 in 1980, the Opposition was left with no seats at all.

Index of Opposition Unity



1980–84 Swing



1984 Congress(I) vote: 68.7%

ALL INDIA PARTY POSITION

Congress(I)	401
Telugu Desam	28
CPI(M)	22
AIADMK	12
Janata	10
CPI	6
DMKP	3
NC(F)	3
BJP	2
PWP	1
Seats Contested	508

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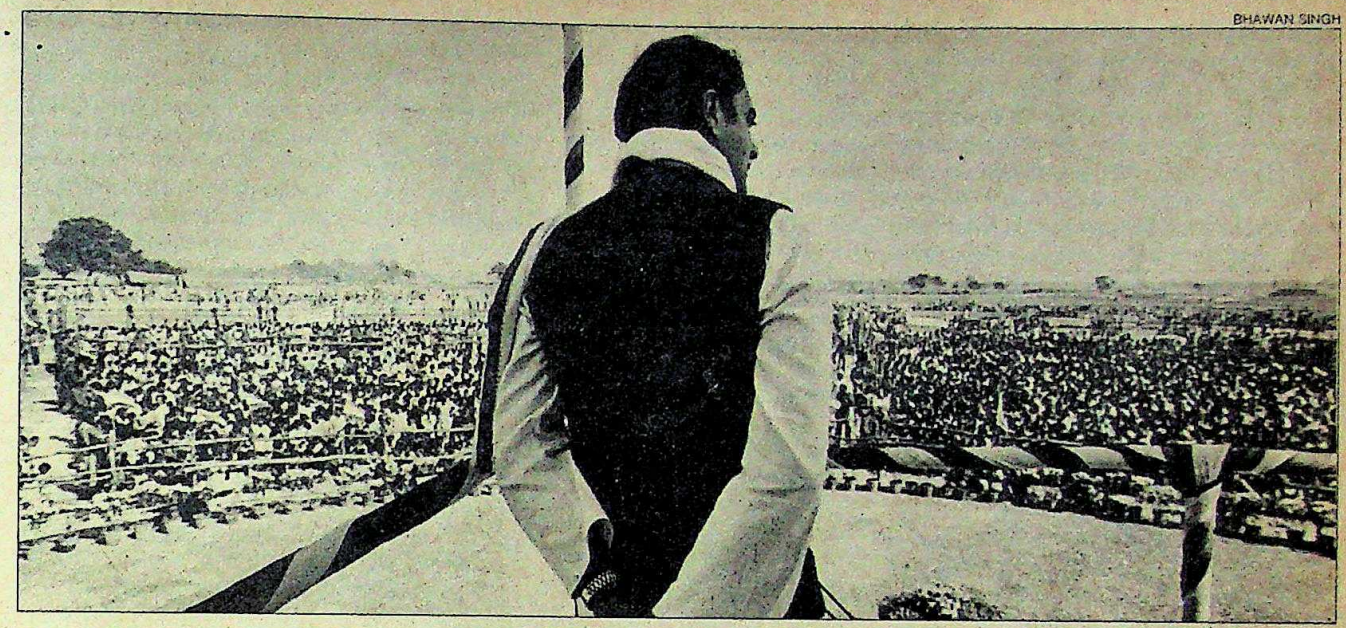
BHAWAN SINGH



Rajiv on the campaign trail: indefatigable

THE CAMPAIGN

A Winning Strategy

THE ENDURING image is that of a white kurta-pyjama-clad figure, a shawl draped over one shoulder and around his waist, rushing up the steps of an election podium to face yet another audience in yet another constituency. It is to this man, decried by some as a political novice, that the landslide victory of the Congress(I) belongs, to the image he projected, the words he spoke, the strategy he adopted, the powerful empathy that he attracted.

Rajiv Gandhi's election strategy has paid off like nobody else's in the past. From the word go, from that now-distant election meeting in Bulandshahr on December 1 which kicked off the prime minister's campaign, the strategic mix was clear: a mixture of hard work and aggressive campaigning designed to cut the ground from under the Opposition's feet and project the ruling party as the only one capable of serving the country's needs.

To push this message across effectively, Rajiv outdistanced all other campaigners, past or present. In 25 days he covered almost 50,000 km by plane, helicopter and car, addressing 250 scheduled public meetings in as many constituencies, reaching out in person to more than 20 million people. Punishing as it was, the campaign hardly left a crease on his face. True, his voice would be a little hoarse in the evening, but each audience would see him a renewed campaigner, hair brushed in place and kurta spotless white, talking as if it were the first meeting of the day.

In the process, he demolished the myth of the political novice, of a soft pilot-turned-politician being manipulated by weightier personalities. There was nothing soft in his style or his campaign which sometimes bordered on the intemperate, which saw him hurling accusations after accusation against the Opposition and moving on before they had time to recover.

But more than that, it was the message that went home, a message that changed in expression as the campaign wore on but at heart remained the same: that India's unity and integrity were being threatened and only the Congress Party would be able to keep the country from breaking up.

It is difficult to say if the electorate was responding to the letter of this message or the spirit behind it—but there is no doubt that by giving the ruling party more than 50 per cent of the vote, the electorate endorsed the strategy.

To begin with, the prime minister's campaign focussed strongly on Mrs Gandhi's assassination, on the inimical forces that masterminded it and how they hoped that India would disintegrate as a result. The appeal led to a new phrase in the political lexicon: sympathy wave. But then midway through the campaign Rajiv changed his plank and sharpened his message to focus on Punjab, on the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, recognising that here was an issue which went straight to the gut in most parts of the country. The technique was a no-holds-barred offensive against the Opposition, on how it had allegedly colluded with what Rajiv described as the forces of destabilisation. "How is it that three members of the Opposition visited the Golden Temple shortly before Operation Bluestar and came back to say there were no extremists, no arms?", he thundered in a Bangalore meeting. "The Opposition must clarify, what is its attitude towards the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, and they must answer these questions before the 24th (polling day) because after that day you won't see them again." Glossing over the Congress(I)'s own earlier connection with Bhindranwale, whom it supported in elections to the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee against the Akali Dal, he focussed on Khalistan protagonist Jagjit Singh Chauhan's prolonged visit to India during Janata rule, citing that as the starting point of the Punjab agitation.

Sharp jibes about the fractured Opposition—"how can parties who can't agree on the sharing of tickets hope to come together to run the country" or "if they can't provide an effective Opposition, how can they form a government"—went home swiftly, and soon Rajiv was putting the onus of proving their fidelity on the Opposition leaders. He revived old charges against George

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Fernandes, that he had received funds for his trade union activities from West Germany and Japan, which Fernandes has cleared up earlier. In a bid to wean the Muslim's from the Janata Party, he brought up former Israeli defence minister Moshe Dayan's secret visit to India during the Janata period. Often, Rajiv would equate the secessionist movement in Punjab with Jammu & Kashmir and Assam, both of which are entirely different problems, to strengthen his allegations against the Opposition charging Farooq Abdullah, for instance, of doing nothing when Pakistani flags were raised at a cricket match in Srinagar—ignoring the fact that this is a not infrequent occurrence and hasn't been unknown since G.M.Shah's Congress(I)-supported regime took over. And, Rajiv was misled by a report which alleged that an American study discussing the likely effect of the death of Mrs Gandhi was published just weeks before the assassination when in fact the book had been on the shelves—and with the Indian Embassy in Washington—for several months.

SADLY enough for them, the stalwarts of the Opposition fell prey to the campaign. With Rajiv stealing their thunder, all that they could get into the national media were denials and protestations which, however valid they may have been, could hardly project a positive impression. Indeed, some of the Opposition campaigns sparkled with wit, and many contenders argued their cases well. But they made few ripples and the overall impression left behind was of an Opposition fragmented and ineffective, put on the defensive.

This merely compounded the effect of yet another master stroke from the Congress(I), pitting glamorous vote-catchers against Opposition stalwarts. Atal Behari Vajpayee didn't learn till an hour before nominations closed that he would be fighting Madhavrao Scindia in Gwalior—leaving him no time to file a second nomination. Amitabh Bachchan tied down Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna in Allahabad while his fellow members of the celluloid world, Sunil Dutt and Vyjanthimala Bali accounted for Ram Jethmalani and Era Sezhiyan. The main result of this was, of course, that with their own seats in difficulty, the Opposition's best campaigners couldn't afford time to go out vote getting in other constituencies.

Not that the Opposition parties covered themselves with glory in their efforts to unite or come to some sort of understanding. Divided among themselves, they were a less than impressive sight, quarrelling over leadership, over seat sharing, over candidates. Mrs Gandhi's death removed whatever focal point remained to their unity efforts. After that they were adrift—and the voter saw right through their protestation that they would usher in an era of coalitions. The voter, obviously wiser after the experience of 1979 when the Janata coalition broke under its own contradictions, wanted none of that. A common remark in the countryside was: "They don't have enough candidates to form a government—why should I waste my vote on them?"

Nor did the Opposition have anywhere near the reach and the resources of the Congress(I). The party's publicity and campaign organisers—men like MP's Arun Nehru, Vishwajit Singh Ahluwalia and Sreekant Verma, advertising executives like Arun Nanda and Romi Chopra, and close aide Satish Sharma—divided the campaign in two phases. To remind the electorate that Mrs Gandhi gave her life in the cause of national unity, they coined the slogan: *"Indiraji ki antim ichcha, boond boond se desh ki raksha"*

CAMPAIGN MANAGERS

Good Logistics

THE CONGRESS(I) campaign had a good dose of the much-talked-about management culture which is permeating the party. The troika responsible for the nuts and bolts of this successful campaign were comparatively new entrants into the political arena: Arun Nehru, the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) general secretary, Vishwajit Singh Ahluwalia, a Doon School-educated Rajya Sabha member from Maharashtra, and Captain Satish Sharma, a former Indian Airlines colleague of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. These trusted aides were handpicked specially by Rajiv himself to ensure that the most important ingredients for the massive election strategy like funds, publicity and transport were in safe hands.

Since it was going to be one of the most expensive elections, Nehru was chosen to handle funds alongwith the AICC(I)'s treasurer Sita Ram Kesari. Deviating from the past practice of authorising the various Pradesh Congress Committees (PCC-I) and the District Congress Committees (DCC-I) Nehru prohibited all Congressmen from collecting money. It was the AICC(I) which itself raised funds and distributed them to all the PCC(I) chiefs who in turn gave it to each candidate. Nehru's primary responsibility was to see that none of the party's candidates was starved for funds, ensuring at the same time that the expenses were within reasonable limits.

According to AICC(I) sources, a limit of Rs 2 lakh for each contestant was imposed by Nehru himself when some candidates started demanding over Rs 5 lakh in the name of fighting Opposition heavyweights. While he conceded few requests from candidates like Jagan Nath Chaudhury, who defeated Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar, and Mahesh Sharma who lost to Chaudhury Charan Singh, he compensated others with allocating them extra publicity material. Though the ruling party's vessel of funds was overflowing, Nehru, by making himself inaccessible, ensured that he was relatively free of direct pressure from the candidates for additional financial support. Instead, he deputed Kesari, who was available to all the PCC(I) chiefs through newly-installed 25 hot lines, to entertain requests and put them up to him for final clearance. But Nehru made it a rule that the AICC(I) would not deal with the candidates directly. A notice board stating that "the candidates should contact the PCC(I)'s for election material" was put up at Arun Nehru's office door. Said Kesari: "In elections each candidate wants enough money when he feels shaky. But we knew our limits and handled each request carefully."

But the trickiest job of distributing election material to 494 candidates was left to Ahluwalia. He was not only asked to get over two crore posters printed in a short period of seven days but also had to ensure that they reached the constituencies in time. In addition he was directed to procure over 50,000 video and audio cassettes for recording Mrs Gandhi's and Rajiv's speeches, along with other publicity material. Ahluwalia was also allocated a specific financial budget in which he was expected to provide over a dozen publicity items to all the candidates in six days.

Ahluwalia ran into major hurdles right from the beginning. He was initially pressurised into printing all the posters in firms where a few AICC(I) employees and some senior MP's had a

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(Mrs Gandhi's final wish, every drop of blood for the country's security). Some 2.5 million posters and 100,000 cloth banners bearing this message flooded the countryside. Verma said: "I must confess that we ourselves were surprised by the success of the first phase of our campaign." The party used cassettes, posters, banners to send the country's 350 million voters this message.

The second phase of the campaign focussed on Rajiv, projecting him as the only person capable of holding the country together and leading it in these difficult and troubled times. The new prime minister was depicted as a man willing to take quick and even unpopular decisions: the Delhi riots were cooled in 72 hours, corrupt politicians had been denied tickets, some 100 sitting MP's had been retired. Above all, he was projected as a clean politician determined to rule effectively and efficiently. "We were pretty sure that the sympathy wave would not last and we wanted people to accept Rajiv Gandhi as the most acceptable claimant of the prime ministership."

To help achieve this aim, a 30-minute video cassette was circulated widely, showing an interview with Mrs Gandhi in which she spoke about Rajiv and snatches of film from the new prime minister's first fortnight in office. In the second phase of the campaign, posters of Rajiv dominated the publicity effort: some 80 per cent of the 15 million posters and pamphlets circulated carried either his picture or excerpts from his speeches.

None of this came cheap: according to estimates, some Rs 9 crore was spent on newspaper advertisements— some 15 large ads in each of more than 250 newspapers and periodicals, and another Rs 16 crore on posters and pamphlets, stickers and other election gimmicks.

OBVIOUSLY as the result shows, the spending was well worth it. But it is also true that for the first time, the Congress(I) was less than profligate in handing out funds to its candidates. In an unusual show of fiscal discipline, the party allotted a mere Rs 2 lakh per candidate and provided the average aspirant with three vehicles in addition to about one lakh posters, 5,000 flags, 500 banners and several thousand audio cassettes of songs and speeches.

The campaigns, particularly Rajiv's, clearly touched a vital nerve in the electorate. INDIA TODAY correspondents touring several different parts of the country attributed the Rajiv whirlwind to five factors. They were:

- Abhorrence at the assassination of Mrs Gandhi, expressed by showing solidarity with her son. As Chandrika Prasad of Patna put it: "The people have taught the killers of Mrs Gandhi a lesson. She said that the last drop of her blood would serve the nation, and after her death, every Indian has risen to save the nation."
- A genuine desire to give Rajiv, who is uncluttered with ideological baggage or a dubious political past, a chance.
- A powerful and spontaneous response to his campaigns, platform manner and appeal, his style and message.
- A realisation that the Opposition was in no position to form a government.
- A widespread perception that the economy has done well in the last few years.

None of this would have gone home, however, if the voter didn't know his mind. For the fact is that the Indian voter has a very clear idea of where his interests lie, what kind of candidates or party or programme he wants, whom he will respond to. If the campaign was unprecedented, so was the voter's choice. And it was ultimately his decisive vote that opened the new frontier for Rajiv Gandhi.

vested interest. But to the chagrin of many, Ahluwalia, instead, invited over a dozen advertising agencies and signed an agreement for printing posters according to his schedule. During earlier elections, AICC(I) received numerous complaints about fewer posters being supplied than ordered because it was humanly impossible to count all of them. Ahluwalia overcame this problem by ordering that each bag of 10,000 posters be weighed before being sent off to party offices all over. Once the supply line for posters and other materials was opened, Ahluwalia even airlifted posters to far off places. Said he: "It was a question of reaching each constituency in time. And we found that it would be cheaper to airlift material than sending it by road and going through all those hassles of check-posts and other barriers."

Arun Nehru

V.S. Ahluwalia

Satish Sharma

Occupying Nehru's room in the AICC(I) office, Ahluwalia was coordinating the distribution of the entire publicity material with the help of two retired senior army officials and a dozen especially recruited hands. In fact, it was perhaps for the first time that the Congress(I)'s election material was conspicuous by its display in all the constituencies. Said Jagdish Tytler who retained his Sadar Bazar seat in Delhi with a huge margin: "Never before have we had such a well-organised election campaign in which each one of the candidates got what he actually required to win an election."

While funds and publicity material were taken care of, the prime minister chose Sharma for organising a well coordinated transport system for campaigning, which included road and air transport. As a former Indian Airlines pilot and vice-president of Aero Club of India, Sharma was adequately equipped for the job. And he had already some experience in this regard: last year he handled the transport arrangements for the Jammu & Kashmir assembly elections.

And when Rajiv sounded Sharma for the Lok Sabha election arrangements he collected over 3,000 jeeps from neighbouring Haryana, Rajasthan and even from Gujarat. Once Sharma was able to organise three to four jeeps for each candidate, he made a list of over 20 helicopters and six aeroplanes which could be made available for campaigning by the PCC(I) chiefs and the state chief ministers.

While Rajiv Gandhi used Indian Air Force's aeroplanes and helicopters for campaigning, all the 17-odd chief ministers and PCC(I) bosses pressed into service over a dozen helicopters, a majority of them organised by Sharma. Said a Congress(I) MP from Madhya Pradesh: "The party needed both air and ground attack ability in order to defeat our political enemies and Sharma provided a grand combination of both. And you see the results. The party has won hands down everywhere and the entire Opposition is biting dust."

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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PSEPHOLOGY

Method in the Madness

OPINION polls have been a feature of several of the parliamentary elections but it was not till the 1980 and 1984 polls that psephology, the scientific study of the election process, came into its own. Most opinion polls used a sampling technique to predict the percentage of votes likely to be won by various parties. Helpful in some ways, this failed to provide a suitable basis for the forecasting of seats likely to be won. The Indian multi-party parliamentary system is based on the winner being the "first past the post", and the proportion of seats won is always higher than the proportion of votes cast (*see table*). Election forecasts therefore remained inadequate since the pollsters lacked the means to translate votes polled into seats won.

Enter two young economists, Prannoy Roy and Ashok Lahiri. After a computer study of the previous general elections, Lahiri and Roy found that the country could be divided into "homogenous swing zones" which cut across state borders and, indeed, constituency frontiers in which the swing of votes was similar, that for some reason the electorate in these zones tended to show swings of a uniform size in the same direction election after election.

They were thus able to devise a technique in which the electorate could be sampled in a representative constituency in each swing zone to show how the vote was likely to swing in the entire zone. Certain pitfalls, they found, had to be avoided. The presence of any mitigating factors—like the constituencies of political heavyweights—had to be avoided since the objective was to assess a representative constituency. By adopting this method they were finally able to break the code that would enable them to translate votes into seats.

The technique was first applied to the 1980 election when INDIA TODAY commissioned a Bombay-based marketing organisation to carry out opinion polls in locations provided to them by Roy and Lahiri. The 1980 prediction pointed in the right direction: at a time when most political observers were anticipating a Congress(I) debacle, the INDIA TODAY forecast said the party would win 291 seats; the actual tally in the January round of elections was 353.

The same method was used to make the 1984 forecast. Between December 7 and 14, opinion polls were carried out in 35 representative constituencies by MARG Marketing and Research Group. Each constituency was covered in a representative manner, that is with the correct rural/urban and male/female samples. Some 8 to 10 locations were selected at random across the constituency and around 300 house-to-house interviews carried out in each constituency.

The findings were then fed into the computer model and the swing towards or away from the Congress(I) calculated. The swing in the representative constituency was applied on the 1980 results of all constituencies in the swing zone and the model then suggested whether or not the seat would remain with the party that held it in 1980 or not.

Those unfamiliar with sampling techniques wonder if it is fair to determine what a whole constituency will do on the basis of just 300 interviews. The fact is that if the sample is scientifically selected, the findings of the poll should, on the basis of the laws of probability, be within a plus-minus 5.7 per cent of the true result in 19 cases out of 20.

Last month, on the basis of 11,297 interviews carried out, the INDIA TODAY forecast yielded a much higher tally than those of other polls, just as it did in 1980. Yet the actual result was far higher than the 366 predicted. But the poll did contain indications that the seat tally might be higher than 366 and the forecast said quite clearly that "...the party could command over 400 seats in the next Lok Sabha".

It is well to remember that India is a vast country and that it is difficult to reach all parts of it quickly, especially where communications are poor. That coupled with deadline problems meant that the field work for the forecast had to be carried out over a week and completed 10 to 15 days before polling day, just as serious campaigning had begun. Thus, the poll was unable to take into account any late swings or the impact of the campaign itself, both in the 1980 and 1984 elections.

COMPUTERS

Chipping In

IF LAST fortnight's elections were a thumping victory for the Congress(I), they were something of a giant leap for computer buffs. Two manufacturers provided computer back-up to those interested in processing and analysing the vast amount of election-related data that was generated.

Computer analysis: new trends

International Computers Indian Manufacture (ICIM) provided a 101 computer to Prannoy Roy to analyse the 11,297 sample opinion poll carried out by MARG (Marketing and Research Group) on behalf of INDIA TODAY. ICIM computers were also used by Roy to develop his election forecasting model which predicted the Congress(I) landslide (INDIA TODAY, December 31, 1984).

DCM, the other entrant into this field, tied up with the United News of India (UNI) and the government's Press Information Bureau (PIB) to process the results as they poured in on a DCM-Tandy computer. This enabled the PIB and UNI to put out election results faster than during any other election and, what is more, put the information out in a convenient, easy-to-digest format. Says DCM's S.K. Maggu: "Computers have for all time to come changed the way that elections will be reported, analysed and understood."

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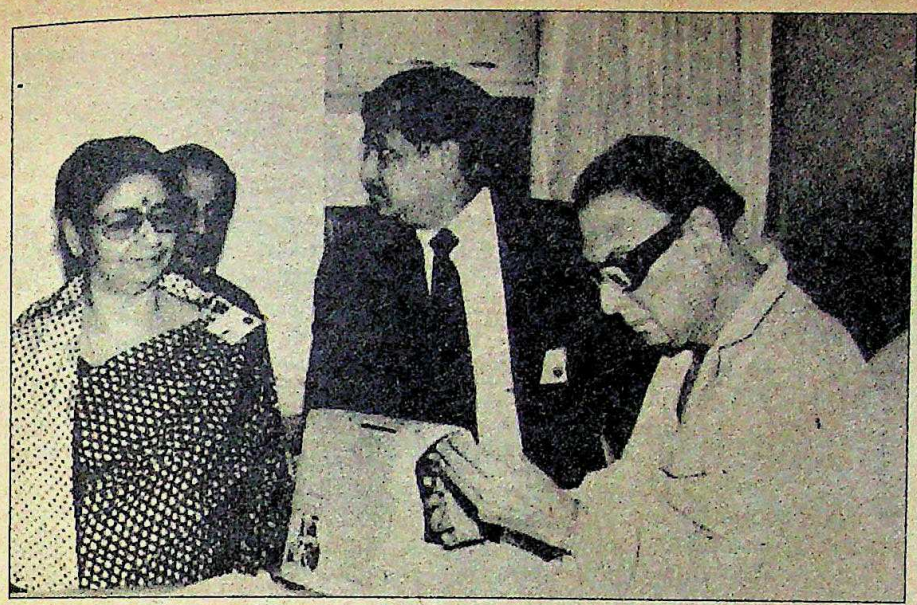

Ailing MGR: remote control

TAMIL NADU

Fruitful Alliance

IT WAS a bad day for the political pundits. Even the staunchest AIADMK supporter had nursed the gut feeling that the fortunes of that party and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) would be evenly matched in the Tamil Nadu assembly elections. The DMK President M. Karunanidhi had drawn unprecedented crowds during his election campaign. And the AIADMK was seriously handicapped by the absence of its glamorous and popular leader, M.G. Ramachandran, undergoing treatment in New York for kidney failure, paralysis, and speech impairment. Even over-cautious political commentators openly said that the state would be voting indecisively for the first time. Tamil Nadu had overwhelmingly voted for the Congress till 1967, and since then for either of the two Dravidian Kazhagams.

But the results of the assembly elections held last fortnight humbled the pundits and commentators beyond belief. The AIADMK, which contested in alliance with the Congress(I), got absolute majority on its own, winning 133 of the 234 assembly seats (of course, elections were held only for 232 seats: the poll was countermanded in two constituencies because of the death of an independent candidate). MGR's party emerged again in a position to form the government on its own accord—and that in spite of the fact that the party contested only 154 seats.

The Congress(I) also did exceedingly well, winning a staggering 62 of the 72 seats it contested. On the other hand the DMK—which was estimated to win anything between 80 to 100 seats—was almost totally wiped out with a measly tally of 20 seats. Observed K.S. Ramakrishnan in the *Indian Express*: "For Karunanidhi this time, his party's symbol (rising sun) could very well have been christened the 'setting sun'." Tamil Nadu had once again cast a decisive vote.

The mandate was unmistakable. And the margins made it amply clear whom the voters really wanted. Even if there was any rigging, it didn't make any difference to the outcome. MGR won by a big margin of 32,000 votes over his nearest Forward Bloc rival P.N. Vallarasu in the Andipatti constituency of Madurai district. In Athur in Madurai the former finance minister, V.R. Nedunchezhiyan—who was also deputising for MGR during his absence—trounced his nearest rival by a majority of 29,573 votes. With the lone exception of the former Adi Dravidar welfare minister M. Vijayasarathy, who lost to his DMK rival in Arakonam in north Arcot, all the former AIADMK ministers romped home with resounding majorities.

Surprisingly enough, even open infighting in the AIADMK in MGR's absence didn't affect the party's fortunes. The party's former propaganda secretary and high-profile Rajya Sabha MP Jayalalitha Jayaram undertook exhaustive whirlwind campaign tours, but conspicuously did not address any election meeting in the Madurai east constituency, where the former agriculture minister K. Kalimuthu was contesting. Kalimuthu nevertheless defeated his nearest rival, P.M. Kumar of the CPI by a margin of over 6,000 votes. Former industries minister C. Ponnaiyan, who contested from Tiruchengode in Salem district, was noticeably absent from an election meeting that Jayalalitha addressed in the constituency. But Ponnaiyan too won by a margin of 19,222 votes against M.M Kandasamy of the DMK.

Normally, urban areas are considered DMK strongholds, while the AIADMK is reckoned more powerful in the rural ones. But this time round, except for Madras city, urban constituencies were just as unkind to the DMK as the rural areas. In Thanjavur town, traditionally a pocket of DMK influence, the seasoned P.S Thangamuthu of the DMK lost by 2,000 votes to Congress(I) candidate Dorai Krishnamurthy. In the thousand lights constituency of Madras city, Karunanidhi's son M.K. Stalin lost by 2,292 votes to the former dairy development minister K.A. Krishnaswamy.

AIADMK candidates were able to win by impressive margins even when they fought outside their native constituencies. Education Minister C. Aranganayakam—who had been elected to the assembly from the Coimbatore (west) constituency in the 1980 poll—was shifted this time to neighbouring Thondamuthur. But he won over his nearest CPI(M) rival V.K. Velliangiri by a huge margin of over 22,000 votes. The president of the All World MGR Fans Association, P. Musiriputhan, hails from Musiri in Tiruchi district, but this time he was given the Kulithalai ticket. He won nonetheless with a decisive margin of nearly 30,000 votes. Observed P. Nedumaran, the famous president of the Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress (which went to the polls in alliance with the DMK), and who himself lost his native stronghold Madurai (central) seat to the Congress(I): "The people of Tamil Nadu have not yet woken up from the stupor of sympathy for an ailing MGR and assassinated Mrs Gandhi."

But the election victory, however encouraging, has hardly solved the problems of the AIADMK, a one-man party

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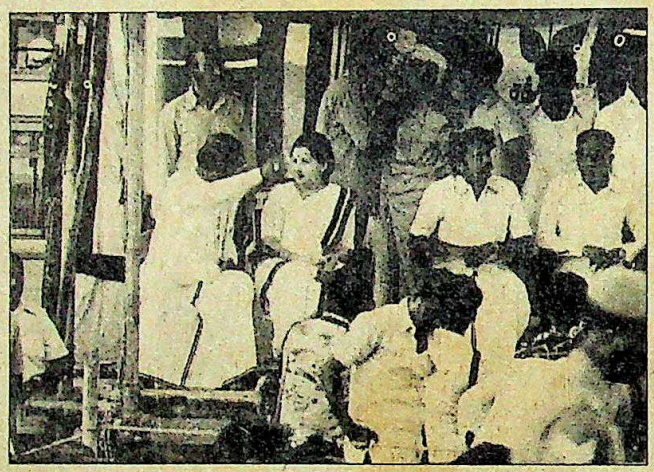
surviving solely on the charisma of MGR. In fact the victory itself poses serious problems for the party. The American doctors who successfully performed a kidney transplant on MGR last fortnight, have advised him to stay on in New York for a few more weeks under medical supervision. Moreover, when and to what extent his speech faculty will improve remains uncertain. In the mean time, the party is so seriously riven by internal dissensions that there is no other consensus candidate to hold fort in MGR's absence.

Among the aspirants for leadership in the party, there is Jayalalitha, whose stock went up immensely after she was recognised as the only effective crowd-puller in the AIADMK's election campaign. There is the former information minister R.M. Veerappan, MGR's ally for many years, who fired the first salvo in keeping the other contestants for party leadership at bay by issuing a statement that "there is no problem in the party electing MGR as its leader and the state governor inviting MGR to form the Government" And there is the shrewd former electricity minister S. Ramachandran, who was only too quick to jump into the fray with Veerappan. Ramachandran in fact went one step further and said that "MGR will be sworn in as chief minister in New York". Finally there is the least controversial candidate Nedunchezhiyan himself. So intense is the leadership struggle that even a prominent Congress(I) leader in the state remarked: "The AIADMK's eventual split is certain, only when is the question."

Little wonder, then, that senior party functionaries have—in a desperate effort to keep the party together—bought time by again formally electing MGR as leader, although leaving open the unprecedented legal question of how he can be sworn in as chief minister in New York in a constitutionally valid manner. According to S. Ramachandran: "There should be no problem in Governor S.L. Khurana flying to New York with the state chief secretary and swearing in MGR as chief minister there. I think there is absolutely no legal bar in swearing in a chief minister on foreign soil. Of course, we have to ascertain legal opinion."

Another former AIADMK minister, however, disagrees: "The governor's jurisdiction ceases once he steps out of the state." Legal opinion is also divided. Khurana refused to comment, but he is understood to have expressed his disinclination to go to New York when the members of the AIADMK Parliamentary Board called on him to officially inform him that MGR had been elected leader. But the Parliamentary Board is seeking legal opinion on this issue. Said Nedunchezhiyan: "We will find out what the law says and place all existing facts before the governor."



Jayalalitha (above) and Nedunchezhiyan: holding fort

There are other reasons as well for the AIADMK to not gloat over its election victory. In real terms, the party hasn't gained anything much in the elections. It had 130 seats in the dissolved assembly, so it has been able to add only three seats to that tally. It is the Congress(I) which has been the greatest beneficiary of this assembly poll. It had a strength of only 33 in the dissolved assembly (the 30 it had won in the previous elections, and three by defection), whereas it has won 62 seats now. In the constituencies that the Congress(I) candidates have won, on an average, they have secured 54 per cent of the total votes polled. AIADMK candidates, on the other hand, managed only 50 per cent. The Congress(I) contested 111 seats in the 1980 assembly poll in alliance with the DMK to win 30, whereas it contested only 72 seats this time to win 62.

The credit of scoring the highest victory margin this time goes to Congress(I) candidate S. Govindasamy, who won the Edapadi seat in Salem by a majority of 40,723 votes. Congress(I) candidates won by impressive margins even in constituencies which had been consistently returning AIADMK contestants. For instance, P. Sengottian won the Kapilarmalai seat in Salem by a margin of over 10,000 votes though C.V. Velappan of the AIADMK had been elected from the constituency in the three earlier elections. Virtually wiped out of the state in 1967, the Congress(I) seems to be regaining its foothold now.

"In fact the AIADMK won this time because of the Congress(I) and not the other way round," observed S.D. Somasundaram, former food minister in the AIADMK cabinet and president of the newly formed Namathu Kazhagam, all of whose candidates including Somasundaram himself lost their deposits. "For one thing, there is the traditional Congress vote bank. Then there is the intelligentsia which concluded that it doesn't benefit the state to have an opposition party in power here. And finally there are the large masses of illiterate people who wanted to vote the hand at the Centre and couldn't distinguish between the Assembly and the Parliament. After 1971 this is the first time that Lok Sabha and assembly polls were held on the same day in the state. And in 1971 also, like now, the mandate was identical for both Lok Sabha and assembly. It was only in 1977 and 1980, when the assembly and parliamentary polls were held on different dates in the state that the verdict of the people was different for the two."

It really seems therefore, as if MGR's party has taken a piggy-back ride on the Congress(I) in Tamil Nadu this time. As the TNCC(I) President M. Palaniyandi remarked: "The outcome of the elections as we see it, has been only a Congress(I) wave from Kashmir to Kanyakumari."

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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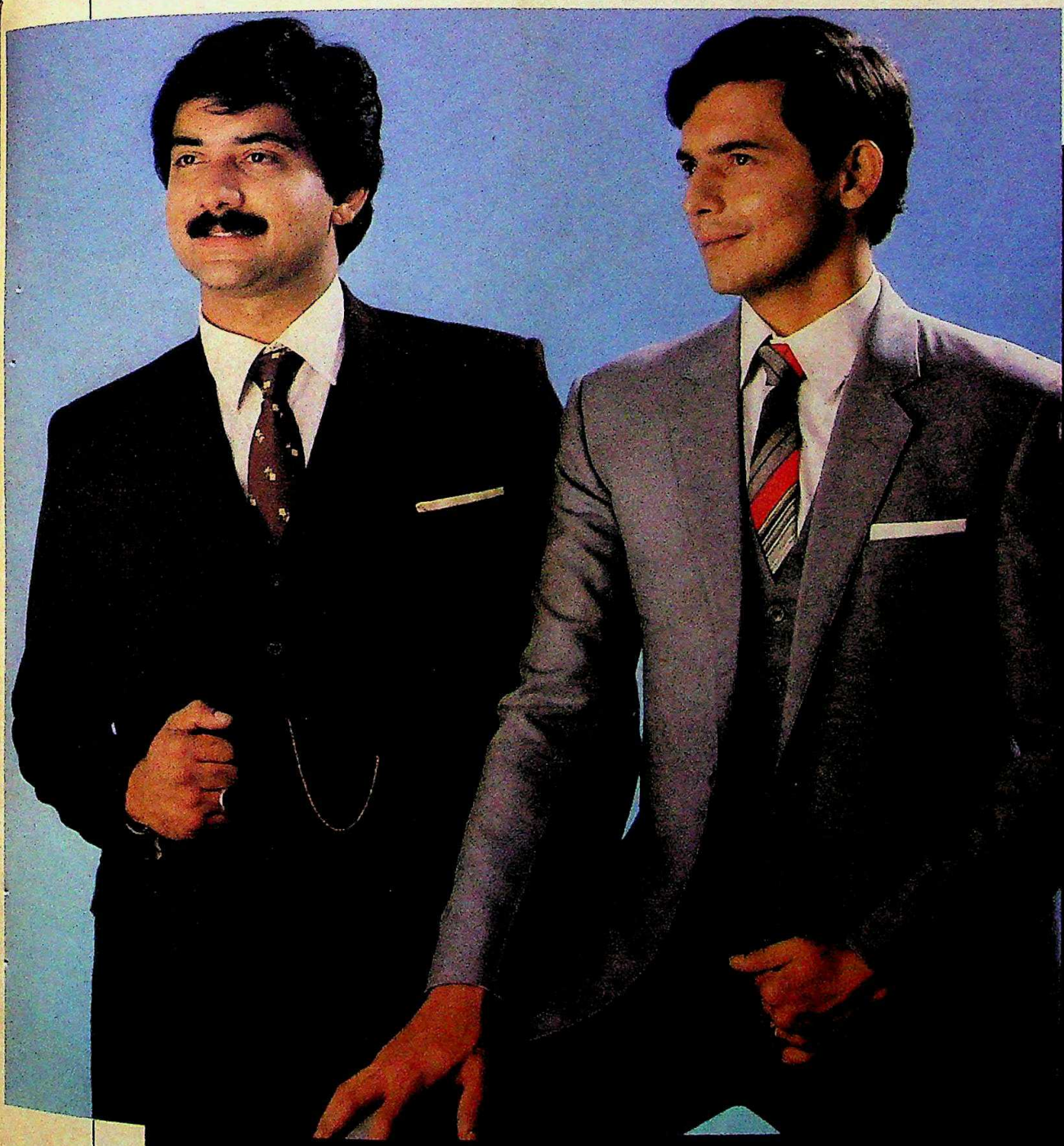

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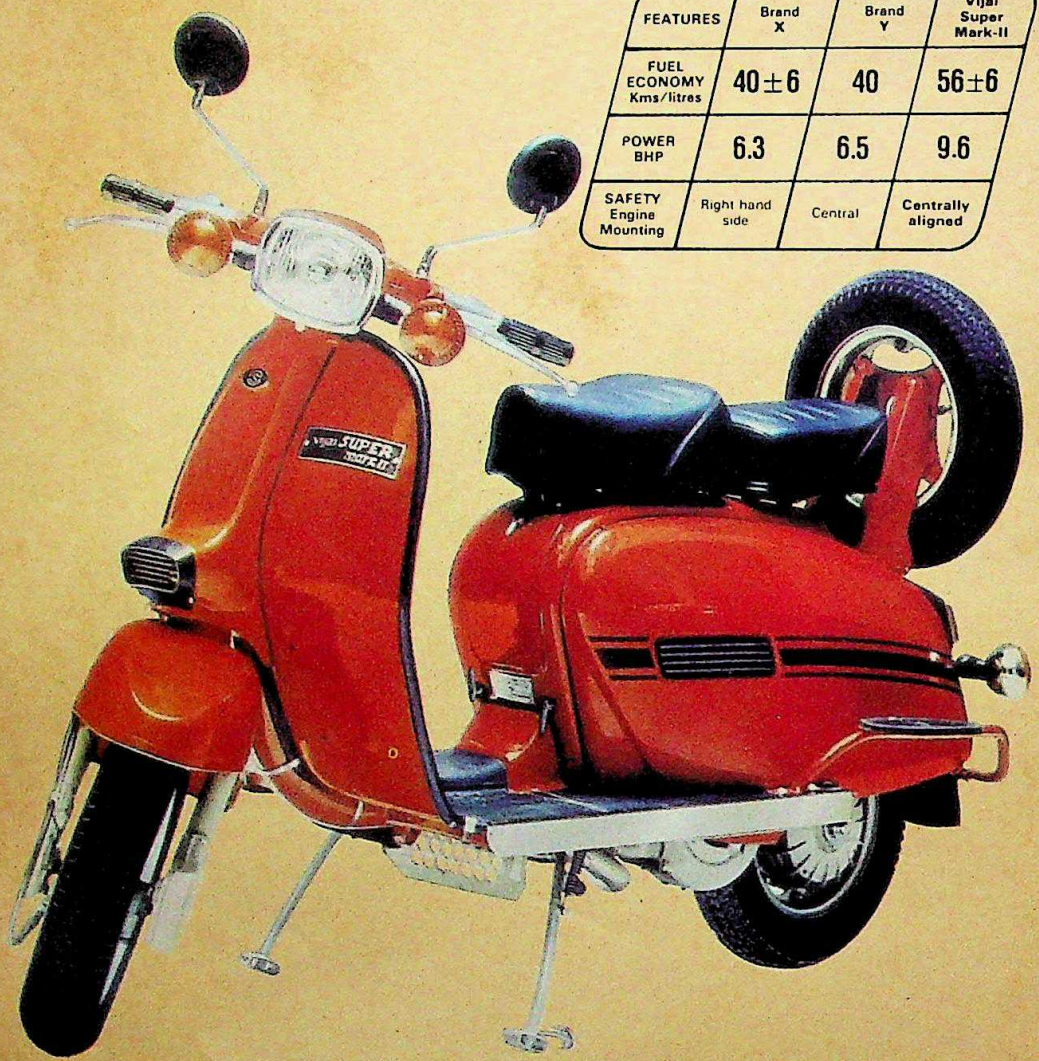

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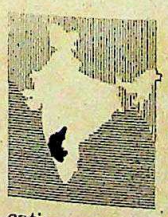
MUSHTAQ AHMED

Hegde announcing his resignation: strategic move

KARNATAKA

A Dignified Exit



AT 3.16 P.M. on December 29, a plainclothes policeman rushed to the dais where Karnataka Governor Ashok Nath Banerjee was presiding over the convocation ceremony of Dharwar University, 500 km from Bangalore, and handed the governor's aide a white envelope. Banerjee casually prised the envelope open and read the message without any surprise, for only 15 minutes earlier he had received a news agency flash about it. The message contained Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's 348-word resignation letter, recommending immediate dissolution of the state Assembly following the ruling Janata Party and its allies' loss of all but four of the 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka.

Except for the alacrity with which it was tendered, Hegde's resignation surprised no one. The previous morning the chief minister and his council of 33 ministers had met in the cabinet hall inside the imposing Vidhana Soudha in Bangalore as the results trickled in. The first report showed the Congress(I) leading in 25 of the 28 constituencies. Hegde was stunned and disappointed, but had not yet given up all hope of victory. As he said later, "I was hoping that the trend would change."

But by evening, as Hegde lay in bed with an excruciating backache and kept track of the results over his bedside telephone, the last flicker of hope was extinguished. The Congress(I) had established a clear lead in 24 of the 28 constituencies. Five of Hegde's six ministers who had stood for elections had been defeated, and doughty Janata Party General Secretary George Fernandes was losing by a margin of 40,000 votes in the Bangalore north constituency.

For Hegde the moment of truth had finally arrived. For two years he had run a government with a fragile majority, skilfully warding off sustained attacks by the Congress(I) to topple him by engineering defections in his ranks. He had proved that his coalition government could not only survive but work as well. For 20 days he had toured the state intensively, ignoring his ailing throat, in a bid to woo Karnataka's two crore electorate. In desperation he had wilfully put his government's performance to test in the Lok Sabha elections, telling the electorate that it would be a vote of confidence for him and his ministry.

Now that electorate had given its verdict and he had to act. "I am never confused during times of crisis. I have never met a blank wall," Hegde told INDIA TODAY later (*see interview*). But that night a stunned Hegde showed no signs of clear thinking. When a persistent newsman told him that former chief minister Gundu Rao had demanded his resignation, Hegde snapped back: "Why should I resign? Mr Rao does not understand the implications of the results. It is not as if I have lost the Assembly elections." A terse Hegde then left his cabinet colleagues in his drawing room where they sat watching the election broadcast on television, dismissed his security guard and walked down to his eldest daughter's house a short distance away.

Over a simple dinner of curds and rice, Hegde worked out his strategy. He

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was feeling the intense strain of running a ministry that was constantly under the threat of being toppled by defections. The Lok Sabha results would only intensify that threat. Twice before, governments have fallen in Karnataka after the Lok Sabha elections. In 1971 when Hegde was finance minister in Veerendra Patil's Congress(O) ministry, the government fell when they lost all the Lok Sabha seats to the Congress(R). There was a stampede of defections in the Congress(O). Then, in 1980 when the Congress(U) ministry headed by the late Devraj Urs was trounced in the polls, Urs resigned. Overnight 80 MLA's walked over to the Congress(I) and Gundu Rao formed his notorious government of defectors. Although there is no constitutional provision for the ruling party of a state to quit if it lost in the Lok Sabha poll, a precedent had been set.

History had repeated itself for Hegde —but with a difference. While in 1980 the Congress(I) was willing to form a government with the help of defections, this time round the new prime minister was unlikely to sully his "clean" image by telling his partymen to form a similar type of government. Hegde knew that none of his 94 MLA's would desert him immediately because there was no party they could beneficially join.

By the time Hegde finished his the first, dinner, he had worked out two options: not to resign but wait till the Central Government dismissed him and imposed President's rule as it did in 1977 when Urs headed the ministry. This would result in a tremendous wave of sympathy for him. But the danger there was that he could be ac-

RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

"I am not demoralised"

AS SOON as Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde resigned and bid farewell to his bureaucrats in Vidhana Soudha, he dispensed with his official car. He told Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *to hop into his own car driven by his son, Bharat, and headed home where he got his official telephone disconnected and told his security staff to leave. Then in the drawing-room, with his family sitting around watching his resignation speech being telecast, a relaxed and smiling Hegde dropped his guard for an hour-long interview. Excerpts:*

Q. ***You once said informally that to be in power was heady and intoxicating. How does it feel to be out of power?***

A. I have a feeling of relief and freedom. A feeling of not being under any obligations. It is as if a weight is being lifted from my shoulders. I am disappointed but not demoralised.

Q. ***When did you first get an inkling that you were going to lose?***

A. For the first time in Kanakapura (his home constituency) three days before the election, I had an insight. The crowd seemed to have come only as a courtesy.

Q. ***You were hoping to win 14 to 16 seats out of the 28. Why did you not win these?***

A. Initially we thought the sympathy factor was not working and the response was good for us. But perhaps we aimed at too high a target. You know even if we won two seats it would have meant a 100 per cent increase in our strength because in 1980 we won only one seat.

Q. ***But why did you lose?***

A. Very simple. It is not a vote against the performance of the state Government. People have hesitatingly given the Congress(I) support in the state. The Congress(I) has not gained but lost its base in the state. We have gained by a 10 per cent increase in votes while they have lost by 5 per cent.

Hegde: sense of relief

Q. ***Although you claim that it is not a vote against your performance, when you were campaigning you made your government's performance a key issue.***

A. It was done deliberately to establish a closer relationship with the electorate. It was a tactic.

Q. ***But don't you think the strategy failed and as a result you were forced to resign although you were not constitutionally bound to?***

A. Our strategy has paid because otherwise we would not even have won so much. Devraj Urs did not make his performance a campaign issue when his party contested. But he resigned when his party lost. So did Veerendra Patil. There is always the pressure of defection and also a moral responsibility to contend with.

Q. ***Why did you resign and recommend dissolution of the Assembly?***

A. On moral grounds and to seek fresh mandate from the people. We were already under the severe strain running the Government with a fragile majority and to prevent the Congress (I) move to topple us by engineering defection. The poll verdict would only intensify this pressure and we didn't want to run after MLA's to keep our majority. This time we are going to ask the people to give us a clear mandate.

Q. ***What is going to be your strategy now?***

A. I'll take it easy for a month and then work for the party again. We will have to win the assembly election and we will go to every village and ask the people to vote for us. I am sure they will respond.

Q. ***Since you are the party's star campaigner much depends on you. In fact there seems to be a personality cult growing around you here. Isn't this detrimental to your party?***

A. I know this has been happening although I have been trying to tell my colleagues to avoid it. Our people believe in symbolism and I have become one of the symbols of the Janata Government in the state. This is Indian culture. But I prefer to delegate responsibility so that my colleagues would get full scope to prove their mettle.

Q. ***What lessons did you learn from this election?***

A. Not to strain my vocal chords too much.

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cused of holding on to power and his MLA's may not stick with him. The other option was to recommend dissolution and resign as chief minister thereby putting the ball in the Congress(I)'s court. The governor had to either accept his recommendation or invite the Congress(I) to form a government, both of which would help the Janata politically.

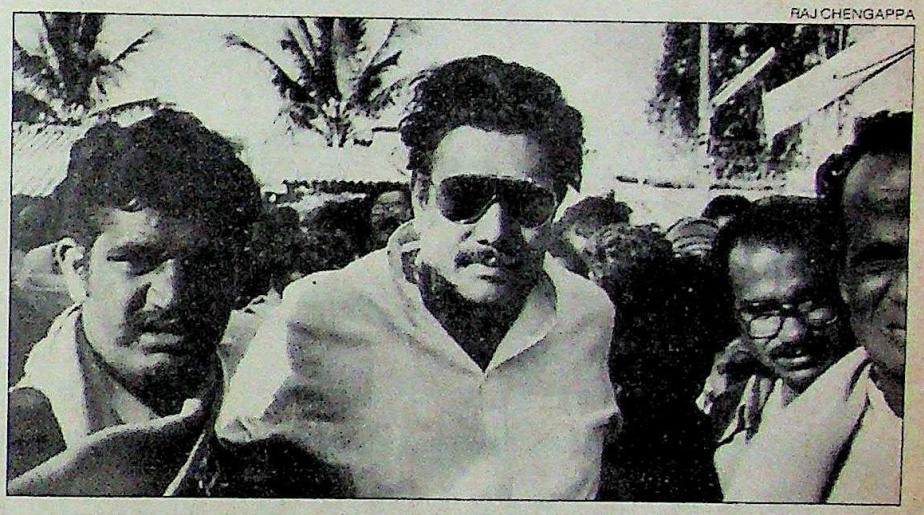
HEGDE was keen on quitting immediately and the next morning he called a cabinet meeting to find out what his colleagues felt. But for a few, the rest of his cabinet was keen that Hegde should resign and recommend dissolution. But even as they were debating the issue news came of Rajiv Gandhi's press conference where he said that he was not going to dismiss the Karnataka Government and impose President's rule. That did it. The Cabinet than unanimously passed a resolution recommending dissolution of the state Assembly.

Hegde then sat down with his cabinet and law secretaries and wrote a long-winded resignation letter to Banerjee. In it, Hegde took pains to point out that his party had improved its performance as compared to the 1980 poll and that there was no need for him to really quit, because "the issues in the Lok Sabha elections are national and the performance of the local government may come for popular review only incidentally". According to Hegde, on "moral grounds" he felt it necessary "to seek a fresh mandate of the people in keeping with the best tradition of democracy". As Banerjee was away in Dharwar, the police teleprinter was used to transmit the message to him.

Hegde's move immediately put the Congress(I) on the defensive and exposed its lack of unity. The local party has such a paucity of credible leaders that ironically enough the star campaigner turned out to be none other than the discredited Gundu Rao. The Congress(I) campaign had never been so subdued, with the high command giving only Rs 2 lakh for each constituency and the candidates unwilling to spend more. The Congress(I) presence was hardly evident yet it won because as elsewhere in India, Mrs Gandhi's assassination and the threat to national unity had left a seemingly deep impact. It was like an unseen hand working for the Congress(I). As a member of the high command close to the prime minister put it: "We won in spite of the local leaders in the state."

The inherent weakness of the state Congress(I) party was exposed immediately after Hegde's resignation. With Banerjee away in Dharwar and the Congress(I) high command busy with the forming of the Central Government, there was no one to advise them on what course to adopt. The result was confusion confounded. While leader of the Opposition Veerappa Moily and state Congress(I) chief K.H. Patil were keen on forming a government, Gundu Rao, who knew what it meant to head a government of defectors, wanted the Assembly to be dissolved. Most of the new elected members of Parliament were keen on the Assembly being dissolved because defector MLA's hardly worked for their constituencies. After a day of haggling, the Congress(I) leaders finally agreed that they should not form the government. Instead they wanted Banerjee to dissolve the Assembly and impose President's rule till the new Assembly was elected.

RAJ CHENGAPPA



Gundu Rao on the campaign trail: star performer

Both the Janata and the Congress(I) are keen on an early election for their own reasons. While the Janata wants to cash in on the wave of sympathy for Hegde, the Congress(I) would do their level best to counter it. In this they face an uphill task. They lack a leader of credibility and stature to match Hegde.

Although Gundu Rao is keen on getting back to the saddle his torrid three-year rule is likely to rule him out. Moily has been discredited after the famous tape scandal where he is alleged to have offered an MLA Rs 2 lakh to defect. K.H. Patil, the state Congress(I) chief feels he should lead but with his key supporter former Union Minister of state S.M. Krishna being trounced in the poll his chances are receding. S. Bangarappa joined the Congress(I) only recently after his unsuccessful marriage with the Janata. As Union Minister Jaffer Sharief, who defeated George Fernandes, put it: "The leadership issue will be ticklish."

The Congress(I) high command is more likely to lean on one of the members of Parliament to provide leadership in the state. A hot favourite is Janardhan Poojari, the new Union minister of state for finance, who is reportedly close to the prime minister and enjoys an untarnished image in the state. At 47, Poojari, a former lawyer, has age on his side but lacks the experience and the maturity to run a state government. But Poojari has the advantage of belonging to the Idigas (toddy tapper) community, a backward class in the state. Since the Janata Party is accused of being ruled by the dominant communities, the Congress(I) is keen on cashing in on the support of the weaker sections by choosing a man from their lot. But Poojari himself is undecided about coming back to state politics.

Right now the Congress(I) is still at sea in the state. Hegde has certainly seized the initiative by calling for a dissolution. As Poojari admitted: "Hegde is a shrewd and clever man. He is hoping to get popular sympathy." Nor has the Janata done too badly in the Lok Sabha. The Congress(I) won on reduced margins in most of constituencies and this has boosted the Janata morale. If the Congress(I) is unable to project a dynamic leader in the state to counter Hegde's charisma, the former chief minister may not become "irrelevant" as Rajiv Gandhi said he would. As Hegde said: "If assembly elections are held I will get a two-thirds majority." So far, nobody is contesting his claim.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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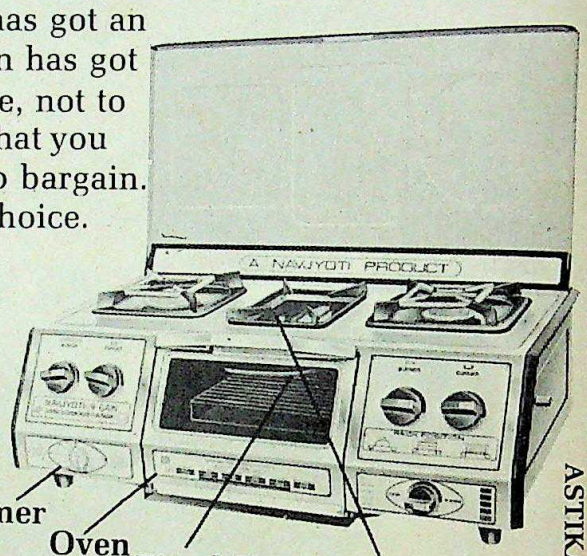

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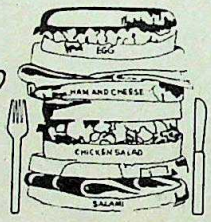

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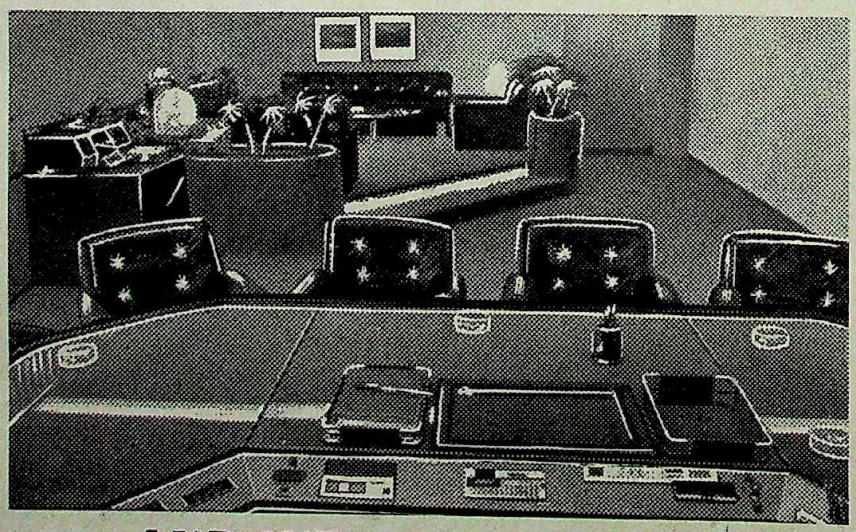

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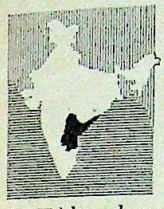
ANDHRA PRADESH

Stemming the Tide

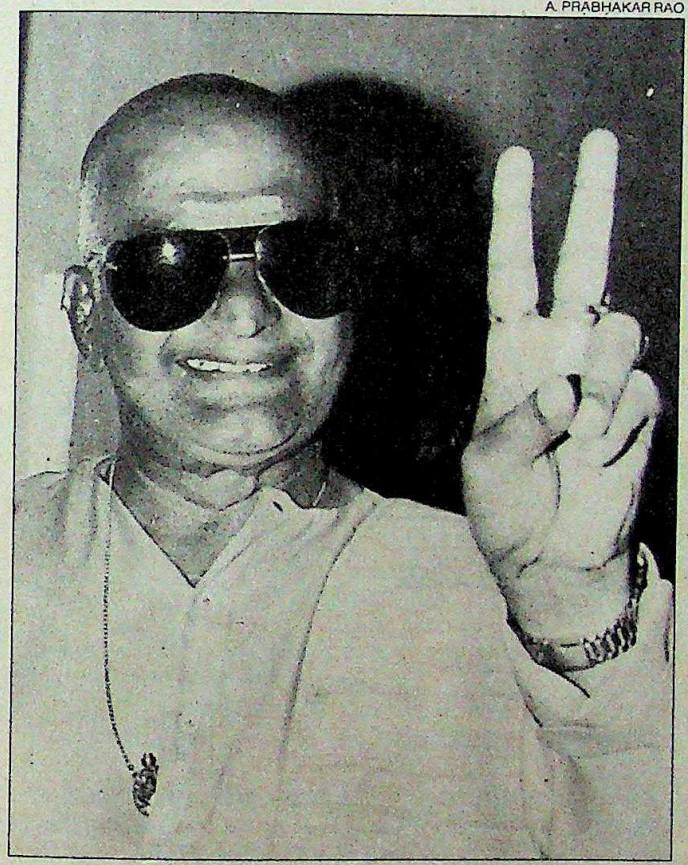


RARELY has anyone plunged into politics on turning 60 by launching a political party and playing the lead role in it. But that is exactly what N.T. Rama Rao (NTR) has done, and successfully, in Andhra Pradesh. His Telugu Desam Party, which will be only three years old in April, has in its debut in the Lok Sabha elections given the Congress(I) a drubbing as good as the one it gave by capturing power in Andhra Pradesh in the assembly elections in January 1983. While the first astounding victory made NTR the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, its second electoral feat of winning 28 of the 32 Lok Sabha seats it contested has catapulted the Telugu Desam into the rather enviable position of being the largest Opposition party in the new Parliament.

The Telugu Desam sweep across the board to win in all parts of the state has also debunked the theory about it being a one-man, one-election party propped up by a section of the mercantile Khamma community in the deltaic districts of the state. But its thumping success is in large measure due to the one-man show of NTR, who travelled to all the far-flung parts of this largest state in the south in his *Chaitanya Ratham*. He went to all the 42 constituencies in the state except Khammam, where the CPI and CPI(M) did not put up a united fight and helped the Congress(I) win by default.

By the remarkable electoral adjustment arrived at for 41 constituencies, including two where elections are to be held on January 28 as Independent contestants died, this election became virtually a straight fight between the Congress(I) and the Telugu Desam or one of its electoral allies. Therefore, the contest was keen, but the NTR charisma coupled with grim reminders of the unseemly and undemocratic manner in which he was temporarily unseated in August last year gave the Telugu Desam the cutting edge. NTR himself reminded the voters about the ouster while explaining why he was forced to ask for dissolution of the legislative assembly after the Lok Sabha elections were announced. He told the milling crowds at 150-odd wayside meetings that he recommended dissolution to purge the assembly of those who "betrayed the people's confidence in the Telugu Desam".

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



Rama Rao after the results: lone ranger

The Congress(I) proferred some unintended help to the Telugu Desam and further confirmed the voters' suspicions about its complicity in the ouster move by admitting 22 Telugu Desam defectors of the breakaway Bhaskara Rao faction into the party. The admissions were even made part of the Congress(I) campaign, with state party chief Rajasekhar Reddy announcing the admission of the defectors in small groups of two or three at a time in a futile attempt to pretend that the Congress(I) was gaining support.

The abortive coup episode and the closing of ranks of the Opposition parties in putting up common candidates were not the only reasons for the Telugu Desam victory. NTR's spirited campaign, in which he pointedly asked voters what the sitting MP's of the Congress(I) had done to raise the problems of Andhra Pradesh in Parliament made the latter sitting ducks. All six Central ministers and 17 other sitting Congress(I) members who managed to get tickets fell by the wayside. The octogenarian Lok Sabha front bencher N.G. Ranga was the only one to survive, winning by a margin of 11,894 votes. Union Home Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao lost by a wide margin of 53,198 votes in his native Hanamakonda constituency, though he won comfortably from the Ramtek constituency in Maharashtra. But Energy Minister P. Shiv Shankar who shifted from Secunderabad to Medak, reckoned as the safest seat for the Congress(I), lost ignominously to newcomer P. Manik Reddy of the Telugu Desam by a small margin of 1,816 votes. The Telugu Desam picked up Manik Reddy at the last minute as the DMKP, which was allotted the seat, decided against contesting any seat in Andhra Pradesh. In all, the Congress(I) could win only six seats in the state.

Nonetheless, the Congress(I) began with high expectations and its leader in the dissolved assembly A. Madan Mohan harped time and again that the party would repeat its stupendous 1977 and 1980 performance of winning 41 of the 42 seats in the state.

The Telugu Desam, on the other hand, presented a less comfortable picture before the poll, unsure as it was about the number of seats it would win as the Congress(I) hype about victory was taken seriously even by some of its own leaders. The party's office in Himayatnagar was virtually deserted. NTR himself took the day calmly. In the morning he flew to Gudapalle in Chitoor district to attend the funeral of Telugu Desam President and MLC A.V. Umashankar Reddy, who had been killed on the day before polling.

The chief minister got the first indi-

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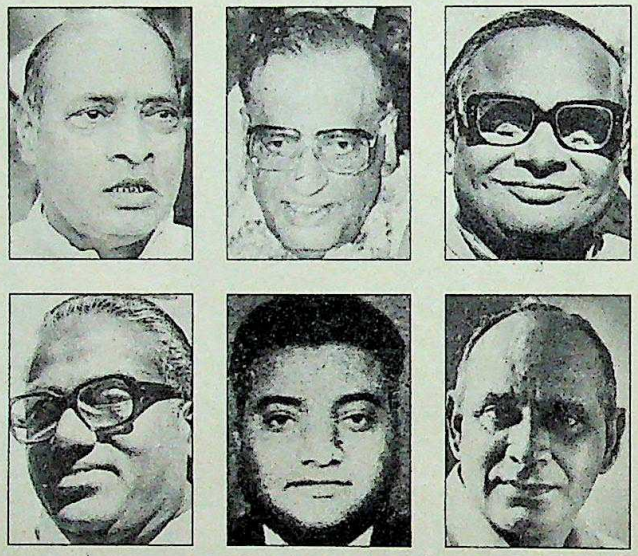
cation his party candidates were leading in key constituencies from police intelligence reports on his way back to Hyderabad from the funeral. NTR stayed in his office keeping track of the news till about 6.40 p.m., when he was sure his party was poised to win a majority of the seats. In the first interview he gave after his triumph the chief minister told INDIA TODAY: "Our win demonstrates the faith of the people, particularly the poor, in the Telugu Desam. They have confidence in me and my party and faith in the manner in which I have dedicated myself to the welfare of the state."

NTR asserts that the voters overwhelmingly supported the Telugu Desam because of its populist welfare programmes for deprived sections like farm labour and destitutes. Said the jubilant chief minister: "The various pensions, rural housing and drinking water supply system in our Pragatipadham programme have convinced people that ours is the government working for the poor and the development of Andhra Pradesh." Whether that is the sole factor or not for the verdict the party and its allies got a little over 50 per cent of the votes polled.

AS FOR the Congress(I) sweep across the country, Rama Rao says: "It is the people's mandate there and I accept it. The trend and wind were favourable to them but the win might not have been so impressive if the Opposition had been united." Explaining the debacle of the Opposition throughout the rest of the country, Rama Rao remarked: "They could not convince people they are united. Oneness was not shown. Only diversity was expressed. If all of them sailed together or spoke from a common platform to create the impression that they were definitely together, things would have been different, much better."

Though he is silent about the reasons for the Congress(I)'s failure in Andhra Pradesh, except for mentioning that it was discredited for its corrupt and inefficient rule earlier, the chief minister cannot ignore the fact that the Congress(I) got about 42 per cent of the votes, an increase of 9 per cent over the votes polled by the party in the 1983 elections. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi spent about three days addressing nearly 30 meetings in various parts of the state and rounded off his visit with a Christmas-eve rally in Hyderabad. But his arguments that the subsidised Rs 2 a kilo of rice scheme and the mid-day meal programme were ideas of the Congress(I), and that the sale of handloom dhotis and sarees at cheaper prices was subsidised by the Central Government did not wash with the voters. The whirlwind tour of the film actor Krishna in the last week—which ended abruptly after he was injured in stone-throwing—also seems to have been counter-productive. His campaign was no match for the last film of NTR, *Srimad Virat Bhramendra Swami Charitra*, released on November 29 and seen by over one crore, according to the estimates of film distributors, in four weeks.



The losers (from top left) Narasimha Rao, Vijaybhaskara Reddy, Venkatsubbiah, Shiv Shankar, Mallikarjun and Sanjeevi Rao

NTR denies he depends on "cine star charisma" for his votes. Says he: "There are demands from people for me to act in one picture at least every year. Some tried to influence me through a senior cabinet colleague, Srinivasulu Reddy. I would like to do it, but it will not be possible before the assembly elections as I have to tour intensively." Some observers argue that besides the film about Brahmendra Swami, the fact that the aircraft carrying NTR for the campaign did not start or leave on time, refusal of permission to use the government helicopter, Rama Rao's head injury early in the campaign and illness in the last three days also influenced voters.

The Congress(I) in the state is virtually dumbstruck after its defeat. None of its normally vociferous members offered any explanation for the debacle, and consoled themselves by saying the party had polled more than in 1983. Union ministers K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy, O. Venkatasubbaiah, P. Shiv Shankar, M. Mallikarjun and M.S. Sanjeevi Rao sent in their resignations after losing. But what hurts the Congress(I) activists in Andhra Pradesh most is the fact that the Telugu Desam will be the main opposition party in the Lok Sabha.

NTR laughs at the prospects of his party having enough members to form a shadow Union cabinet. Says he: "Our MP's have to work hard to focus on the problems and needs of the state. I am planning to see subjects are divided among them and they specialise in specific areas through discussions in the state. About other things we will see later." The state's most immediate problem is one of the finances, with large sums drained on the various populist schemes. Though its position is better compared to that of West Bengal and Kerala, with the assembly election due in April, no additional taxation can be expected in the near future and the state will have to depend heavily on overdrafts.

Among the 28 Telugu Desam MPs are the good-humoured party vice-president Bezwada Pap Reddy, a pilot, Ananda Gajapathi Raju, sugar technologist and industrialist Bolla Bulli Ramaiah and three doctors: Chinta Mohan, G. Vijayrama Rao and T. Kalpana Devi. The other woman MP is N.P. Jhansilakshmi. Three others elected on the Telugu Desam ticket are Harijans and are the only ones who have been members of the Lok Sabha earlier. "With this wide variety of experienced people," says the party General Secretary Upendra, "we are determined to demonstrate in Parliament also that the Telugu Desam is not a narrow-minded regional party as some have tried to paint us, but a powerful political force." Whatever be the party's performance in the new Lok Sabha, the Telugu Desam has confirmed that it is now definitely here to stay as a regional political party in Andhra Pradesh.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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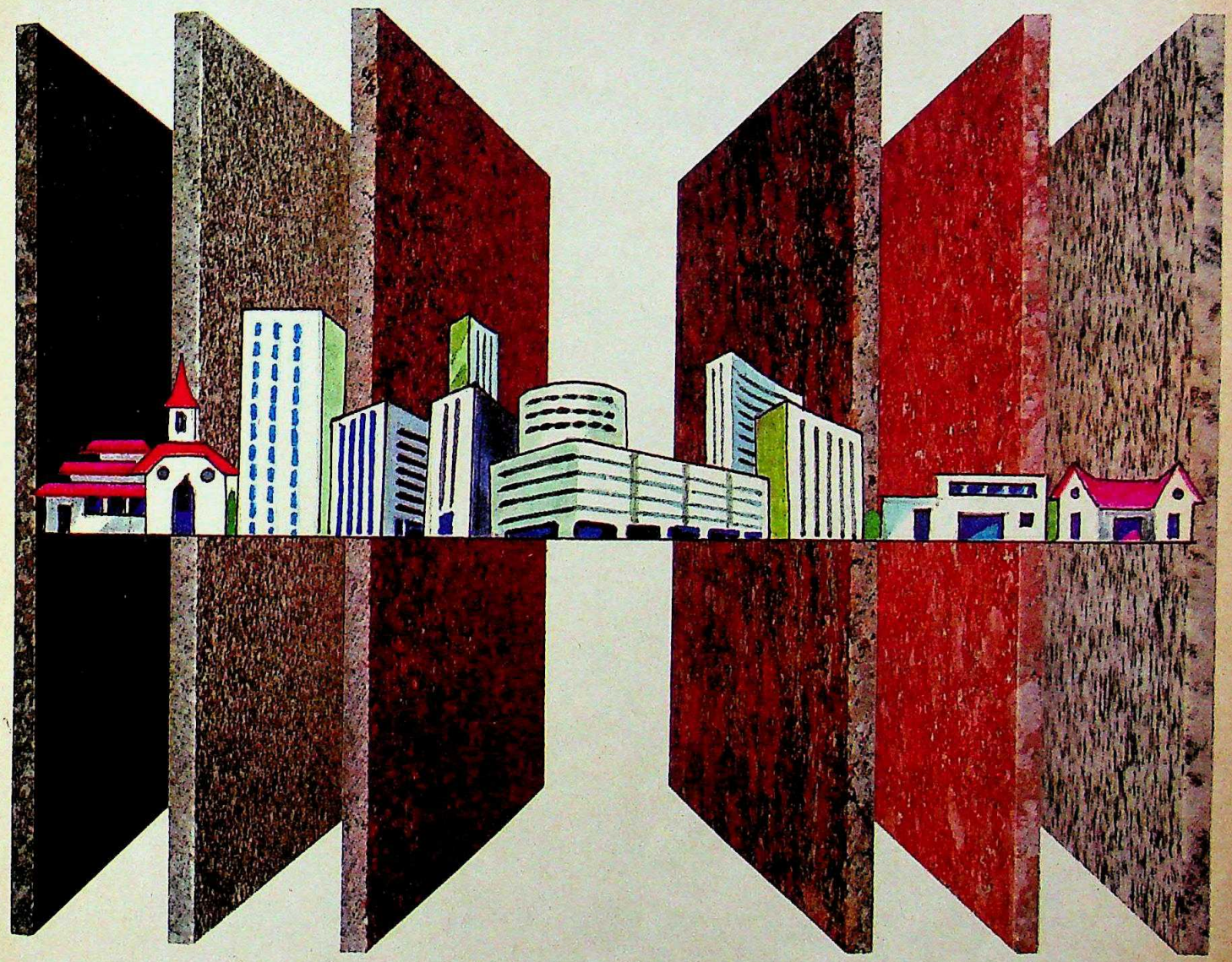

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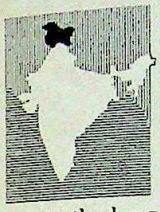


IF THE electoral verdict in Jammu & Kashmir, like Andhra Pradesh, is any indication, it carries a crucial message for the ruling party. Namely, that it does not pay in the long run to topple state governments through dubious means. The National Conference (NC-F) headed by ousted chief minister Farooq Abdullah made a clean sweep in the valley winning all the three seats while conceding just two to the Congress(I) in the Jammu region.Said a jubilant Farooq after the tally: "The mandate has gone against the Congress(I) in Kashmir. Despite large-scale rigging and the use of money power, the people have not accepted the new state government installed by the ruling party".

The NC(F) walked off with three of the four seats it contested in the state with two sitting MP's, Saifuddin Soze and A.R. Kabli winning from Baramullah and Srinagar while Farooq's mother, Begum Akbar Jahan, trounced the Congress(I) candidate Peer Hissamuddin in the Anantnagar constituency. The wide margins of victory have established clearly that Farooq continues to wield considerable clout in state politics and that his estranged brother-in-law and state Chief Minister Ghulam Shah has failed to find political legitimacy.

Shah received his most embarrassing setback when his son Muzzaffar Shah who was instrumental in engineering the defections that led to Farooq's downfall, was humbled by the NC(F)'s Kabli by over two lakh votes in Srinagar. Muzzaffar was being groomed since last year as a political rival to Farooq by his father as well as the Congress(I) and started his election campaign almost immediately after Shah became chief minister last July.

BHAWAN SINGH

Farooq and mother Begum Abdullah: total vindication

During the elections, Shah and his ambitious wife Khalida campaigned extensively for their son. Yet, Kabli, the sitting MP, increased his victory margin by about 20 per cent over the 1983 by-election result. The seat was earlier held by Farooq. The Khalida faction of the National Conference suffered yet another humiliation when its nominee, Mohiuddin Uri, lost to the NC(F)'s Soze by over 1.50 lakh votes.

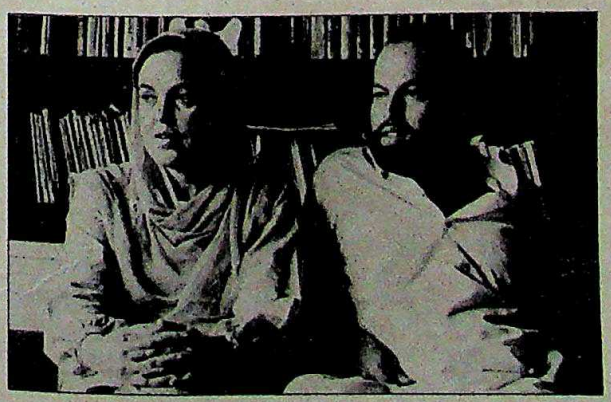
But the NC(F)'s most impressive victory was in Anantnagar, considered to be a Congress(I) stronghold, where Begum Abdullah won by over 65,000 votes. The applecart was upset by Farooq who prevailed upon his reluctant mother to contest from the constituency. There was cold comfort for the Congress(I) in the Jammu region with the victory of its candidates, Janak Raj Gupta and Pandit Girdhari. Gupta, a political lightweight, was ranged against Dr Karan Singh who fought as an Independent candidate but only managed to finish a poor third after the NC(F) candidate Shabir Ahmed Salaria. The NC(F) was hoping for a split in the Hindu vote between Singh and Gupta. But despite a heavy concentration of over 30 per cent Sikhs and Muslims, Gupta romped home by over 1.2 lakh votes. For Karan Singh,a scion of the erstwhile Kashmir royal family, it was the first electoral defeat of his life.Said Singh philosophically: "The Congress(I) wave has engulfed Jammu also."

But the lesser margins with which the Congress(I) won in the Jammu region means that major problems lie ahead for the Government of Chief Minister Shah. With his failure to win a single seat for the NC(K), his breakaway faction, Shah will be under considerable pressure to quit office and pave the way for fresh assembly elections.

As it is, the Congress(I) has been disappointed with Shah for not being able to establish a firm grip on the state and for his failure to adopt a hard line against Farooq and his supporters. Congress(I) leaders maintain that Farooq's win in the valley was purely due to the support of communal elements whom Shah failed to keep under control.Additionally, Shah also ignored the Congress(I) demand to weed out pro-Farooq elements from the bureaucracy.

In the absence of any documentary evidence against Farooq, the NC(K)'s campaign fell flat in its attempts to justify Farooq's dismissal. With the election verdict clearly in his favour, it now rests with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to make the next move.

—PRABHU CHAWLA



Karan Singh (left) and Khalida with son Muzzaffar: serious blows

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RAE BARELI

Death Debate

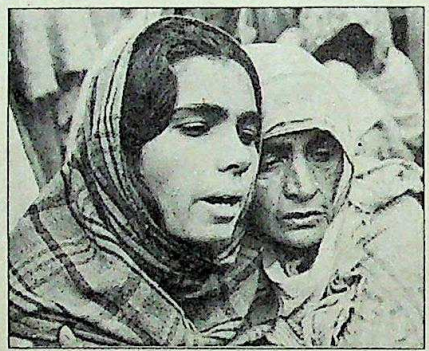
RULING party General Secretary Arun Nehru's weighty electoral victory from the Rae Bareli constituency was somewhat tarnished by the death of H.S. Bajpayee, one of the 19 candidates in the fray. Bajpayee's murder and the mystery surrounding it had already sparked off an Opposition demand for countermanding the poll.

The Opposition complaints revolve around Section 52 of the Election Manual which states that if news of a candidate's death is conveyed to the returning officer before the polling starts, the election is countermanded. However, Chief Election Commissioner R.K. Trivedi made it clear that there was no question of countermanding the poll since the returning officer was only informed about Bajpayee's death after the polling had started at 8 a.m. on December 24. Ruling party sources were firmly convinced that the murder was nothing but a crude attempt to get the poll countermanded.

The murder itself offered few clues. Bajpayee, 55, was last seen on December 21 in Bachharwan where he told associates that he was leaving for Lucknow. His nephew Vijay who always accompanied him was to join him in Rae Bareli the following day. One of his political aides met Bajpayee and Vijay in Rae Bareli on December 22 and 23 and says that Bajpayee was actually trying to withdraw his candidature. He adds he last saw him at 8.30 a.m. on the day before the poll, at a bus stop.

The Independent candidate's body was found some 12 hours later, between 8.00 and 9.00 p.m., some 30 km away from where he was last seen. According to a local school-teacher, Dinesh Chowdhary, the body lay just 1 km away from a police station, and was spotted by a passing bus driver. "Bajpayee's hands and legs had been tied with a wire, and he was lying in a crouched position on the road. He was bleeding profusely from the nose, and was dead for all practical purposes," says Chowdhary.

Two policemen were sent to inform Bajpayee's family of the death. According to the murdered man's daughter, the policemen arrived at their house at about 9 p.m. and asked the family to accompany them to the police station. "When we asked them what it was about, they said it was something very serious in connection with my father. It was only when they finally told us that our father had been killed that we decided to go to the police station." Once there, Mrs Bajpayee was not allowed to see the body, she says, and complains that the body was not even handed over to her the next day but cremated without her knowledge.



Bajpayee (top) and his wife and daughter: mystery death

Villagers maintain stoutly that Bajpayee was dead when his body was taken to the police station. By 1 p.m., the villagers say, the body just disappeared. The official version is dramatically different. Collector P. Chakravarthy claims that Bajpayee was alive when he was found by the police who immediately tried to contact doctors of the local primary health centre. When no help was possible locally, the candidate was rushed to the government hospital at Rae Bareli some 30 km away. The time then, according to the collector, was 11.30 p.m. At the hospital, the doctor on duty, Dr Ashok Shukla, says he saw his patient alive at 3 in the morning. Dr Shukla signed Bajpayee's death certificate at 8.50 p.m. on December 24, almost an hour after polling had begun.

Local Opposition leaders allege that only after consulting senior officials did the local officials decide to show Bajpayee alive, admitting his death only after they ensured that the polling had begun. Chakravarthy is equally vehement. "No doubt he was beaten up badly and left for dead, but he was still alive," he insists.

But the official story is not wholly convincing. If as the collector says, Bajpayee was rushed to the hospital at 11.30, the vehicle must have taken a most circuitous route because he was wheeled into the hospital only at 3. a.m. He was declared dead almost six hours later, after the polling had begun. Chief Medical Officer R.C. Johri, who, acording to the collector, attended on the dead man all through, says: "This was a clear case of coma." But he refused to part with the post-mortem report which would determine the time of death saying it would be made available only to the court.

Though versions of what happened vary there is little doubt that Bajpayee's murder was a conspiracy to get the poll postponed. Inquiries indicate that the murdered man had no personal enemies. According to villagers, the mild-mannered Bajpayee, who has been contesting elections as an Independent since 1967, would not hurt a fly, and counted both Congress(I) men and RSM followers among his friends. Apart from the fact that Vijay who was seen with his uncle last, is missing, another significant fact is that Bajpayee's body was planted conspicuously enough to make the discovery quick and easy. Not only did it lie barely 1 km from the Bachharwan police station, Bajpayee's nomination papers and his election symbol and other paraphernalia and bag were strewn all over and around him to make identification easy.

Rae Bareli is no longer the peaceful backyard of Uttar Pradesh it used to be before 1980. The election of the doughty Arun Nehru from there and the increasing activites of the RSM and its connections with antisocial elements has added to the insecurity of the people there. Somewhere along the line, Bajpayee was caught in the cross current of the two most powerful parties in the area. A CID probe and one by the courts should ideally examine both the circumstances of Bajpayee's death and the alleged attempts to cover up the news. Some local officials are already sceptical about the outcome of such a probe. But for Bajpayee and his family, it is already too late. —RAJU SANTHANAM in Rae Bareli

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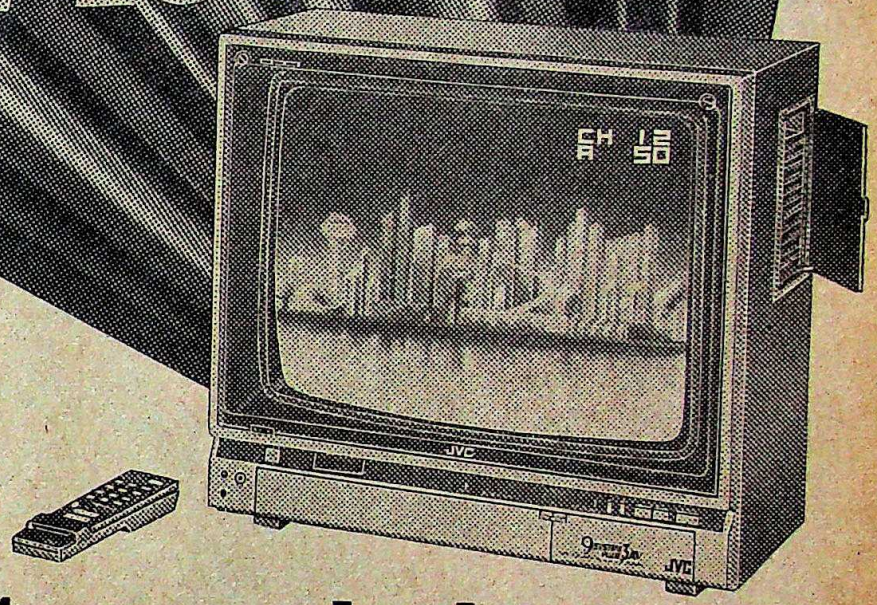

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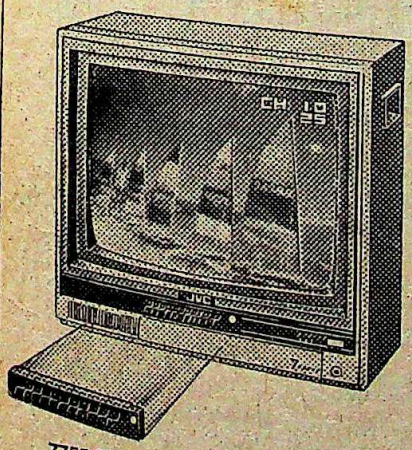

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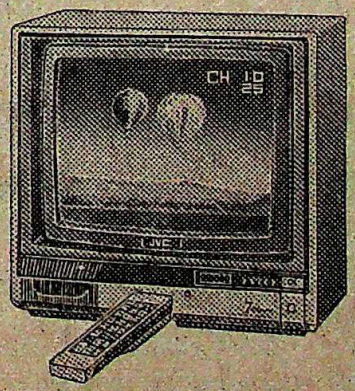

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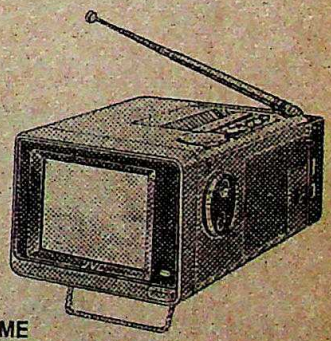

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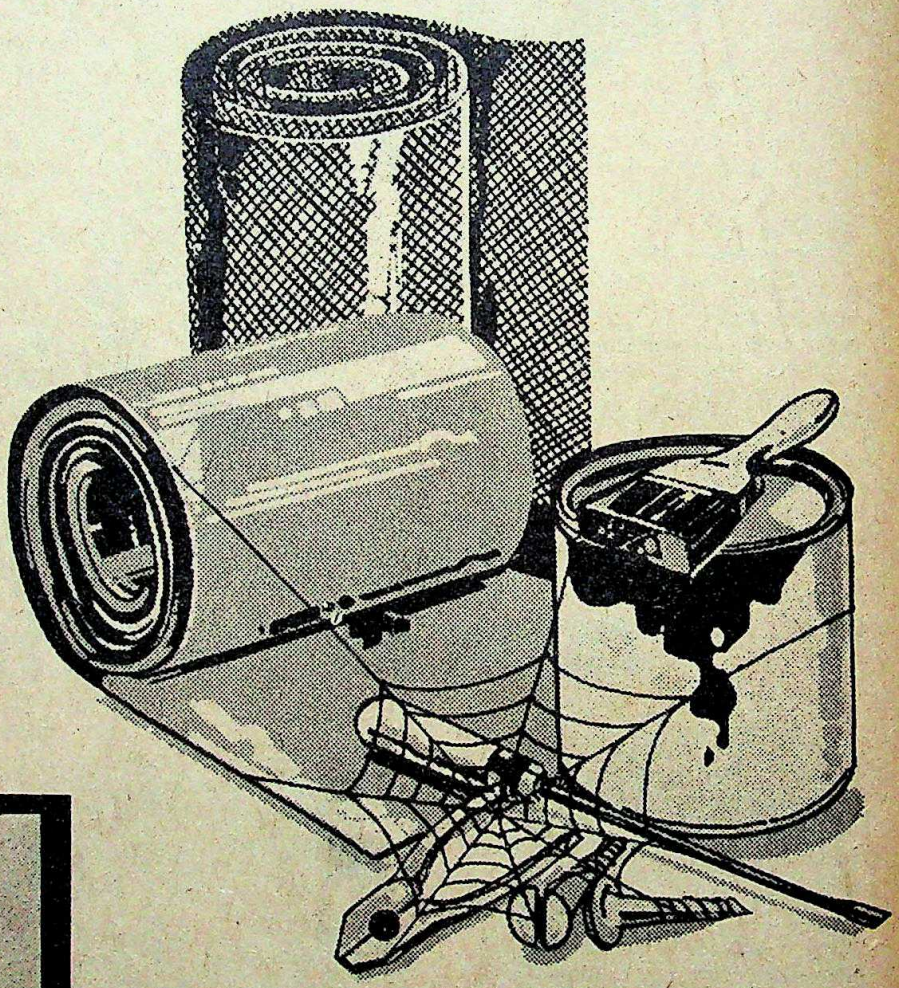

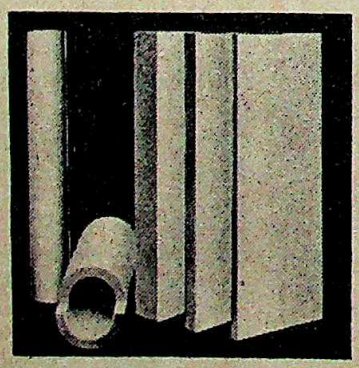

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BIHAR

Poll Toll

GIVEN BIHAR's reputation for poll violence and the number of candidates this time with criminal records (INDIA TODAY, December 31), the incidents that marred the December 24 elections in the state should have come as no surprise. Yet they did. The sheer scale of lawlessness was unprecedented: 23 people were killed in violence that erupted in 24 of the total 54 constituencies in the state. Polling had to be suspended in 156 booths due to reports of booth-capturing at gun-point, large-scale bogus voting, snatching of ballot-papers and blatant looting of ballot-boxes. And the Election Commission had to order repoll in all the 156 booths where voting was suspended half-way through.

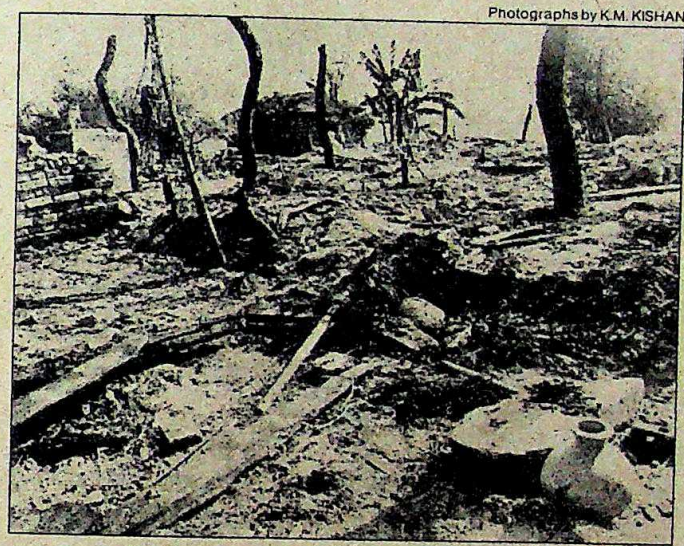
This is certainly not the first time criminal elements tried to scuttle the election exercise. In 1977, too, there were instances of violence—13 people were killed and repoll ordered in 40 booths—but they were confined to crime-infested districts like Nalanda, Gaya and Aurangabad. This time round officials, anticipating trouble, called in thousands of paramilitarymen whose armed presence was conspicuous throughout the state. Besides, as a precautionary measure, 2,000 "listed" criminals and 5,000 political workers and "trouble-makers" were picked up by the police on the eve of elections. Yet when the crunch came, all these counted for nothing.

"If the reports of disturbances and violence are true, they definitely show an unhappy trend," acknowledged Satish Bhatnagar, chief electoral officer of Bihar. With politicians of all hues brazenly employing mercenaries to do their dirty work, the situation apparently went totally out of control. In Bhagalpur, five people were killed, in Jehanabad nine, in Gaya, Monghyr and Muzaffarpur two each and one each in Patna, Nalanda, Aurangabad, Madhubani and Saharua. Chief Secretary K.K. Srivastava had to declare that the Government would impose collective fines in areas affected by poll violence.

Ironically enough, a member of the state Government—Minister of State for Public Health Engineering Department Awadhesh Singh—was accused of indulging in criminal activities. The police had issued a warrant for his arrest on the charge that he had captured ballot-papers at gun-point at the Kanchanpura booth of Aurangabad Lok Sabha constituency. Singh's own version was that the police were after him because he had shouted at a presiding officer for conniving with the Opposition. Few were above blame—in Saharsa and Madhubani districts, three presiding officers and two patrolling officers were arrested for dereliction.

As if this wasn't enough, new records were set in "bogus" voting as well as in brash new ways of "fixing" the polls. In some booths, the polling was an incredible 100 per cent, and in others, more than 100 per cent. For instance, in one booth in Madhubani, although only 863 voters had been registered, the ballot-box contained 864 votes. In some booths, voters who had patiently queued up to cast their votes were turned away with the amazing explanation that they had "already voted". V.N. Mallick, a college student from Muzaffarpur, when confronted with this baffling statement, kicked up a fuss. Only then was he allowed to vote—in the name of a woman voter. Not far away, in Muzaffarpur's Damuchuk Mohalla, incredulous passers-by saw polling officer R.B. Sharma relaxing under a peepul tree while just 11 young men voted again and again for hours.

Photographs by K.M. KISHAN



Purainia village destroyed in poll-related violence; and (below) underaged voter caught by the police

This phenomenon was evidently not confined to small, out-of-the-way booths. Right in the state capital of Patna, according to state election office sources, Chief Electoral Officer Bhatnagar saw a handful of boys in their early teens voting continuously in a booth on Hardinge Road. But he could not do anything, said officials, unless someone else challenged it because the "presiding or poll officer is not supposed to know the voter's bona fides, age or sex. That is the law".

One candidate in crime-infested Monghyr, former inspector general of police Fazal Ahmed, of the Janata Party had to take the law into his own hands. He single-handedly aborted a plan at booth-capturing. When men in police uniform muscled in, Ahmed challenged them and sent them packing—the uniforms turned out to be fake. In Gopalganj, an armed gang hijacked a polling party, snatched the ballot-papers, stamped and stuffed the box with them. In this case, however, the authorities ordered fresh polling.

Bihar certainly provides a very frightening lesson. P.K. Sinha, former general secretary of the Bihar Administrative Services Association put his finger on it: "If these trends are not checked immediately, genuine voters will be compelled to be indifferent and the ministers, MP's and MLA's will represent only the gangs of criminals."

—FARZAND AHMED

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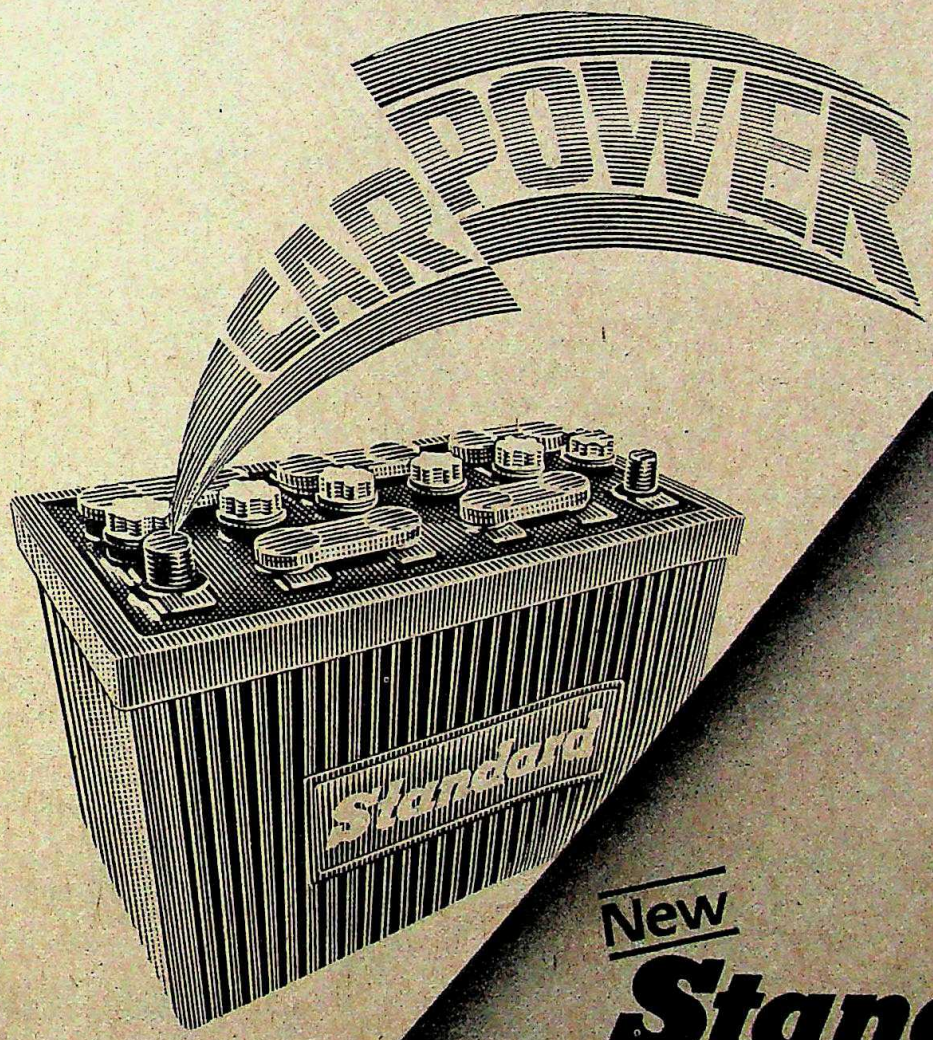

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The prelude to last fortnight's elections produced some fascinating campaign sidelights that have been largely engulfed by the eventual and staggering outcome of the poll. INDIA TODAY *state correspondents document some of the more memorable moments they came across on the campaign trail.*

Coining Phrases

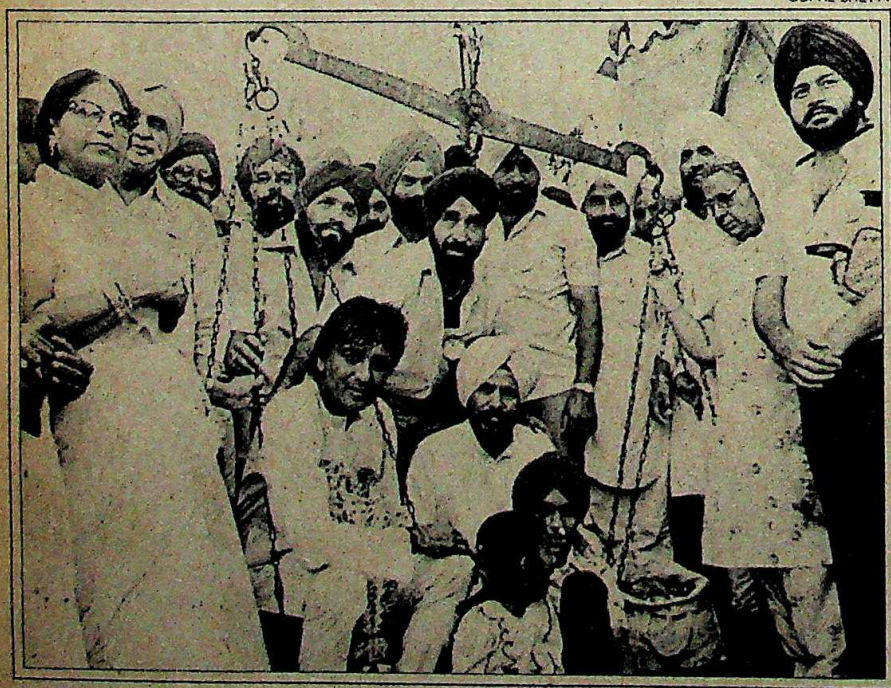
■ Actor Sunil Dutt, the Congress(I) candidate from Bombay north-west, is no political heavyweight but he must have been wishing that it were quite literally true when his enthusiastic campaign publicity department sent out photographs showing the tall and well-built star perched on a pair of scales being weighed against coins with a large crowd of Versova Sikhs gathered around. The truth, as it transpired, was a bit different.

Whether it was the acute coin shortage in the city or the fact that the Sikhs are currently not overly enthusiastic about the Congress(I), the organisers of the coin-weighing function discovered to their acute embarrassment that they could not collect enough coins to match the matinee hero's weight. To tilt the balance, one smart helper slipped a heavy stone into the bag of coins.

Some spoilsports in the crowd, however, spotted the subterfuge and demanded that the bag be emptied and the coins piled on the scales in everybody's view. Hot words followed when the organisers refused to oblige and the situation could have literally got out of hand when Dutt himself saved the situation by gently remarking, without intending the puns, that a stone or two didn't make any difference, it was the thought that counted.

Sunil Dutt: short changed

GOPAL SHETTY



Heavy Clout

■ Talking of political heavyweights proved quite a tongue-twister in Mysore where the biggest problem was not just the candidate's name—Srikanta Datta Narasimharaja Wodeyar, but his size as well. The scion of the former ruler of Mysore tops the scales at over 200 kg and still seems to glory in the past. He still occupies a sizeable section of the former palace and his campaign office is set amidst ivory panelled doors, period rosewood furniture and elaborate chandeliers.

His personal staff still call him "His Highness" though his opponents prefer to refer to him as "His Heaviness". But he obviously carries enough feudal weight for the Congress(I) to have given him a ticket though politics is hardly a favourite hobby of his. He is better known for his collections which include hotels (five at the last count), race horses (22), vintage cars and watches. For the elections, he obviously hopes to cash in on the goodwill built up by his late father. Despite his size, Wodeyar has a voice that is hardly audible, which is why his campaign was quite low-pitched.

Wodeyar: king size

Political Tricks

■ He has the aplomb of a Houdini and the stage presence of a Sorcar. But Madan Kundu's claims to magical fame lie mainly in the art of political conjuring, a field in which he excelled himself during last fortnight's election campaign in, naturally, the star constituency of Amethi. When Rajiv Gandhi's campaign carousel hit the constituency last fortnight, the show-stopper was Kundu's act which must rank as one of the most unique election gimmicks in the ruling party's arsenal.

To a rapt audience that included Rajiv, his wife Sonia, and a clutch of the

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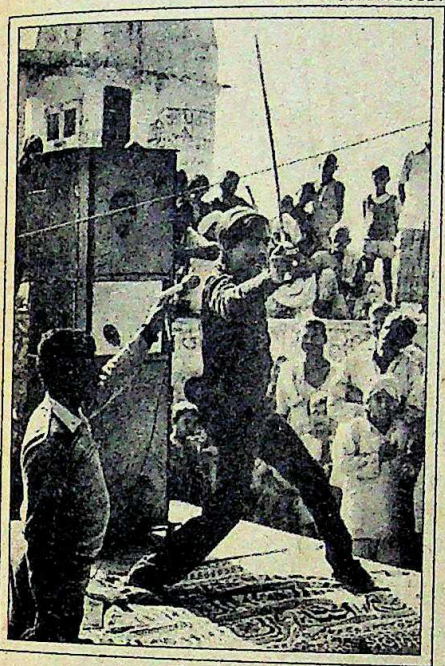
international print and broadcast media, Kundu displayed two black slates wiped clean of any writing. He then asks the question: "What do the people want?" He turns one slate and presto, the word 'Progress' is mysteriously inscribed. The answer to the second inevitable question

SUMAN DUBEY



Kundu: sleight of hand

of what else do the people want appears on the second slate: 'Stability'. The slates are elaborately wiped clean and Kundu poses the punch line: "Who can give you these?" With a theatrical flourish he once again turns the slates to reveal 'Rajiv' inscribed on one and on the other, the symbol of the hand.

His next act is even better. An interlinked chain resembling the Olympic symbol made up of five metal rings. "The Opposition comes and tells you they will form a strong government. What kind of strong government?" he asks and holding up the chain replies, "as strong as this", effortlessly peeling off the rings one by one and flinging them flamboyantly into the cheering crowd.

But Kundu's *piece de resistance* is reserved for the last, a clever variation of the magician's standard sawing-the-lady-in-half trick. Into an upturned box fitted together in three sections and painted in the colours of the Indian flag steps a young lady. The box is locked with strategically placed holes revealing her face, one arm and a foot. Kundu then steps forward brandishing a long lethal-looking sword and once again harangues the audience. "This is Mother India. Our country is threatened by foreign forces like this and like this," he says, thrusting the sword viciously into the box. "They want to divide the country like this," he goes on, removing the middle section of the box sideways on sliding rollers. "Mother India is too strong for them," he finishes, straightening out the box and letting out the lady who has survived the ordeal without a scratch. Score one for the Congress(I).

Numbers Game

■ Madurantakam constituency in Tamil Nadu's Chingleput district posed some unique electoral problems this time. For one, the candidates almost outnumbered the electorate with a record 90 people contesting. For the Election Commission, the fact that 87 of them were Independents posed nightmarish problems since only 25 election symbols available for Tamil Nadu. The size of the ballot paper containing all 87 symbols and names was another headache.

The range of candidates was, for the electorate, even more confusing and ranged from Harijans and landless labourers to rickshaw-pullers, all with individual reasons for contesting. "It is cheaper for a Harijan to contest. The deposit is only Rs 250," said one.

To everybody's surprise, the jumble eventually sorted itself out with the symbols decided upon including carrots, pumpkins, tables, chairs, mugs and jugs. Specially-made ballot boxes to accommodate the extra-large paper were also hastily constructed. But just as election officials were heaving a sigh of relief, the biggest bombshell dropped when 84 of the 87 Independents announced that they were retiring from the contest and had only stood because they "wanted to expose the loopholes in electoral law which allowed anybody and everybody to contest". But the move was greeted with great relief by the remaining candidates who were obviously convinced that too many crooks had brothed the spoil.

Some Madurantakam candidates

GEORGE FRANCES

Foot in Mouth

■ Elections bring out the worst in some candidates and one prominent campaigner who certainly got the worst of the exchanges was rotund railway minister Ghani Khan Chowdhury. Incensed with Dr Farooq Abdullah for campaigning against him in Muslim-dominated parts of Malda district, Chowdhury charged that the former Jammu & Kashmir chief minister was a "traitor" and still held a British passport. "We will not spare him," snarled the minister at a well-attended press conference at which he also claimed that Dr Abdullah had tried settling Pakistanis in Jammu & Kashmir.

The railway minister was obviously on the wrong track and soon ran into a

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Farooq in Malda: one upmanship

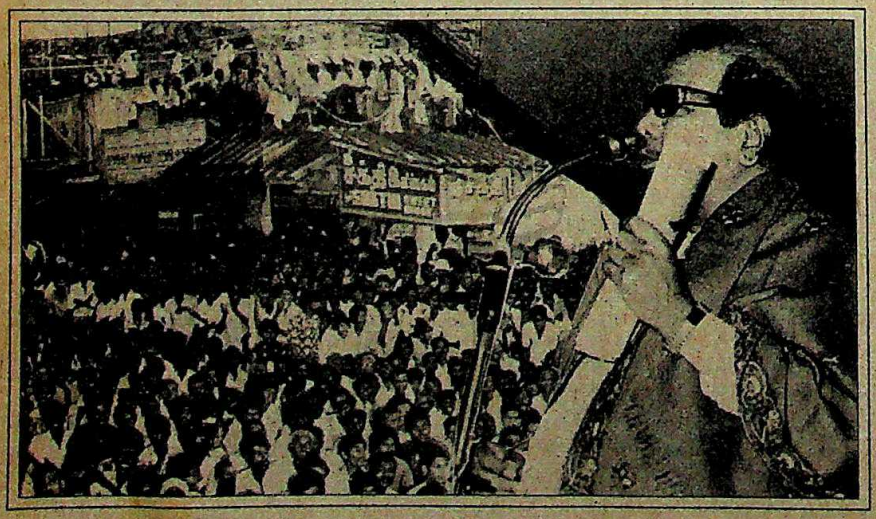
head-on collision with West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu who, when newsmen relayed to him Chowdhury's charges, pointed out that both Chowdhury and Farooq Abdullah had spent some years studying in Britain, the only difference being that one of them could not get through his exams while the other did. Nobody was left in any doubt as to which of the two had finally got derailed.

Tit for Tat

■ In metaphorical terms, the election exchanges have never been better—or more confused. Tamil Nadu, the land of film dialogues, naturally took the cake. In Coimbatore, Rajiv Gandhi started the ball rolling by comparing the Opposition to crabs in a bucket of water. The moment one of the crabs tried to crawl out of the bucket, the others would simply pull it back.

Karunanidhi, not one to let opportunities slip, unsheathed his metaphorical claws at the next meeting by saying that crabs are supposed to have a 'deadly hold' and the opposition parties had a real grip on the people. "So we don't mind being called crabs," he declared triumphantly, adding in the same vein, "but if we are crabs, the alliance between the Congress(I) and the AIADMK is a tie-up between a frog and a mouse." He then went into what must rank as the most mixed metaphor ever recorded. The frog, he said, would pull the mouse towards the water and the mouse would pull the frog towards the land. The alliance wouldn't hold any water and wouldn't land anywhere. A hawk would then swoop down from the sky and quickly swallow them both. Quite a mouthful that.

Karunanidhi: convoluted counter



Pill Poll

■ The man who must have breathed the biggest sigh of relief when the campaign deadline arrived was Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, and with perfectly justifiable reason. Already handicapped by an afflicted throat, the Janata Party's star electoral turn resembled a mobile dispensary as accompanying doctors pumped him with an array of medicants to help him finish the full campaign course.

Whatever Hegde's electoral gains at the hustings, the doctors must take the major credit. When Hegde kicked off his campaign, his medical chart registered only a mildly sore throat. By the 15th day, almost 200 meetings later,

Hegde: mobile dispensary

he had added high fever to the list and his throat, as his doctors warned, was in danger of being permanently impaired. The only concession Hegde made was to cancel a days programme while he was pumped full of pain killers, throat sootheners and Cortizones. By the 22nd day, his voice had been reduced to a barely audible squeak and he was reluctantly forced to cancel the last day's campaign since, as he remarked later when his vocal chords had recovered, "I had no voice left". The next morning, an excrutiating backache finally convinced Hegde that enough was enough and gathering his family together, took off for the Nandi Hills resort for a much overdue rest with nobody being more relieved than his panic-stricken doctors. The trip was kept a secret as, in Hegde's words: "The mercy of my friends would have been killing". And so would have been the ordeal of the campaign had he not called it quits when he did.

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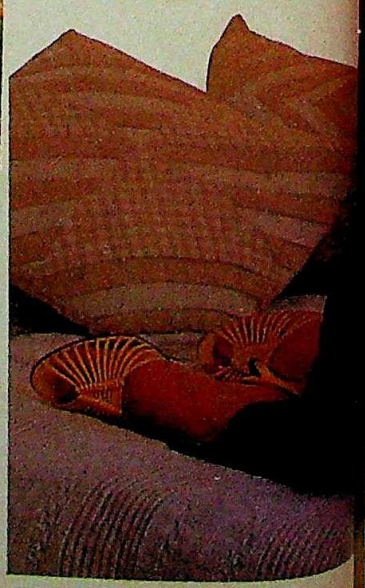

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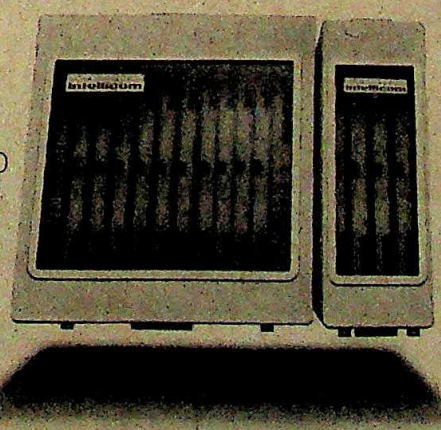

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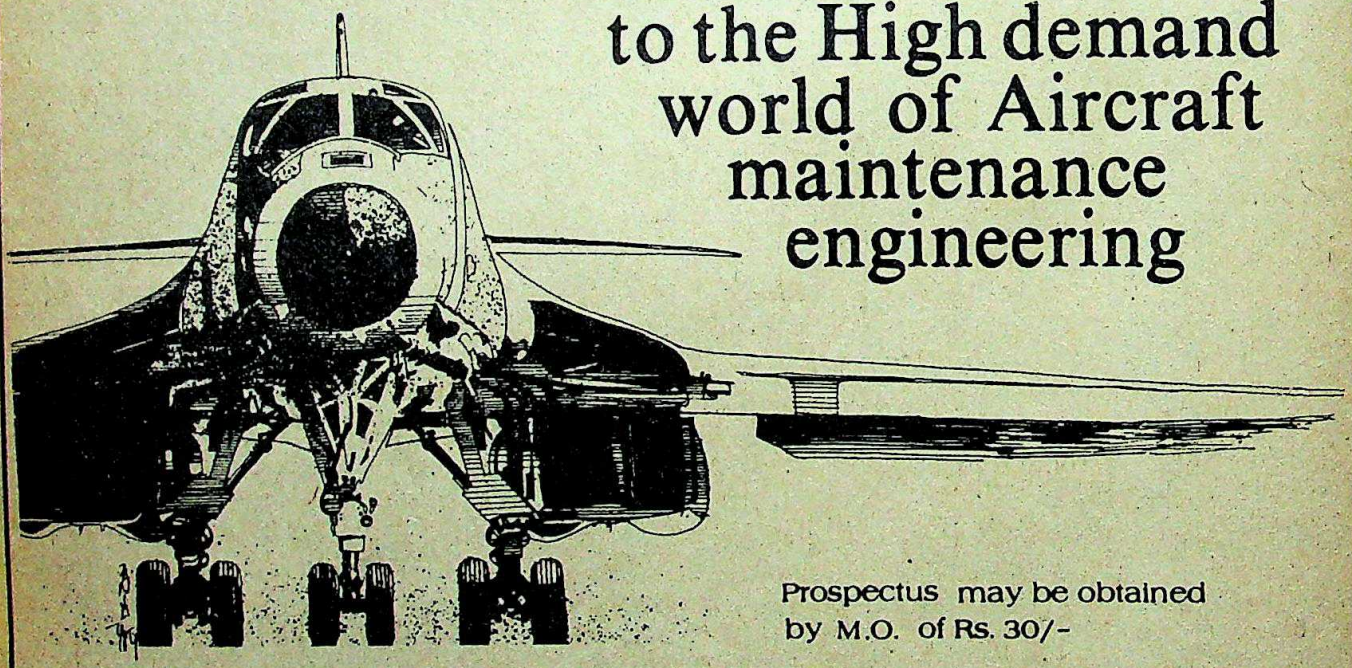

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SABY FERNANDEZ/Indian Express

Antulay's poster ploy

Wrong Rose

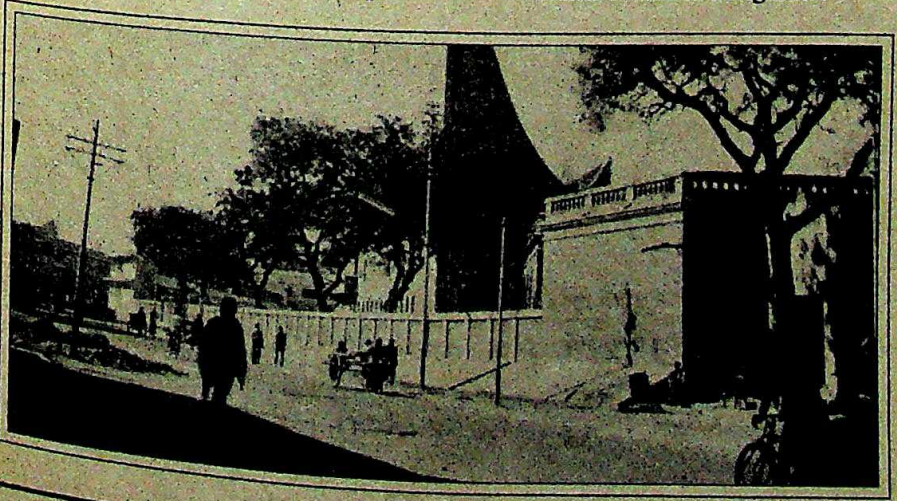
■ Does a rose by any other name smell just as sweet? Apparently not if the olfactory organs of voters in Raigad are any indication. Having smelled something fishy in the sudden reincarnation of former chief minister A.R. Antulay as a candidate of the Indirawadi Maharashtra Congress, they gave little credence to his promises to deliver the development goods even if he was in the opposition. His supporters even put up a banner describing Antulay as a candidate of the 'Indirawadi Maharashtra Government'. It was promptly removed when newspapers pointed to it as a ploy to convince the people that he was still in the Government.

But the confusion was not confined to the electorate alone. Shalinitai Patil, wife of the chief minister and one of Antulay's bitterest foes, returned with her face the colour of her Revlon lipstick when she stepped onto a dais festooned with pictures of Indira Gandhi and tricolour flags and started giving an election speech only to be greeted with cries of "Barrister Antulay zindabad".

Stone Walling

■ Quilon is a Kerala backwater and Tangasseri is the backwaters' backwater. But in certain areas, this little southern outpost is streets ahead of the rest of the country. The township proudly boasts of a Tangasseri Wall Owners Association which claims membership of "every wall owner in Tangasseri" and according to its secretary, Rufus A. Gomez, is dedicated to making people "realise the need and importance of having a clean wall"

Pristine walls in Tangasseri



Not surprisingly, election time is when the association faces its greatest exposure in its bid to preserve the pristine condition of the town walls. As Gomez points out: "The association was founded to prevent the defacing of the well-maintained walls of the locality by the numerous electioneering political parties". To back up their aims, those who dare to touch brush or poster to wall are threatened with a voter boycott and the association is now hoping that similar groups will soon sprout in other parts of the country thus giving them a larger canvas to pursue their purpose. The Tangasseri association is obviously not writing itself off just yet.

Condom Counter

■ Quilon had other novel features to unsheath during last fortnight's elections. The Congress(I) candidate, Krishna Kumar, being the former chairman of Hindusthan Latex, the condom-

SHREEDHAR PILLAI

Krishna Kumar in Quilon

manufacturing company, laid himself wide open to an ingenious campaign assault by his rival, R.S. Unni of the RSP.

Thousands of RSP workers gathered on the national highway between Quilon and Alleppy, each armed with a Nirodh condom. At a signal, thousands of condoms bloomed as they were blown up by the workers and then, at another signal, burst with a collective bang accompanied by the slogan: "Krishna Kumar alias Nirodh Kumar is going to go burst at Quilon." Whether or not Kumar's electoral balloon is pricked or not, the red-faced bureaucrat had no prophylactic to counter the assault.

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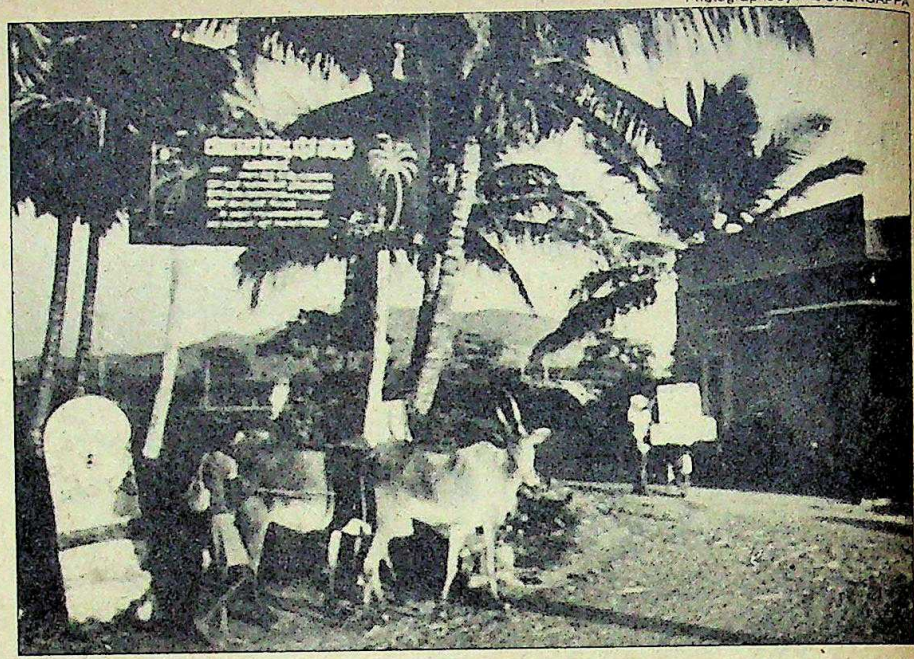
BUDIGUPPE

Village view

HOW DOES a village react to an election and what goes through a voter's mind as he heads to the polling booth? To find out, Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *stationed himself from sunrise to sunset in Budiguppe, a tiny hamlet 60 km from Bangalore on polling day. His report:*

Photographs by RAJ CHENGAPPA



The cheeky signboard outside Budiguppe

SALARIED government servants, servants of the cooperative department and corrupt politicians will not be allowed into the village without the prior permission of the villagers. Visiting hours 6 to 7 p.m. Mondays holidays", says a sign in Kannada posted by the stone track leading to Budiguppe village, 60 km from Bangalore. It is a symbol of the once-militant farmers movement in Karnataka. But its warning has long since been forgotten. In fact on December 24, when "salaried government servants" opened a polling booth in the village primary school, they were welcomed.

For Koralingaiah Gowda, 45, the balding dhoti-clad convenor of the Budiguppe unit of the Rajya Ryotha Sangha, or farmers association, this was hardly surprising. Swathed in a green scarf—another symbol of the farmers movement—and seated in the tiny village square, he declared with a twinkle in his eye: "Election day is like a big festival. We put on our best clothes, drink and enjoy." And a festive spirit certainly pervaded the village, for the previous night Congress(I) workers had distributed their cache of liquor: 60 quarter bottles of arrack and 60 litres of toddy for anyone who was man enough to drink—including Janata Party men. For the village elders, 10 bottles of beer were provided.

The Janata Party workers, however, were a rather sour lot because although they had received several crates of rum a week ago these had been quickly exhausted. Their election day quota, they alleged, had been seized by excise officials on its way to the village. But party loyalty did not dissuade them from taking a few swigs from the Congress(I) stock. So much so that by 10 p.m. the village square was filled with boisterous men staggering around drunkenly and arguing vociferously. And though threats were freely exchanged no brawls took place because, said Janata Party worker Basavaraj: "Tomorrow we have to face each other again and we certainly cannot afford to be enemies."

The distribution of liquor, or *sarai* as it is called in Kannada seems to have become an election ritual despite the election commissioner's ban on liquor sales for two days prior to the polls. Political parties still believe in the old village homily quoted by bus conductor N.M. Aradhya: "Those who drink your liquor will sing your song." But the villagers have gone one better, and tend to think like Kannada film actor and Janata supporter Uday Kumar, who told them at a public meeting the previous day: "Drink from everyone who gives you liquor and then sing your own song."

That is exactly what the villagers do. And so it was a rather bleary-eyed lot that greeted the booth officials on election day. Ironically, B. Linge Gowda, 34, a Congress(I) worker who coordinated the liquor distribution expresses concern about this "dirty part" of electioneering. Says he: "Most of the youngsters learn how to drink during election time and soon become addicts."

There are nine candidates in the fray in Kanakapura constituency of which Budiguppe is a part. But in the village only three parties really matter. These are the ruling Janata Party, the Congress(I) and the Rajya Ryotha Sangha. And relations between the candidates are exceptionally good. That is not surprising, because all of them have, in the words of Linge Gowda "blood relationships". Kempe Gowda, the Janata Party leader is related to Koralingaiah Gowda, the local Ryotha Sangha convenor, and both are distantly related to Linge Gowda, the Congress(I) worker. Said Koralingaiah: "We fight like goats during election time. But at 4 p.m. when the booth closes we are the best of friends. We are one."

Every third person in the village has the suffix Gowda because of the 270 families in the village at least 130 are from the Gowda (agriculturist) community. They are Vokkaligas, one of the two dominant communities in the state, the other being the Lingayats. The Gowdas of Budiguppe are divided about equally in their political loyalties. In Basavaraj's family, for instance, his elder brother Maralingaiah is a Ryotha Sangha supporter while his younger brother Nagesh is a staunch Congress(I) loyalist. Basavaraj himself is in the Janata Party.

Though Budiguppe has a relatively modern political outlook it is still backward socially. The village has 50 Harijan families who to this day are treated as untouchables. They live in a segregated block of houses joined to the village by a road lined with human refuse. When the Janata Government sunk three borewells for drinking water recently a separate one was dug for the Harijans. The village hotel has crockery set aside for the Harijans, who have to wash their own plates after they use them. It is not surprising then that they vote solidly for the Congress(I). Said Marialaga, 22, an agricultural labourer: "Only Indiramma cared for us. The others just exploit us."

Half an hour after the polling booth had opened at 8 a.m. only 34 people had voted, all of them men. The women waited until they had cooked lunch for their families before turning up. Although they voted in almost equal

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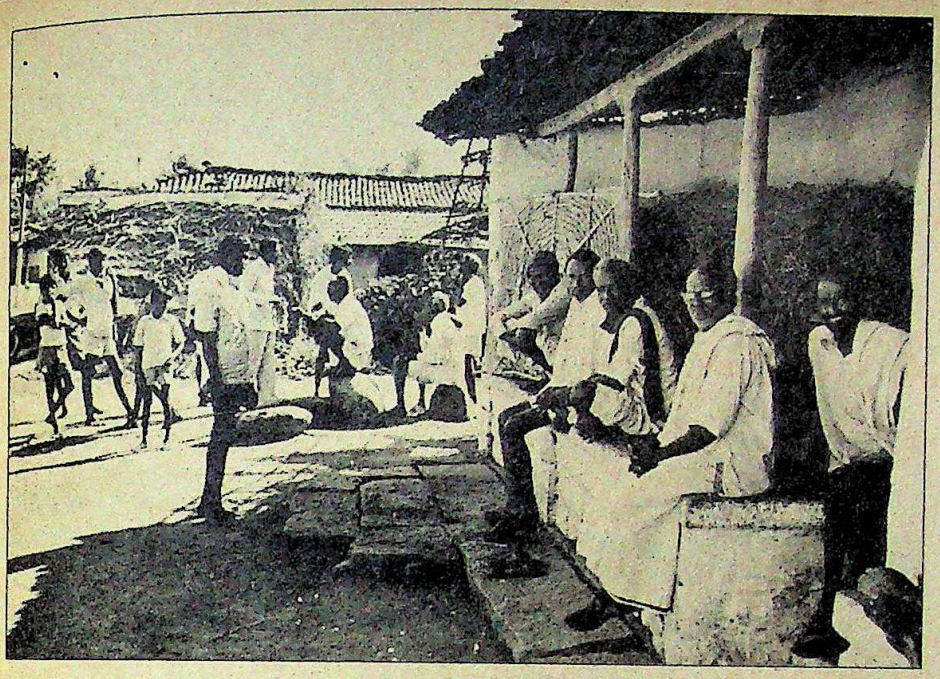

Party workers waiting to assist voters

numbers as the men, most of them finally cast their vote for the parties their husbands supported. Emerging from her smoke-filled kitchen Yashodamma, wife of Koralingaiah, said: "Whoever my *yajamana* (lord of the house) asks me to vote for I will vote for." Her *yajamana* bashfully admitted: "We have not given them the capacity to vote so far," meaning the men had not allowed the women the freedom to have their own views.

EVEN the women from the backward classes and Scheduled Tribes seem more forward than their upper class counterparts. When Koralingaiah Gowda tried to tell Munilingamma, a backward class woman to vote for the Ryotha Sangha she snarled back: "How dare you ask me to vote for your party. You never bothered when I suffered without water. You had no tears when I lost my husband. Where were you when there was no electricity or when my drains got blocked and stank up the whole place? All you do is sit there and twirl your moustache while we suffer." Retorted Madamma, wife of an agricultural labourer to a Congress(I) worker who sought her vote: "Once we vote for your candidate he will live in a posh house and only feed himself while we continue to starve. Why should we feed him?"

As the day progresses small groups of villagers gather around the square and discuss politics. Kuntenanja Gowda, 60, his eyes clouded over by cataract, asks: "What did Chandrashekhar Murthy (the Congress(I) candidate) do in the eight years that he was in the Lok Sabha? He never even once visited us. But look at Sindhia, (the Janata candidate). He brought us at least this road when before there was only a jungle path; he got borewells dug and at least he comes to listen to our problems. We must give the Janata another chance." Linge Gowda, a little upset by the way the discussion was progressing, said: "Most people will vote because of community. Chandrashekar is a Vokkaliga while Sindhia is from the Maratha community. People are not happy with Sindhia because he believes only in physical power. He has only *goondas* as followers." Basavaraj retorts furiously: "You are singing Congress(I) songs because they fed you with liquor. You were a Janata supporter. But now you have gone to the other side." A few elders tell them to cool off before the discussion gets violent.

Poster being pulled down at the end of the voting day

Near the village square Kempe Gowda, the Janata leader, looks worried, but says: "People are happy with the small work that we have done like light, water and roads. We have good chances of winning." To which Koralingaiah Gowda said: "It was your job to provide water and light. Why are you making so much noise about bores and rigs? All political parties have become useless and corrupt."

Inevitably the discussion veers around to Rajiv Gandhi's speech at Kanakapura two days before. Says Kunte Nanje Gowda: "He seems a good boy. He spoke well. But what I didn't like was at the end he asked us to raise our hands to know who all are supporting the Congress(I), just like some other politician." Quite a few of the villagers are unhappy about what Rajiv asked them to do because they prize the secrecy of the ballot and do not like to commit themselves in public.

Rajiv would also have been surprised to know that the Budiguppe villagers are not bothered about national unity and integration. Instead the discussions were mainly about the work done for the village by the various political parties, the clean image that Rajiv has and caste and communal factors. The amount of money spent by the political parties was another factor. The Janata camp was split, with a section accusing Kempe Gowda of stashing away the money the party had given him to spend for the village. The Congress(I) workers, on the other hand, were broke. They had not even been paid the usual Rs 15 a day for working. So much so that when Rajiv came to Kanakapura none of the party leaders were willing to hire a lorry to take the people to him and even told some of the people that the meeting had been cancelled.

But these differences do not seem to have troubled the voters. By 4 p.m. when the booth closed 616 of the 800 registered voters had cast their votes, making it a record turnout of 77 per cent. As the sun set gloriously over Budiguppe the villagers had split into small groups, each villager claiming his party would win. Said Linge Gowda: "All this *tamasha* will go on for at least a week after the results. Then life will become normal again." In Budiguppe, at least, Indian democracy was certainly alive and voting.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Budiguppe

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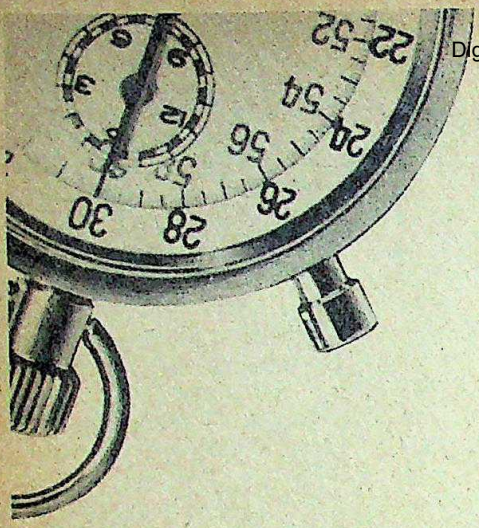

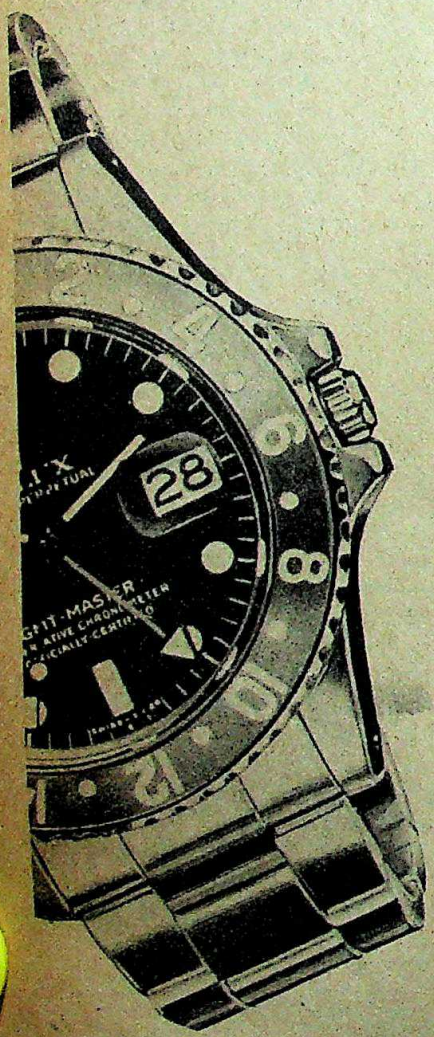

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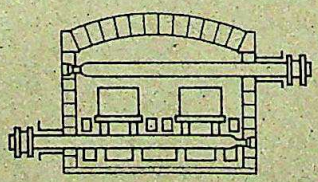

BBC Swiss Furnaces in India by

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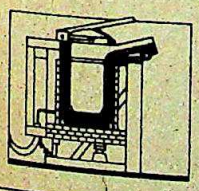

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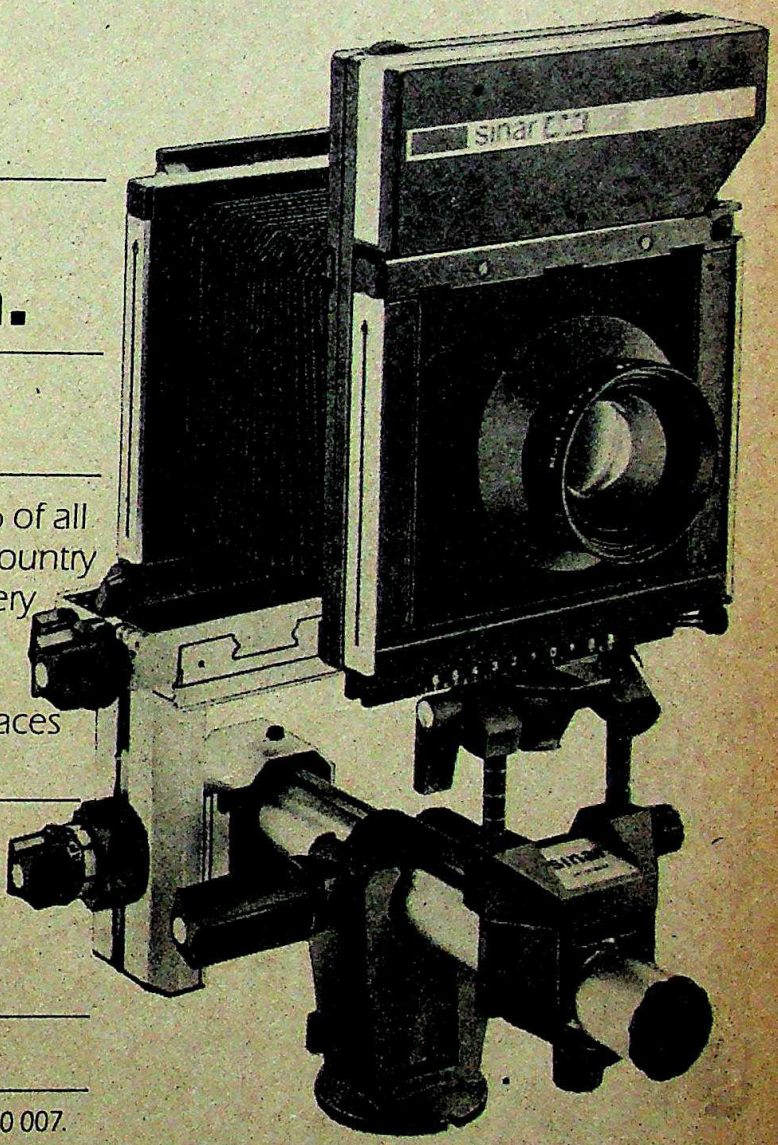

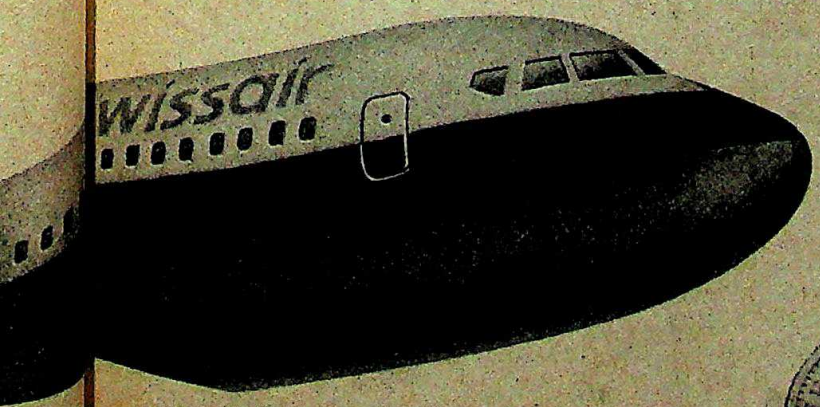

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ELECTIONS '84

IN SOUND, smell and style it is a unique celebration of democracy, a five-yearly date when the voter sheds his burden of quotidian trivia and assumes the mantle of kingmaker. And in the pulsating build-up to this climax he is wooed as never before, by the high and the low, the mighty and the humble. Election campaigns take to the road like colourful circuses, poster wars devour empty walls, and an ear-shattering cacophony of speech, songs and slogans reverberates across the entire country for three weeks and more.

There is inventiveness in the campaigns. They have their share of the absurd as much as touches of pure genius. Their lighter moments and their wearisome ones. But above all they are a concentration of enormous energy. Candidates sleep three or four hours a day as they rush about imploring, cajoling, beseeching, begging support. Vehicles carrying supporters and party workers scurry about ceaselessly in lanes and dusty country tracks, bringing a touch of rare gaiety to what are all too often drab lives.

Then there are the contrasts. The *neta* who campaigns with an army of supporters, who has headquarters in each *kasba*, who assigns workers and transport with computer-like precision aiming to reach every citizen and visit every village in search of success. At the other end of the spectrum is the lone ranger, a man on a cycle or riding a lonely rickshaw, megaphone pressed to his mouth competing for attention with the blaring loudspeakers of lottery ticket sellers.

The images conflict and reconcile themselves with amazing facility. Invocations to the memory of a slain leader. Catchy graffiti etched on a wall. The face of a candidate in a grotesque line drawing, plainly a caricature of a four-colour photograph pasted alongside. Election art, easily recognised as a close relation of the art of cinema hoardings, at its best and its worst. This is the flavour of a national election when for one brief moment the humble are proud and the proud are humbled.

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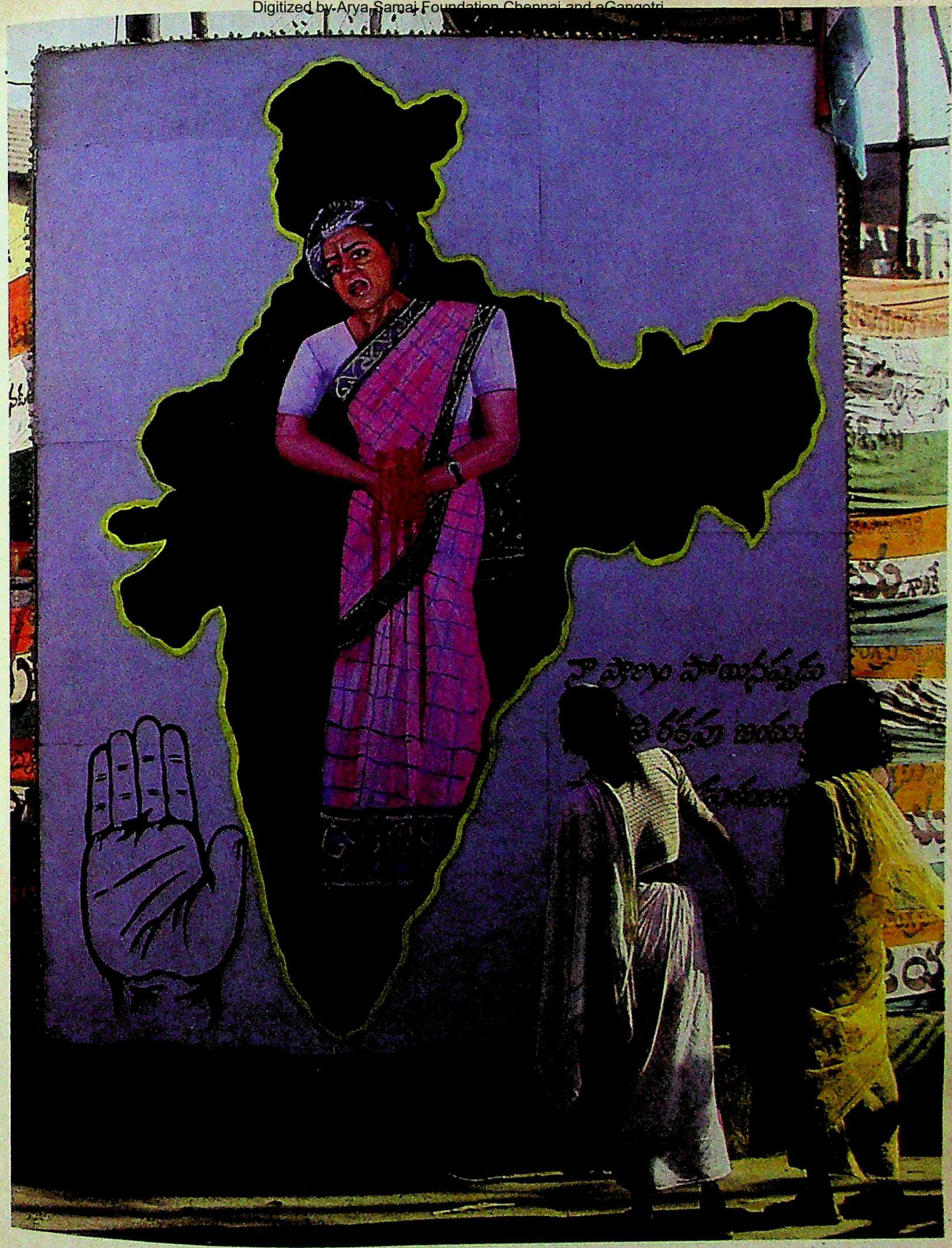
RAGHU RAI



INDIRAJI'S FINAL WISH—SAVE THE COUNTRY WITH EVERY DROP OF BLOOD
Congress(I) Poster

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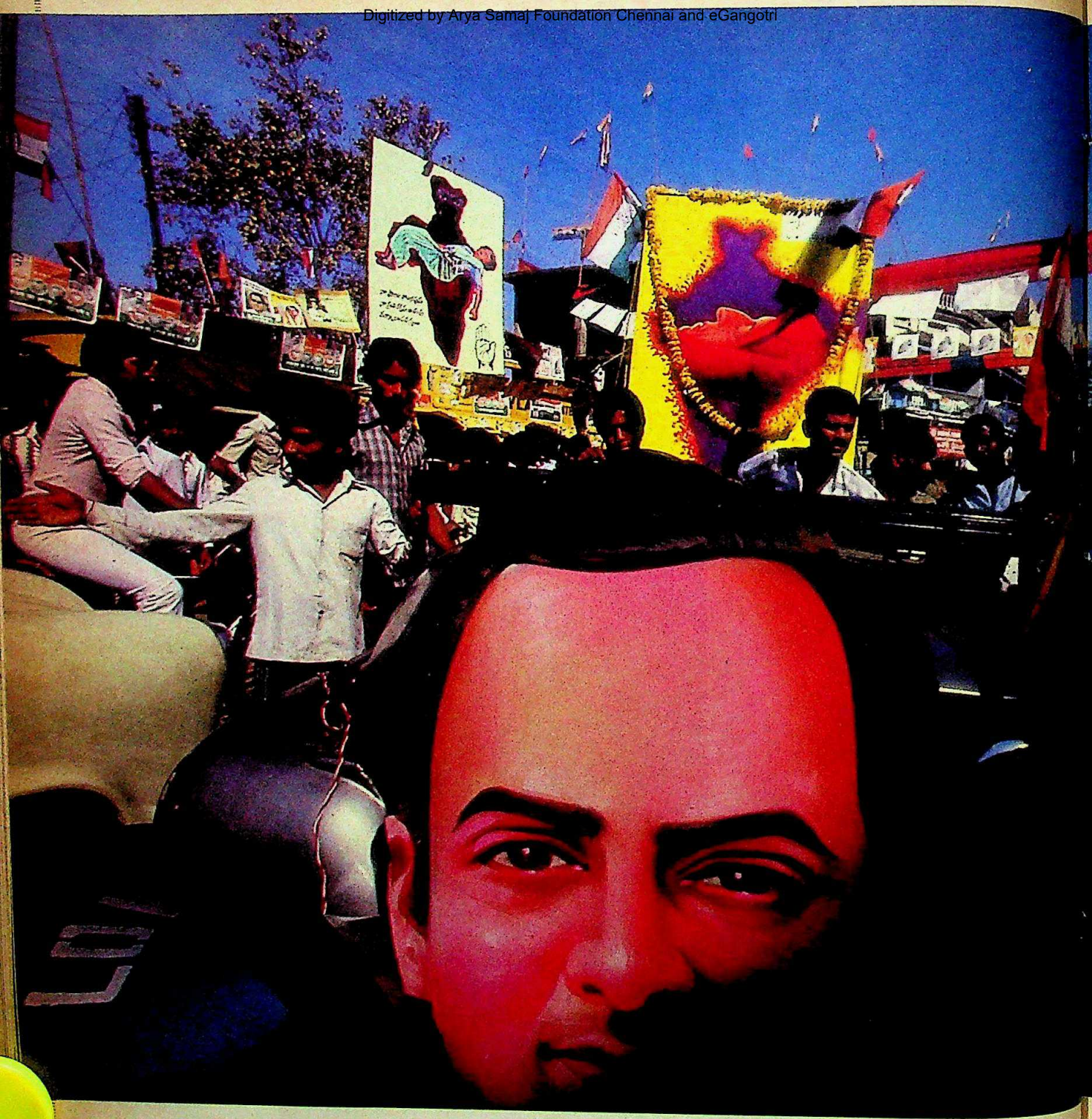

MORE THAN THE WAVE OF SYMPATHY, I SAW HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

RAJIV GANDHI

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RAGHU RAI

RAGHU RAI

NTR IS LIKE A FIREFLY, FOR SOME TIME HE PROMISES LIGHT, BUT THEN YOU DON'T SEE HIM.

T. ANJAIAH at an election meeting in Secunderabad

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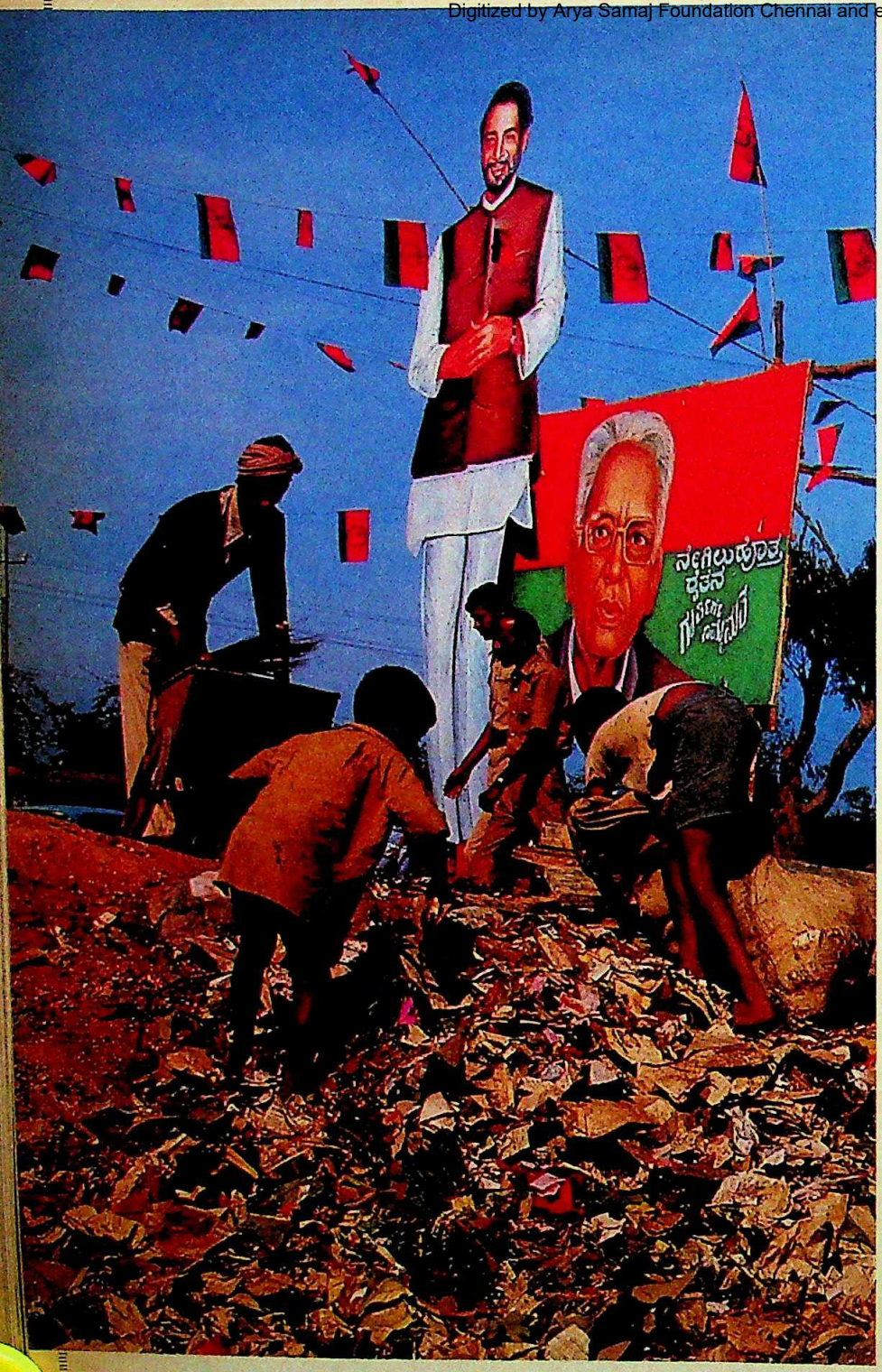

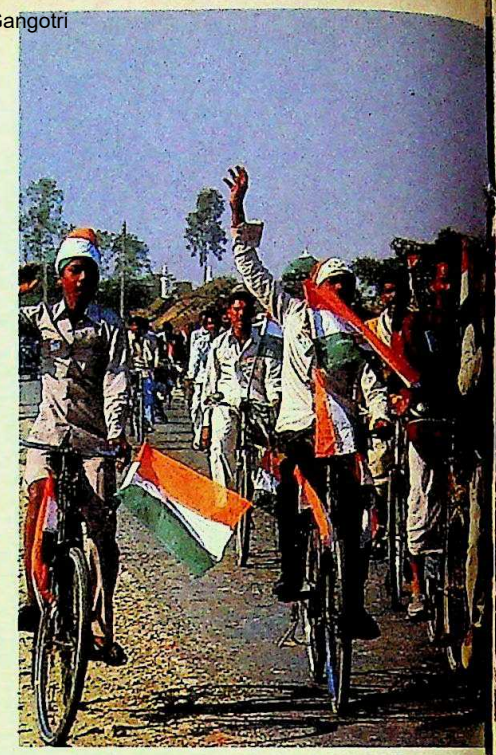

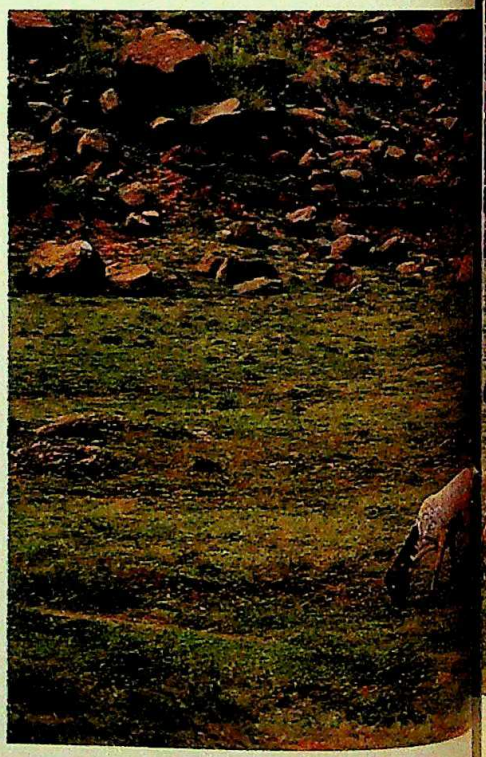

THE PROBLEMS FACING THE COUNTRY ARE TOO GRAVE TO BE LEFT TO ONE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS FRIENDS... THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR ON-THE-JOB TRAINING.

RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

FLAGS FROM DIFFERENT PARTIES HAVE COVERED THE TOWN'S SKYLINE. PARTY WORKERS WITH MEGAPHONES AND LOUDSPEAKERS MOVE AROUND IN JEEPS AND RICKSHAWS THROUGH THE SERPENTINE LANES AND NARROW BYLANES.

Free Press Journal

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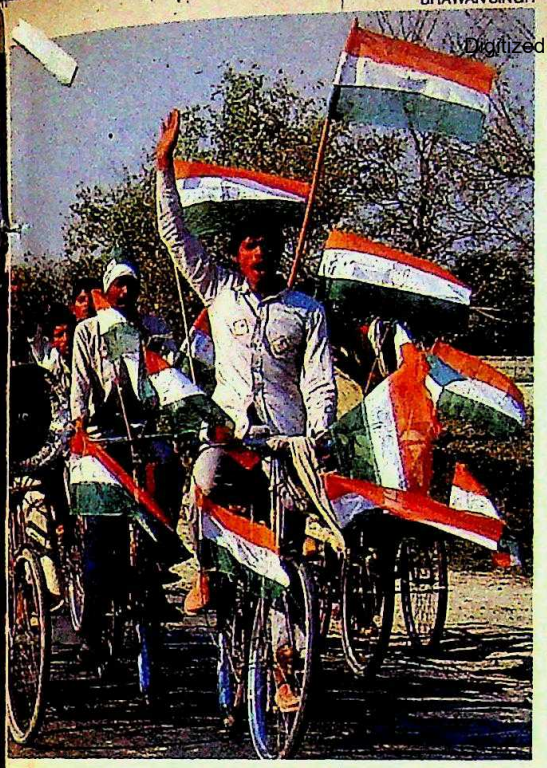
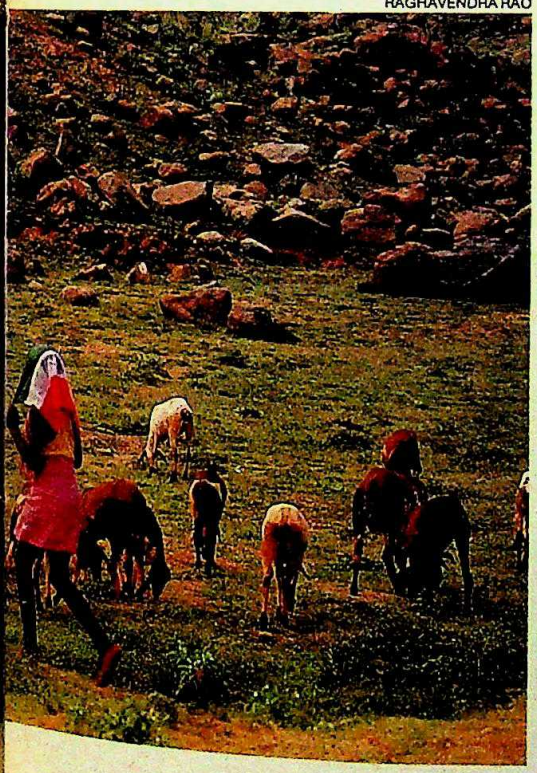
BHAWAN SINGH



RAGHAVENDRA RAO



RAGHU RAI

DESPITE THE UBIQUITOUS POLITICAL GRAFFITI, THE WRITING ON THE WALL IS STILL OBSCURE, FOR, AS IN ANY HEALTHY DEMOCRACY, THE MOOD OF THE ELECTORATE IS NOTORIOUSLY UNPREDICTABLE.

The Telegraph

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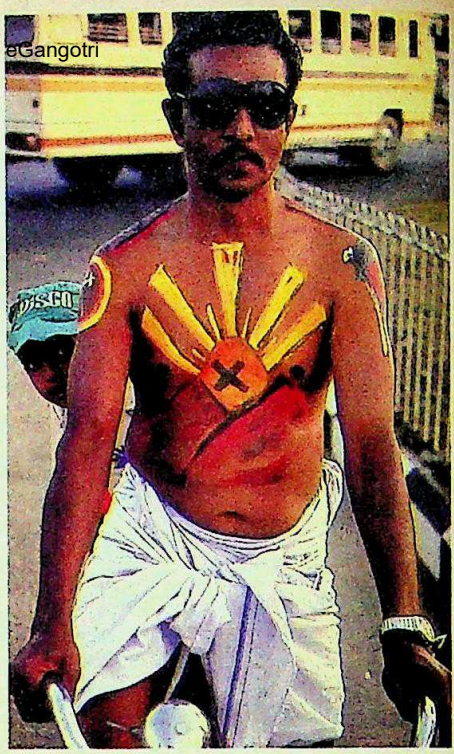

WHILE OPPOSITION LEADERS IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY HAVE TO TACKLE THE FALLOUT FROM THE PASSING AWAY OF ONE LEADER, K. KARUNANIDHI HAS TO WORRY ABOUT NOT ONLY OUR FORMER PRIME MINISTER BUT ALSO A REVERED MGR TRYING HARD TO SAVE HIS LIFE IN A NEW YORK HOSPITAL.

M.J. AKBAR in *Sunday*

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RAGHU RAI

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IT IS WARM AND GETTING MORE SO. VYJAYANTHIMALA BALI'S BROW IS PERSPIRATION-RIDDEN, THE DROPS MAKE FURROWS THROUGH HER MAKE-UP, THE LIPSTICK IS STARTING TO CAKE... IT IS LIKE SOMETHING FROM A FILM IN WHICH THE WELL-DRESSED HEROINE OSTENSIBLY WORKS IN A SLUM BUT DOES NOT LOOK ANYTHING LIKE ONE OF THOSE AMONG WHOM SHE WORKS.

A.S. ABRAHAM in *The Times of India*

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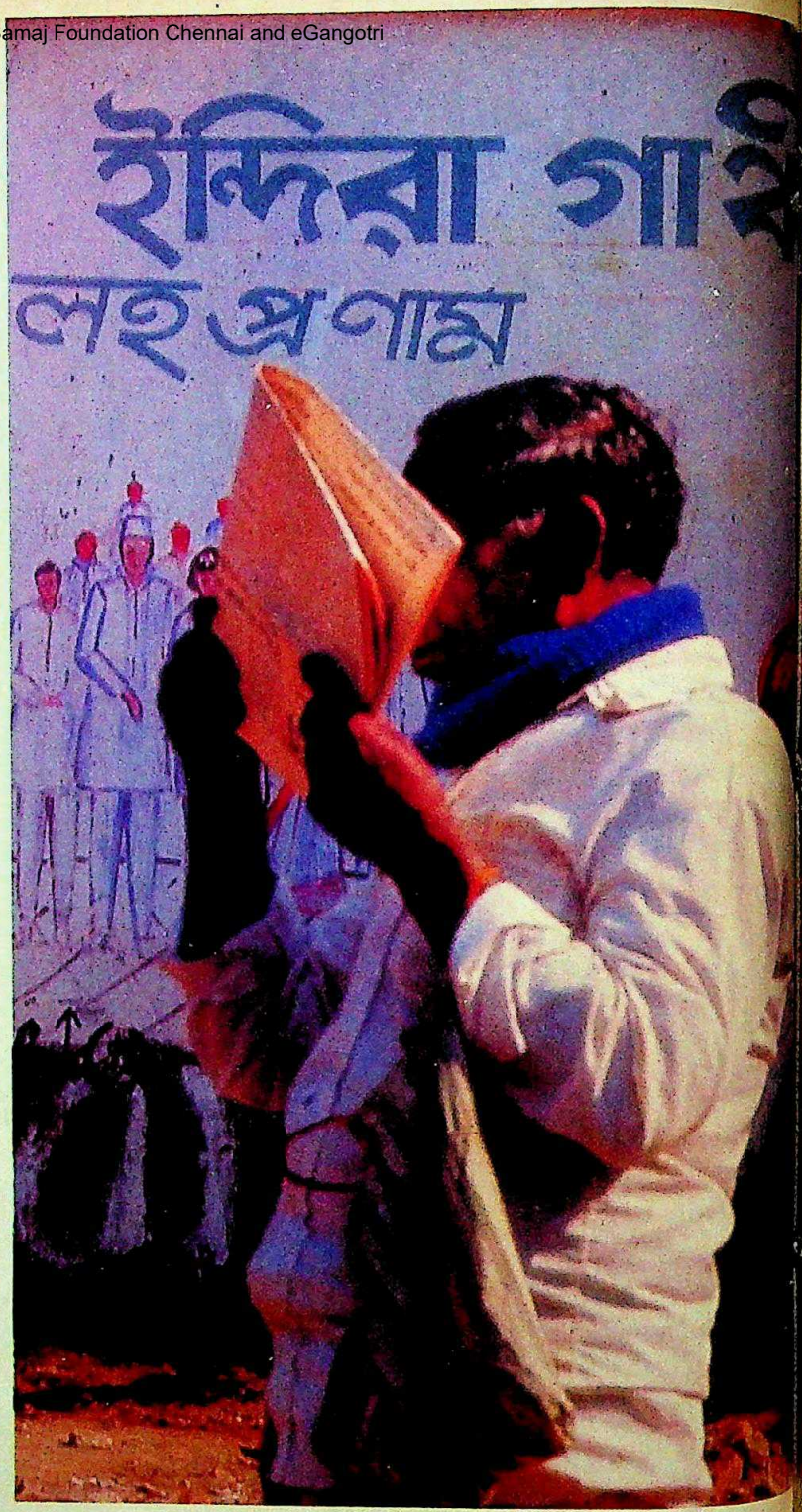

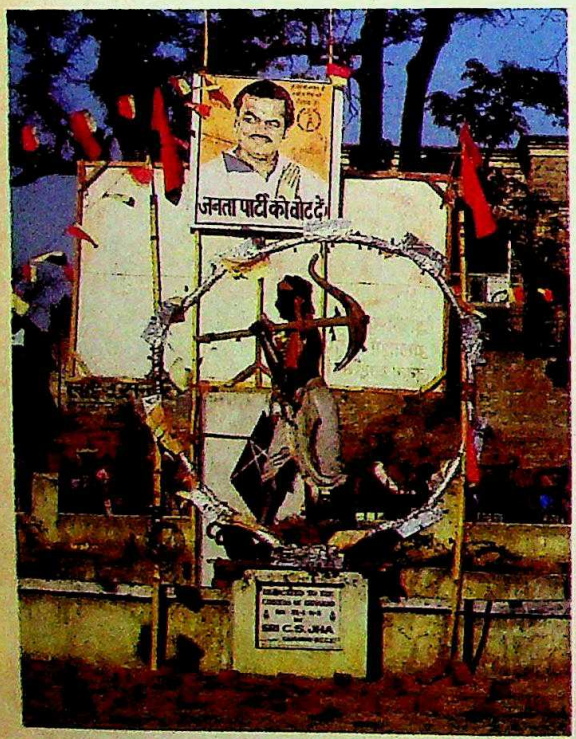

WHAT IS THE USE OF IT (ELECTIONS) ALL? EVERYONE MAKES A LOT OF PROMISES BUT WHAT HAPPENS LATER: NOTHING. I WAS GIVEN THE COW. SHE DOES NOT PRODUCE ANY MILK I HAVE TO SPEND MONEY TO FEED HER.

M. YELLIAH, a farmer in Andhra Pradesh

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Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

RAJIV'S MOTHER HAS DIED: MAYBE THE SYMPATHY WILL PULL HIM THROUGH IN AMETHI. BUT NOT ALL CONGRESS(I) LEADERS HAVE LOST THEIR MOTHERS.

BISWANATH MUKHERJEE, CPI leader

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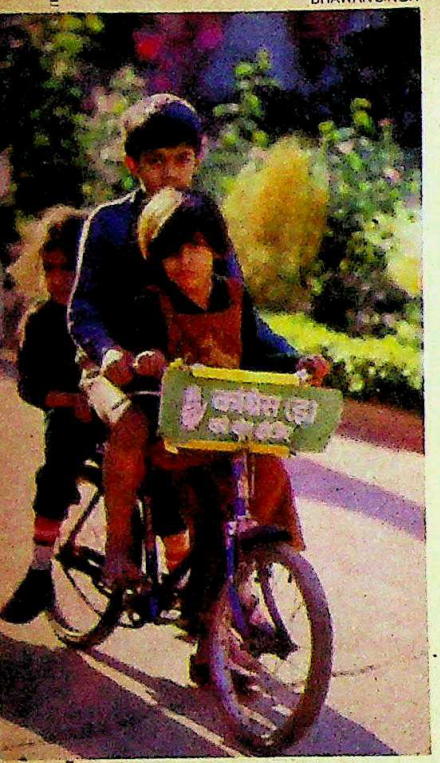
BHAWAN SINGH



RAGHAVENDRA RAO

RAGHAVENDRA RAO

WHEN THE PEOPLE HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT POWER MUST CHANGE HANDS, IT HAS... THOSE WHO HAVE ANY DOUBTS SHOULD GO TO VILLAGE AFTER VILLAGE IN INDIA AND SEE THE PASSION AND FAITH IN THE VOTERS EYES. AGAINST ONE BOOTH WHICH IS CAPTURED, THERE ARE A THOUSAND WHICH THROB WITH THE TRUE WILL OF THE PEOPLE.

Editorial in *The Telegraph*

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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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EVERY BUS STAND, EVERY WALL IS PLASTERED WITH POSTERS, THE STREETS DECORATED WITH PARTY FLAGS AND BIG BANNERS TIED ACROSS THE MAIN ROADS. THE WOOING OF THE VOTER IS INTENSE... CARS PLY THE STREETS, PARTY FLAGS FLUTTERING, HUNDREDS AND THOUSANDS OF POSTERS ENDLESSLY REPEAT THEIR MESSAGES ON EVERY WALL.

The Statesman

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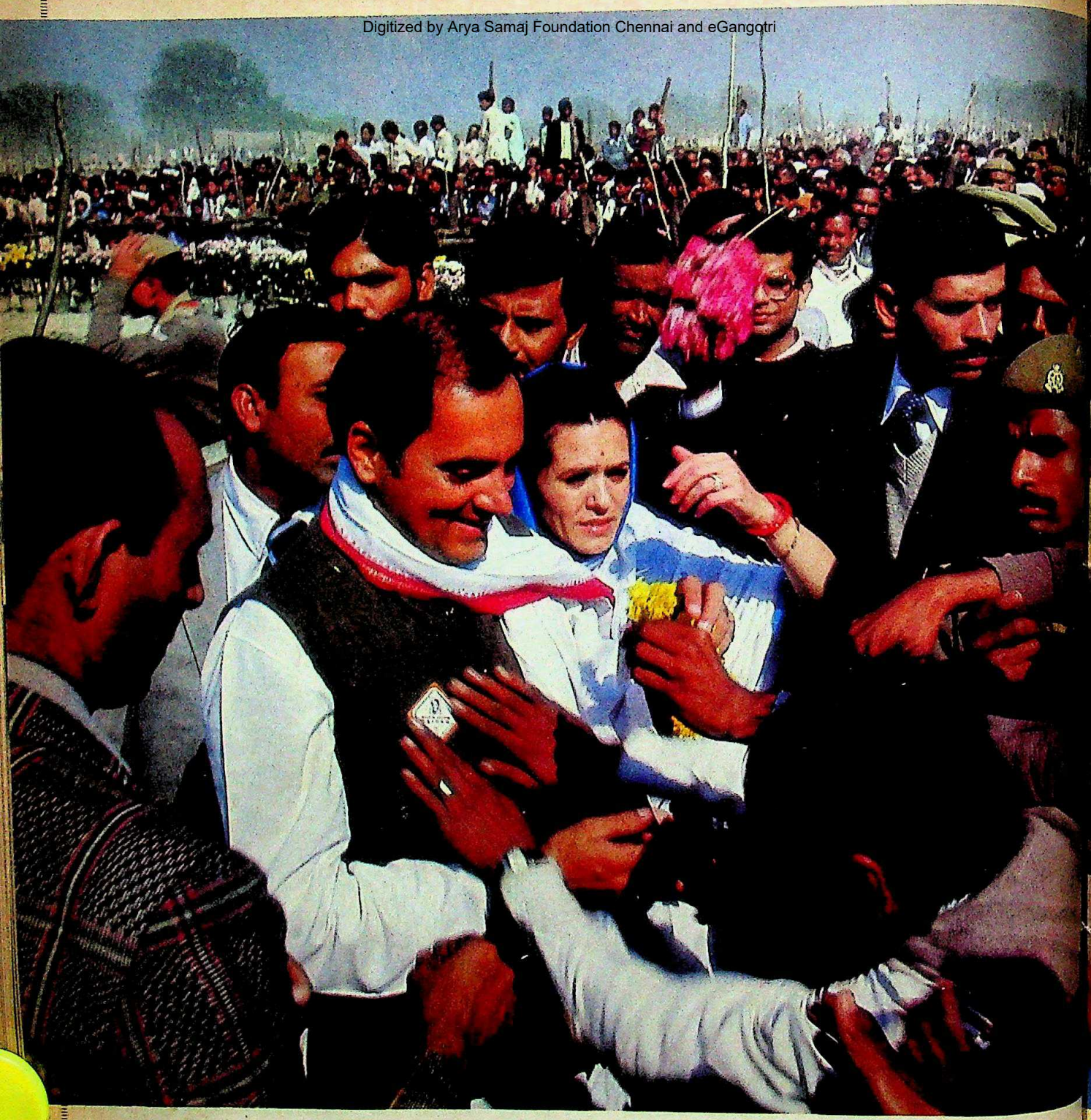

BULLET-PROOF CARS, SECURITY JEEPS AND CAMPAIGN VEHICLES HAVE BEEN INVADING AMETHI FOR WEEKS. VIDEO TAPES SUBSTITUTE FOR THE CANDIDATE. NATIONALLY IT IS THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONSTITUENCY. LOCALLY, IT REMAINS RAJIV BHAIYA'S AND BAHURANI'S DOMAIN.

Weekend Review

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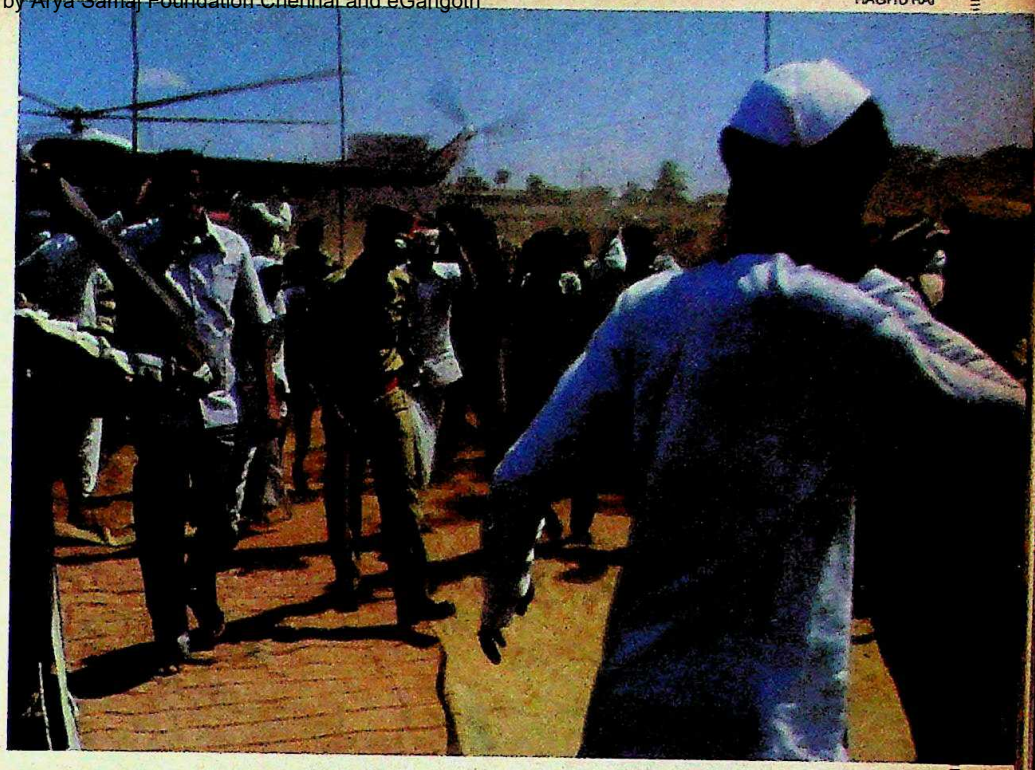
BHAWAN SINGH

RAGHU RAI



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

NEITHER HE (RAJIV) NOR HIS MOTHER COULD DISTINGUISH BETWEEN A PADDY FIELD AND A WHEAT FIELD.

CHARAN SINGH

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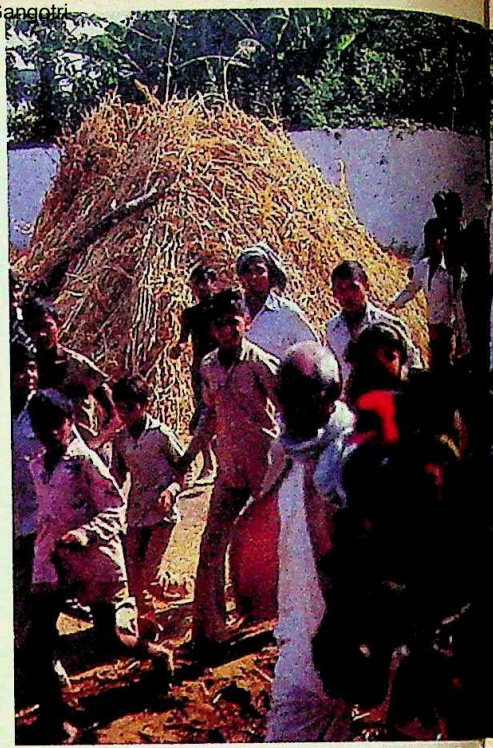
PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



THIS IS A FIGHT BETWEEN THEIR HAND AND MY (INJURED) FOOT.

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE

PEOPLE SAY I'M A ZERO IN POLITICS. THEY ARE RIGHT. BUT WHEN THIS ZERO HITS THE RIGHT PLACE, IT EXPANDS TEN TIMES.

AMITABH BACHCHAN

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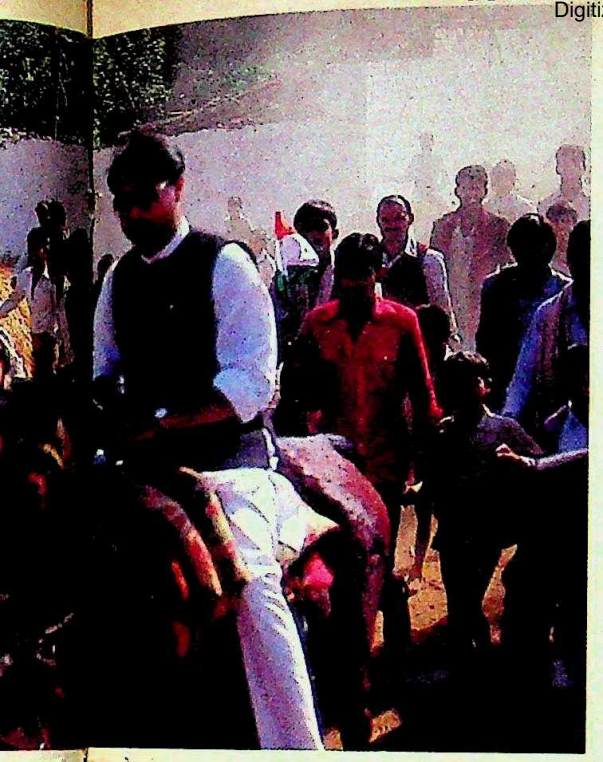
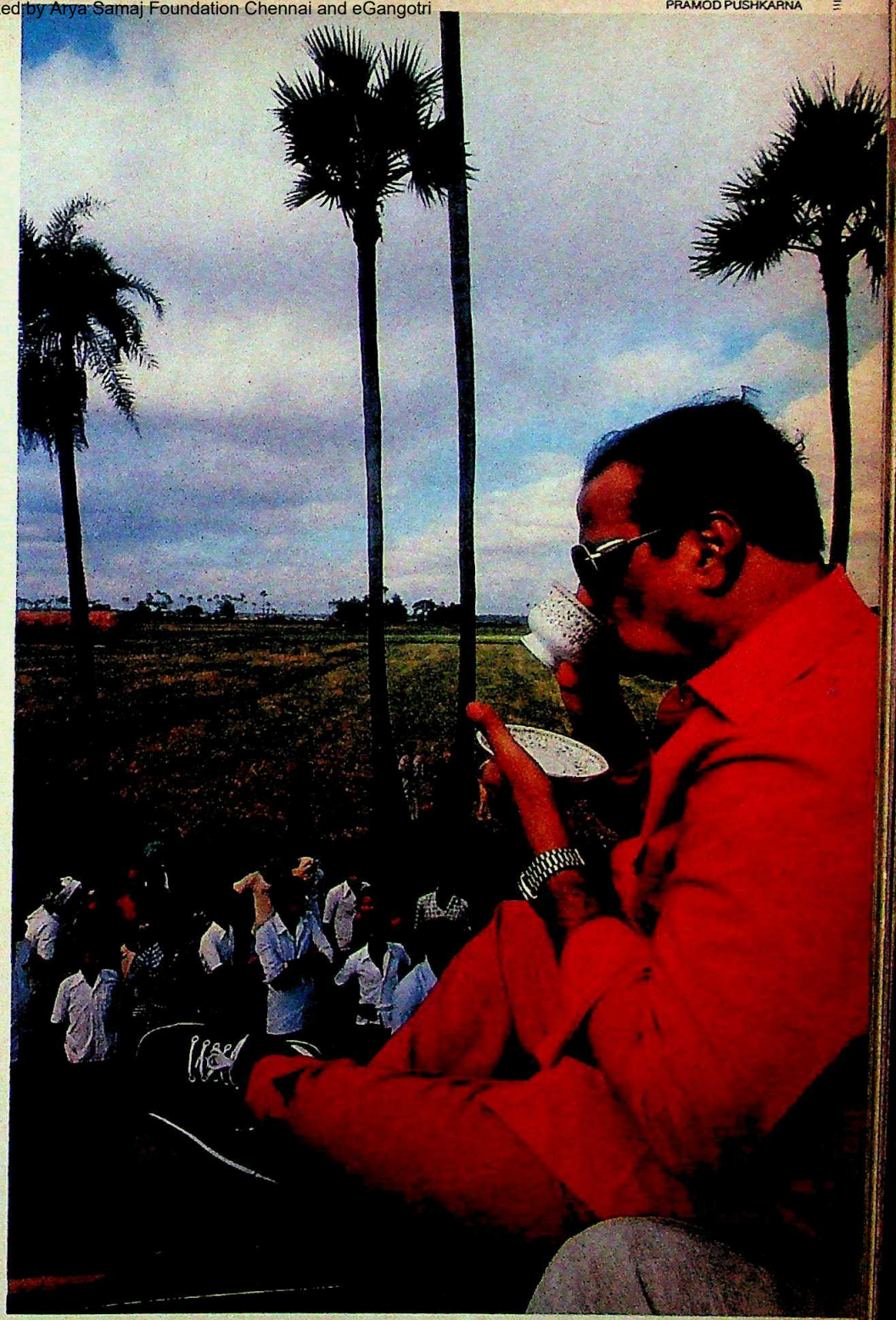
SHEKHAR GUPTA



I FEEL THAT IF YOU CANNOT DO ANYTHING FOR THE CONSTITUENCY YOU SHOULD GET OUT OF THE LOK SABHA.

MADHAVRAO SCINDIA

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



WHEN CAMPAIGNING, THERE HAS TO BE A NEW LOOK. I MAY HAVE TO DISCARD MY DHOTI TOO, IF NECESSARY AND SWITCH TO TROUSERS.

N.T. RAMA RAO

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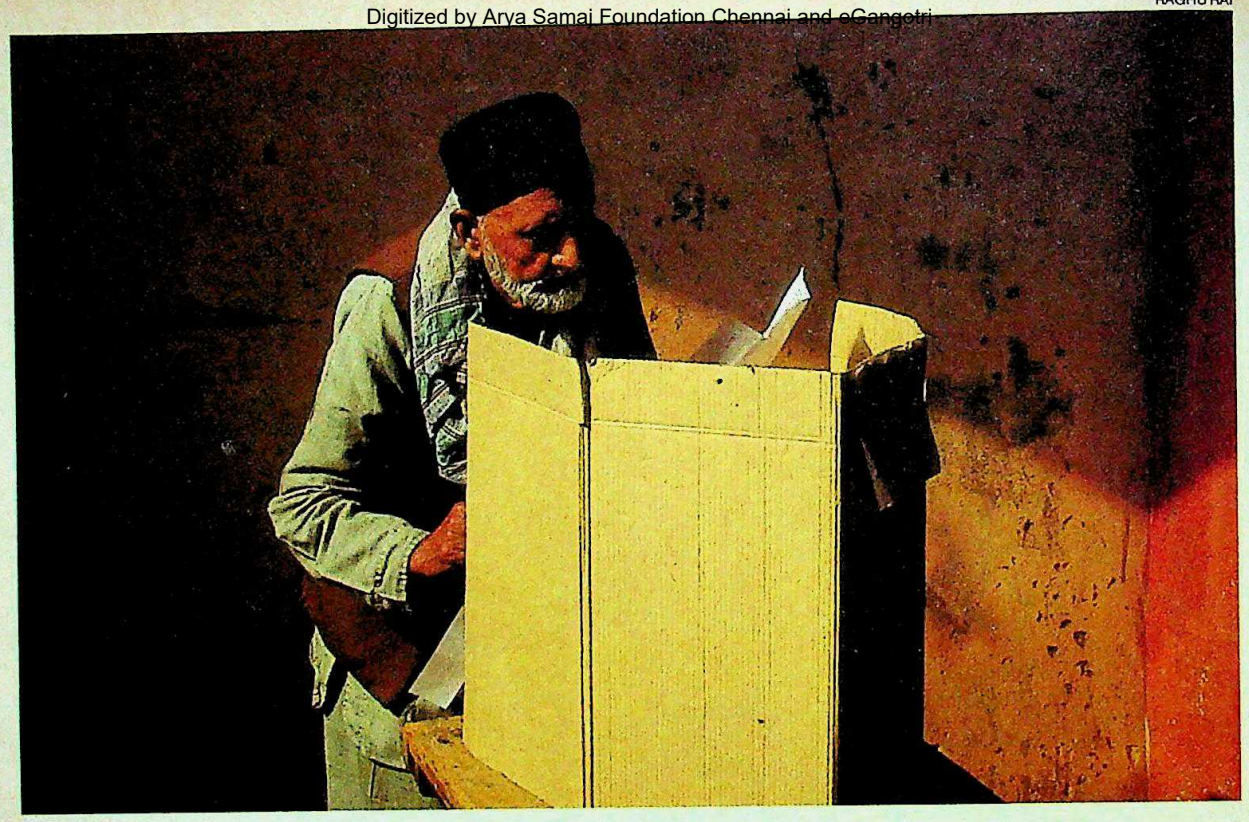
RAGHU RAI



RAGHU RAI

SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE GLAMOUR AND THE GRIME IS THE ONE UNWAVERING SYMBOL THAT EPITOMISES THE MOST VIBRANT AND VITAL FACTOR IN AN INDIAN ELECTION—A LEAN AND LOIN CLOTHED FIGURE... HE IS THE HEARTBEAT OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY, THE RURAL VOTER, ON WHOSE OVER-BURDENED SHOULDERS RESTS THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF DECIDING WHO RULES FROM NEW DELHI FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.

DILIP BOBB in *India Today*

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THE ASSASSINATION

The Silent Prisoner

WITH the arrest of Simranjeet Singh Mann, key suspect in the Indira Gandhi assassination case and underground since last July, there was hope of a quick unravelling of the threads of the conspiracy. But expectations that the former Punjab police officer would talk were soon belied. Disclosed an official in Bharatpur where Mann is currently being held: "We expected him to sing, but the only birds that tweet come from the famous sanctuary here."

Mann was caught in the company of four Sikhs as they attempted to cross into Nepal through the border district of Purnea in Bihar. Described as rich transporters from Calcutta, they seemed only to know that Mann was wanted by a detention order under the NSA. And they could well be telling the truth, judging by the manner of the attempted escape—effected with few precautions —and the fact that Mann is known to have confided little.

Mann: tight-lipped

The jeep carrying the fivesome was stopped by customs and police officials who refused to allow the vehicle into Nepal. Suspected of being smugglers, Mann and his friends were questioned and their baggage searched. The contents of Mann's luggage could not have been more incriminating—copies of his letters to President Zail Singh, and other equally interesting documents. Immediately alerted, the officials held back Mann's passport and tipped off security agencies like the Intelligence Bureau and others. In a foolish attempt to get away, one transporter offered a bribe of Rs 62,000. Said an official: "This was so stupid. Besides, the fact that the huge sum would have at least made any official think twice before taking the bribe, by the time they offered the money, there were too many security agencies involved."

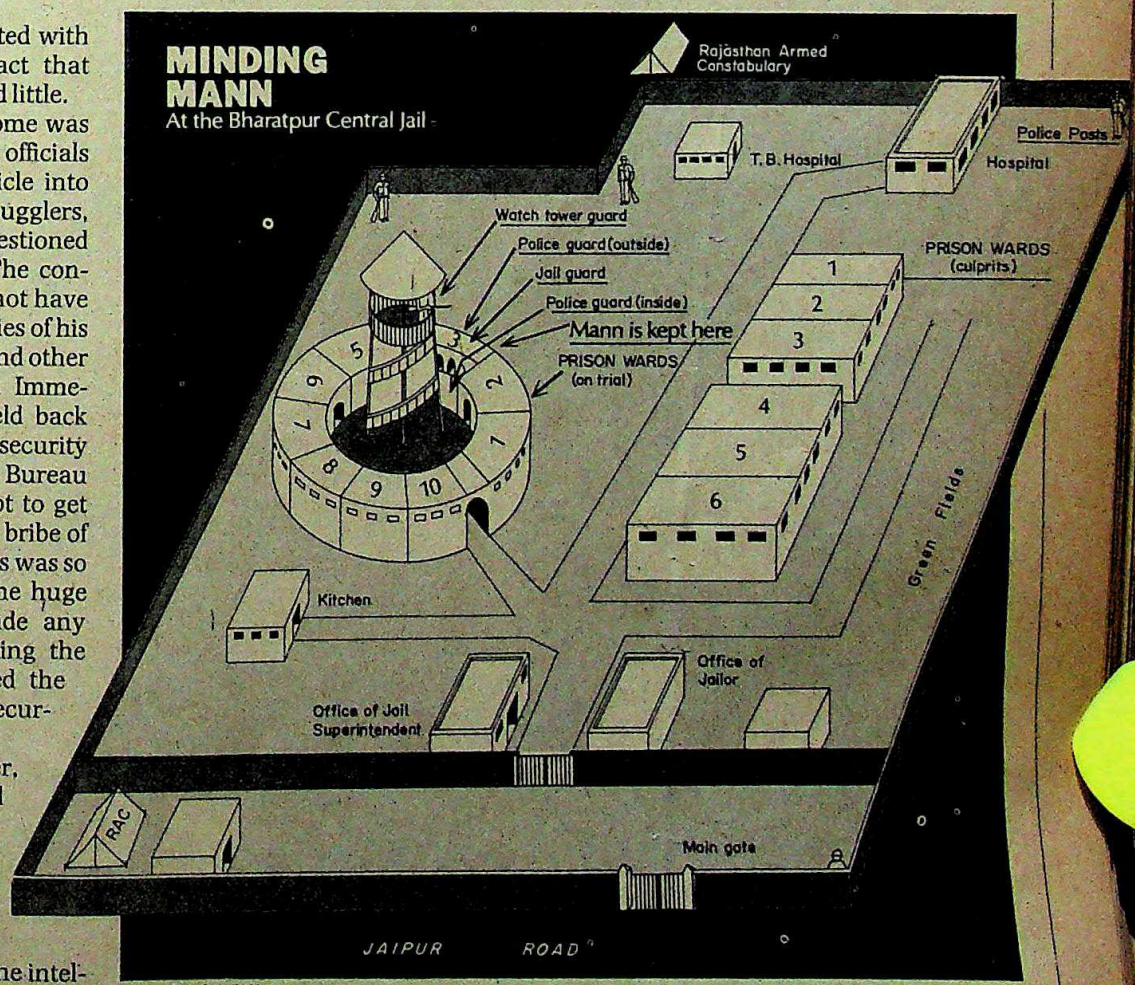
The fact remains, however, that Mann's arrest occurred purely by chance and at a place he was least expected. Intelligence agencies had earlier claimed that Mann had gone over to Pakistan within days of the killing. After the arrest, one intelligence agency opined that he had left the country before the assassination. Very little of course is really known about Mann's movements. But investigators consider it reasonable to assume that he was based in Calcutta and making frequent trips to Delhi. His contacts in that city were all Sikhs prominently connected with the All India Sikhs Coordination Committee led by an arrested transporter.

The 'hideout in West Bengal' theory makes for logic. With an opposition government in power, the assumption was that state security agencies would not keep as keen a watch on the activities of Akalis and suspected Punjab extremists, as would agencies in a Congress(I)-ruled state. Reports from Calcutta state that security officials are trying to verify rumours that Mann was close to some police officers there. They are also on the hunt for another Calcutta-based transporter missing since the arrest.

In the melange of theories and assumptions, two facts definitely link Mann with the death of Mrs Gandhi: the sighting of the former policeman near the Ashok Lines home of slain assassin Beant Singh and, more vital, disclosures made by Satwant Singh, the surviving assassin. Satwant is reported to have reiterated Mann's involvement in no uncertain terms. He also told the team that Beant often spoke of Mann in glowing terms.

The modus operandi was to get to the target by manipulating at the lower level. In this case, he operated through sub-inspector Beant Singh and is considered the constable's principal motivator. An official said: "After Operation Bluestar, Beant Singh was connected with a group of Sikhs who were amateurishly discussing various ways and means of killing Mrs Gandhi. But that conspiracy was over in August. Why should Beant suddenly pick up the threads from October?"

By the middle of October, Beant



Map by B.K. SHARMA

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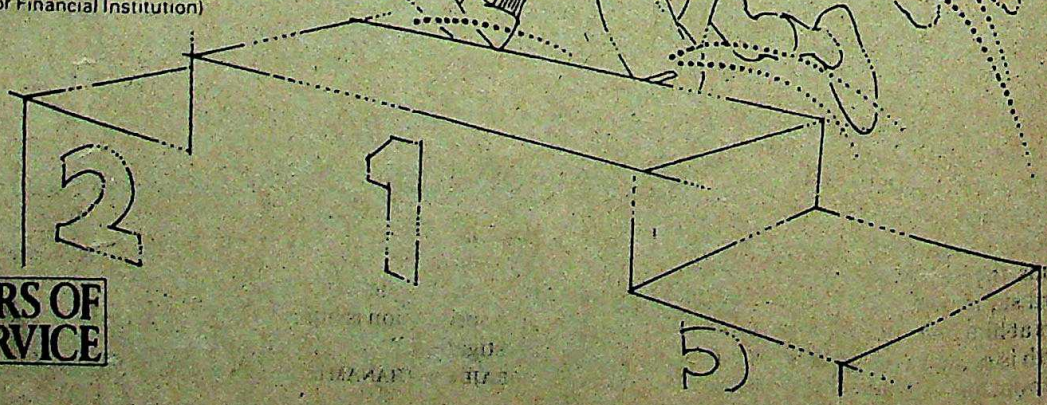

20 YEARS OF TRUSTED SERVICE

Shilpi/UTI 4A/84

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showed signs of 'indoctrination'—a reflection of the fact that he was meeting Mann regularly. He made a note of a religious passage at the Bangla Saheb Gurudwara on October 13, he took his wife to the Sisganj Gurudwara on October 17, after which he went to the Akal Takht to meet Satwant, and on October 24 he took Satwant to the gurudwara in R.K. Puram. But for all these bits of information to fall into place, Mann's own testimony is crucial—and for the moment, at least, he remains tightlipped.

Denying involvement in the assassination, Mann is reported to have told interrogators that what had happened to Sikhs in the aftermath of the death was final proof that the Government was being ruled by Hindus. "I had some contacts," he is reported to have claimed in another context, "who told me that I was about to be suspended." Asked who, he replied: "That is for you to find out."

Beant Singh: motivation factor

Lodged in Bharatpur Central Jail under utmost secrecy Mann is being heavily guarded in the inner cordon of the jail normally housing undertrials. "Routine" precautions to thwart any suicide bids were taken with the removal of the flush chain in the toilet and concealment of the wire from which the light bulb is suspended. As a worried official explained: "We will be finished if Mann commits suicide." For this reason jail authorities got Mann to replace his thick *kada* (bangle) with a thin one—after applying considerable pressure.

A new superintendent has been appointed solely to ensure that no attempts are made to reach Mann through the employees. A jail guard spends the night with Mann, a police guard stands outside his door, another peers at him from the watchtower, and a fourth is posted outside the rear wall of his room. As a final security measure, bugs planted beneath the floors of Mann's three-room suite can carry the least circumstantial whisper across to waiting securitymen.

In the face of such security, Mann's silence has come as a damper. But officials are confident of getting onto something definite soon. They have not ruled out the Oslo connection and neither have they entirely accepted defecting diplomat Harjinder Singh's denial of any connection with Beant Singh. There is a new twist likely to this tale by the report that the diplomat's friendship with Beant was not reported to the authorities by a senior official.

By last week, there were reports that the investigating team would be reorganised and those concerned with the earlier part of the probe axed. An official said :"The earlier inquiries were done hurriedly and did not suggest a very deep-rooted conspiracy. Now the team is convinced that the assassination is not the handiwork of merely Beant and Satwant Singh."

Whoever comprises the revamped investigating team, one possible lead for them is the arrest of Bhindranwale's nephew Jasbir Singh who was flown in from Manila. Although there is no evidence yet of Jasbir's involvement in the assassination, an official pointed out that he was a prominent extremist based abroad and had been making frequent visits to Pakistan. "We are sure that if he talks, we may get something on the foreign angle," the official added.

For the Government, which sent a formal note of protest to Pakistan in connection with a recent Sikh convention at Nankana Saheb in that country where Jasbir raised fiery pro-Khalistan slogans, his detention is a welcome sign. Refused permission to stay in England by the British Home Office, Jasbir was turned away at Dubai and detained at Manila by the Philippines authorities until an Indian Airlines aircraft brought him to India on December 26.

Like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, the theories of conspiracy and foreign involvement clash with facts and figures garnered from various sources. But the most important source still remains unyielding—Mann himself. And even if he should choose to speak, it is not certain whether the pieces will fit exactly. That is possible only when the Justice Thakkar Commission actually gets going. Till then, as one official commented: "All speculation is injurious to healthy investigation."

—RAJU SANTHANAM in Bharatpur

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BHOPAL GAS LEAK

The Legal Damage

AMERICAN lawyers were descending on Bhopal last fortnight like bees to honey-suckle. Within days of the gas leak tragedy they were buzzing about looking for material to file compensation suits in US courts on behalf of the victims and also a substantial cut—as fees—for themselves.

Their initial appearance and the promise of enormous compensation had sent hope surging through the gas-ravaged localities and the shattered victims. But by fortnight's end the euphoria was dying down and in its place came strong doubts. How much did they know about these foreigners? Could they be trusted? What was their game? What papers had they been made to sign? Was the promised money only a mirage? The very people who had formed queues to sign forms giving the power of attorney to the Americans just days ago, were showing clear signs of hostility. Some examples from Jayaprakash Nagar, a slum locality right outside the Carbide premises:

▶ Ram Gopal Sharma, a local Congress(I) leader, is employed in the railways as a mechanical fitter. He says that he has lost count of the number of lawyers whose forms he filled, giving the power of attorney to each of them. Said he: "No one told me that there was any question of giving a percentage of the claim to the lawyers. I can read Hindi but most of the forms were in English. I stopped signing and tried to prevent others when I came to know of their sharing in the compensation." Sharma is among the lucky few in the area who is literate and even he does not know the names or addresses of any of the lawyers.

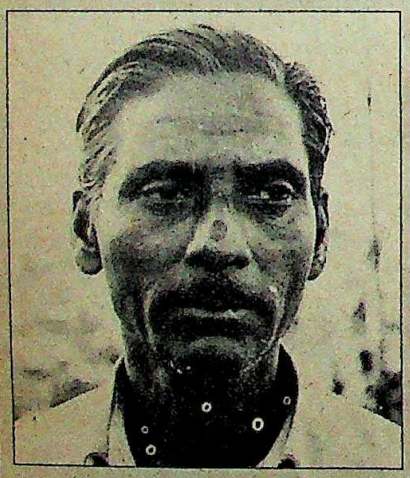
▶ "A few days ago," says another resident, Kamta Prasad Vishwakarma, "we started questioning one of the lawyers. We asked him for a receipt as proof of the fact that we had given him the power of attorney. He kept avoiding and when we grew insistent, he fled."

▶ Shanta Bai has another problem. The hospital in which she had been treated had given her a medical slip which was evidence of the fact that she had suffered methyl isocyanate (MIC) poisoning. "It is a vital document to seek assistance from the Government. A lawyer, whose name I do not know, took it away and left me with an acknowledgement slip that does not even mention his name."

▶ Bangal Soni, who is in the dairy business, lost one of his four children to MIC and the rest of his family was hospitalised. He has filled forms for two lawyers. Says Soni: "I signed wherever they asked me to. I hope it won't get me into trouble. I couldn't believe that a stranger would fight my case in America. But everyone was filling them, and so did I. Greed got the better of me."

Illiteracy, obviously, was the main culprit. At the height of the rush, few questions were asked and thousands of people gave the power of attorney to more than one lawyer. Few, if any at all, understood what precisely they were signing. S.C. Godha, a Bhopal lawyer who represents the Washington D.C.-based firm of Arthur Lowy and John P. Coale, says that they have so far managed to collect

Photographs by SREEKANT KHANDEKAR



"We asked one of the lawyers for a receipt as proof that we had given him the power of attorney. He avoided it, and when we grew insistent he fled."

KAMTA PRASAD VISHWAKARMA

"The medical slip is a vital document to seek assistance from the Government. A lawyer took it away and left me with an acknowledgement slip that does not even mention his name."

SHANTA BAI

"No one told me that there was any question of giving a percentage of the claims to the lawyers. I can read Hindi but most of the forms were in English."

RAM GOPAL SHARMA

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about 10,000 forms—and each form represents a family so the actual number of claimants is much higher. Mahendra R. Mehta, a Chicago-based Indian lawyer whose name figured in the Morarji Desai-Hersh case initially, says that he had collected more than 1,000 forms. And they are only two among many who are working on these lines.

The worst aspect of the affair is that there seems to have been very little—if any—attempt to explain to the victims precisely what the law is all about. The stress has been on collecting as many signatures as possible. Mehta's people, for example, were securing signatures on two agreements, one in Hindi and one, a more detailed one with significantly diffe-

UNION CARBIDE

Grey Areas

AS LAST fortnight drew to an end, the controversy shifted from the Union Carbide pesticide plant to a few kilometres south in Bhopal: to a glass and concrete structure that houses the company's Research and Development (R&D) centre.

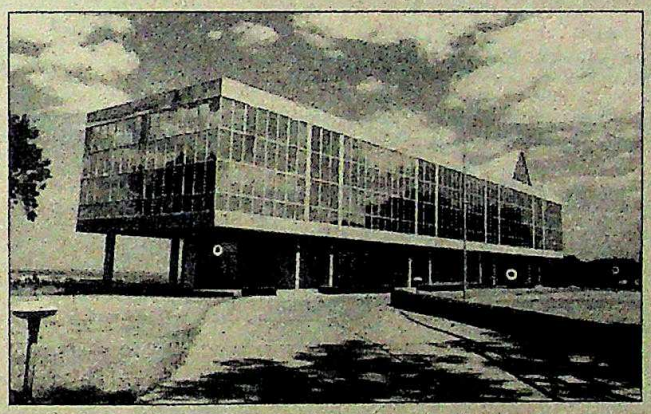
The row was started by a report of the Delhi Science Forum (DSF) on the Bhopal gas tragedy which urged the Government to investigate the goings-on at the R&D centre. The report stressed the urgent need to institute effective mechanisms to monitor foreign collaborations and the R&D carried out under these agreements. It also demanded that the inquiry into the Bhopal accident should include the R&D activities of the company which cover "the grey area between peaceful application and biological warfare". The suggestion was instantly grabbed by the media but till month-end, no hard facts had emerged about even the centre's legitimate activities, let alone the "grey areas".

However the centre by itself is interesting enough. With a Rs 2 crore investment, it is the largest of its kind in India and the only one in the country engaged in the discovery of new pesticides. When it was established in 1975, Carbide was influenced by the fact that all pesticide discoveries have so far taken place either in the US, Europe or Japan, and are tested on crops and pests of temperate or cold countries, where conditions vary greatly from the tropical countries.

Carbide's interest in having a well-equipped centre lay in two reasons: one, a place where pesticide discovery could be tried in local conditions and second, to have a place where new molecules developed in the corporation's research centre at Raleigh, North Carolina, could be trial tested under tropical conditions.

Discovery of pesticides is not the centre's only occupation. To offset the expense and time involved, the centre has been in product and process development, formulation and environmental toxicology. Work on an insect screen—for pesticide testing—started only in 1978 and molecular synthesis came in 1980.

As the functions grew, so did the staff. From 25 scientists in 1975, the number has gone up to 60. The equipment today is valued at about Rs 1 crore and includes nuclear magnetic resurgence, infra-red spectrophotometer, and chromotograms. In fact, many of the air and water and plant tests carried out by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) following the recent tragedy, were conducted at Carbide's R&D centre.



Carbide's R&D centre in Bhopal

In 1980, Union Carbide, US, and Union Carbide, India, entered into a collaborative agreement on screening of new molecules developed in the US against tropical pests. The initial agreement was for 50 molecules to be tested per year in Bhopal and in return the R&D centre was to receive a grant of US $25,000 annually. In 1982, as testing facilities in Bhopal improved, the annual number of molecules was increased to 500 per year and the grant increased to US $ 300,000 per year. According to Carbide sources, a new deal was in the pipeline to test 2,000 molecules each year from 1985 onwards for the parent company for which a grant of US $ 500,000 was being sought.

Carbide scientists argue that they are being unfairly dragged into controversy and it is not as if the Department of Science and Technology (DST) is unaware of its activities. The R&D centre was registered with DST in 1976 for three reasons: it meant income tax relief, ease in import of equipment, and access to government research facilities if required. But registration also means that the company has to forward to DST annually information about projects undertaken, achievements, equipment, and even details of number of scientists employed and their salaries.

Says R&D Manager B.P. Srivastava bitterly: "Because an unfortunate accident occurred, to suggest that we are engaged in anti-national activities is grossly unfair. We are not criminals. These reckless allegations have deeply hurt all of us scientists. We are Indians too. We have regularly had scientists from CSIR, Indian Council of Agricultural Research and from universities coming to work here. The facilities are always open to inspection by the Government. How come no one made any of these allegations earlier? If we were carrying on 'secret' work, would we be so open to outsiders?"

Now, with the pesticide plant shut, whether Carbide will carry on with the R&D centre is an open question. Said one Carbide scientist: "The advantage of having the plant was that we were constantly forced to think in commercial terms. We were in constant touch with the production people there. Without it, we may be reduced to mere academics like numerous government research institutions—doing work without thought to applicability." Plagued both by uncertainty as well as controversy, some of the centre's employees are already talking in terms of seeking jobs elsewhere.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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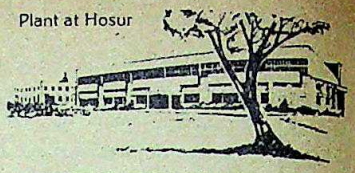
Plant at Hosur



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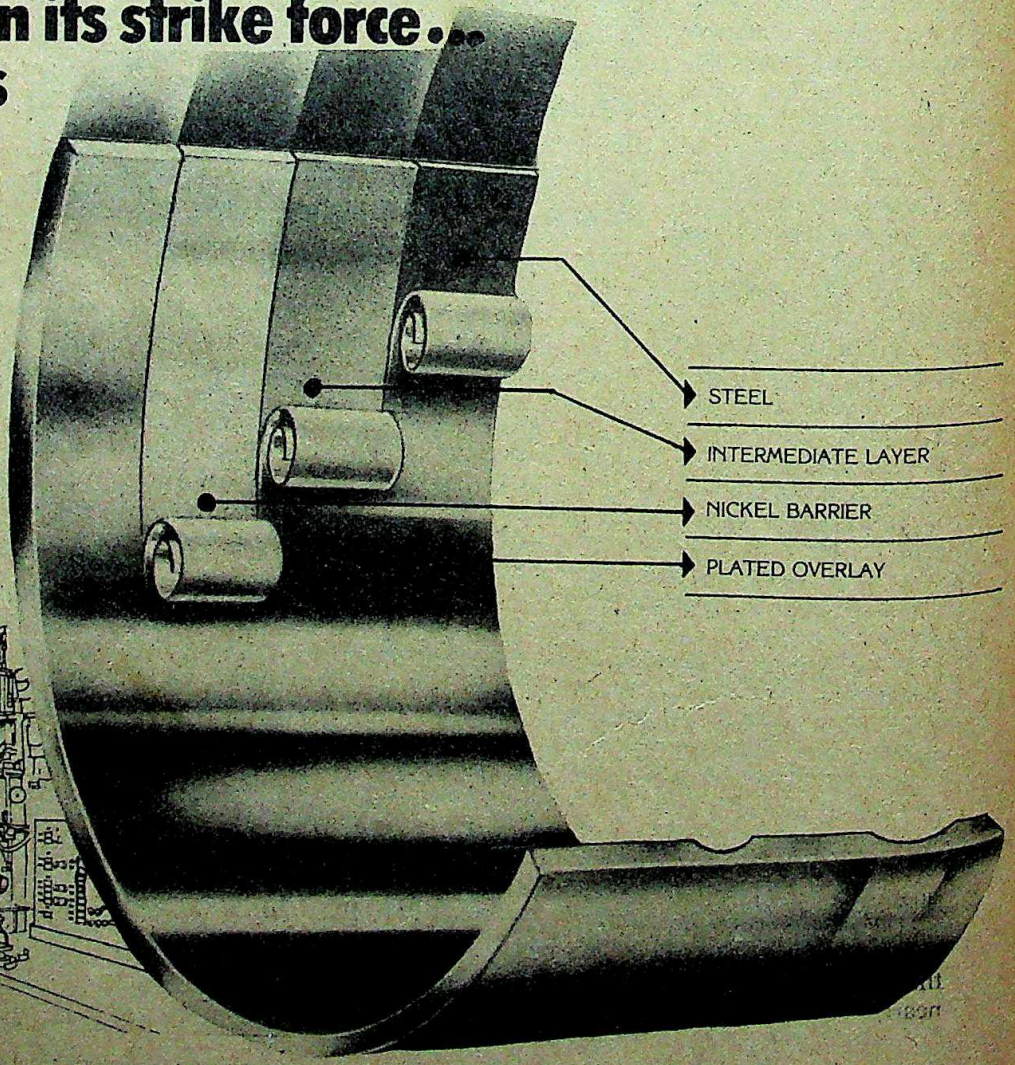

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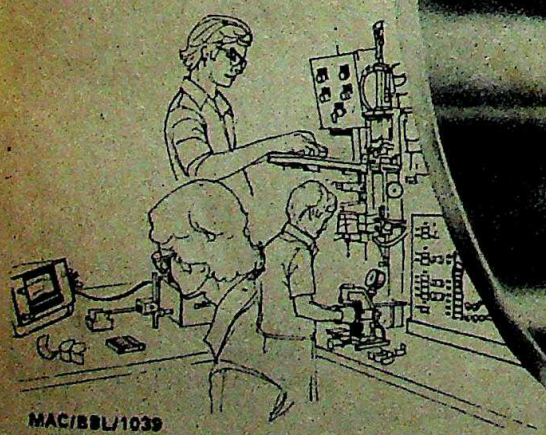

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rent conditions, in English. The printed Hindi agreement said that the English form had been explained to the signatory, the victim, whereas the truth was that none that INDIA TODAY interviewed knew anything about it. Mehta says that the shortage of time did not permit detailed explanation to each individual. In other cases the only agreement forms signed were in English: and they were signed by people who use their thumb impression as signature.

There was little the state Government could do to stop these men of law whose antecedents were unknown: the cases related to personal injury and the affected were legally free to repose their trust in whosoever they chose. Indian or

THE EVACUATION

Tragic Farce

MORE than three weeks after the Bhopal catastrophe, official heads finally started to roll, the most prominent being Madhya Pradesh labour minister Shyam Sunder Patidar. Others axed included seven officials from his department. According to a government release, Patidar had in fact submitted his resignation on December 4 accepting moral responsibility for his department's failure, but Chief Minister Arjun Singh only accepted it after the records had been scrutinised.

What prompted the action was a report submitted by Dr S.Siddiqui, professor of chemistry at the Motilal Vigyan Mahavidyalaya (INDIA TODAY, December 31, 1984). Siddiqui had been appointed as inquiry officer on February 10, 1982, to examine the safety factor at the Union Carbide factory after the death of a worker on December 24, 1981. Siddiqui submitted his report on March 5, 1984, but nobody acted on it. Two officials have been suspended for not forwarding the Siddiqui report for a full seven months. The then deputy secretary, V.K. Pachpor, and under-secretary R.S. Tholia, found guilty of the same crime, are facing departmental inquiry. The services of Pachpor, employed after his retirement by the Madhya Pradesh State Agricultural Board, has been terminated. Labour Secretary Arun Kumar and Special Secretary H. Mishra have been asked to go on leave pending a decision. Both men came to know of Siddiqui's report in October 1984 but took no follow-up action. The axe also fell on C.P.Tyagi, chief inspector of factories, who stands accused of having renewed the Carbide factory licence annually without considering earlier safety lapses.

Official bungling, however, was hardly restricted to the period before the tragedy. The panicked exodus by nearly half the city's eight lakh inhabitants during 'Operation Faith', the government-sponsored effort to neutralise the rest of the MIC in the plant's storage tanks, turned out to be nothing less than a tragic farce.

Patidar: among the first to go

According to senior government and army officials, there was, in fact, no need for the panic since there were few dangers involved in the neutralisation of the remaining gas. If anything, the mass exodus was largely instigated by the chief minister himself who over-played the situation and also over-emphasised the risks involved in an attempt to get the maximum media mileage. In a dramatic piece of dialogue that would have done justice to a Bombay film script, Singh intoned: "It is one of the most crucial decisions I have been called upon to make but duty leaves me no choice. In such moments of supreme loneliness, nothing impels us more than one's faith in our creator who is the final arbiter of our destiny."

Chief Minister Arjun Singh

The mass exodus was largely instigated by the chief minister himself who greatly over-emphasised the risks to get maximum media mileage.

To add to the panic, the state Government ordered the closing down of all schools and colleges right in the middle of examinations. The result was total chaos as the city turned into a ghost town with even patients, however sick, blindly groping their way out of hospital beds to mingle with nurses and operating room assistants in a desperate bid to flee from the imaginary threat.

That it was imaginary was testified to by the problem-free neutralisation of the lethal gas. While Indian Air Force helicopters periodically sprayed the plant with a fine mist of water to neutralise any escaping gas, a huge, 15 feet high burlap fence was also erected all along the factory wall and kept wet. Other elaborate measures were also taken in addition, which, as the head of Operation Faith, S. Varadarajan, testily admitted, "may not even be necessary".

They obviously weren't. The Union Carbide staff restarted the plant, the MIC was piped into a 'charge pot' where it was mixed with several other chemicals to produce pesticides. Within a few days, the gas had been spent and the plant shut down again. But the citizens who started trickling back to Bhopal a few days later were bitter and disillusioned, not only with Union Carbide which remained the main villain of this heartrending piece, but also with the Arjun Singh Government for so heartlessly choosing to take advantage of a tragic event for pure political expediency.

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Bhopal

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American. On December 10, the state Government had declared its intention to file a suit on behalf of the victims within a week but its failure to do so even till December 27 led victims to rely on the American lawyers.

Where the matter rests legally in the US is being debated. The first question is whether American courts have the jurisdiction to decide on damages in an accident that has taken place in India. This is also linked to the question of whether and to what extent the liability of paying compensation rests on the parent company.

Reports from the US suggest that Union Carbide will try to challenge the jurisdiction of US courts to hear the cases, and try to shift them instead to Indian courts, which in keeping with past practice, usually award lower damages. More important, from the Carbide point of view, is the fact that there is no system of punitive damages in India. Substantial punitive damage awards in the US could wreck the company and its Indian subsidiary because its insurance does not cover punitive damages. K.V. Rathee, a Supreme Court advocate, who has handled such cases in Canada before, explained: "Punitive damages are no longer looked upon in the US as monstrous, but are awarded to vindicate wrongs arising from antisocial behaviour."

Whatever plea Union Carbide might finally take on jurisdiction, most Indian and American lawyers agree that US courts do, in fact, have jurisdiction in this case. "A parent or a holding company, is fully liable for the actions or inactions of the subsidiary company, even if the subsidiary is located outside the US. Legal action can be filed either inside or outside the US," said Rathee.

In the meantime, US courts will have to keep in mind a recent US Supreme Court opinion that the victims must get "meaningful relief". Lawyers representing the Bhopal victims have argued that the Indian legal system—slow and poorly equipped as it is for mass-tort litigation—would deprive the victims of "meaningful relief".

Even while its jurisdiction plea is pending, Union Carbide will try its best to reach an out-of-court settlement to pay compensation to the Bhopal victims. This again is to avoid paying punitive damages which may have to be awarded if the cases go to US courts. Mediation or arbitration, according to American mediation lawyer Robert E. Stein would be the best way to settle the question of compensation. Even in America, explained Stein, cases involving mass accidents "simply take too long and often seem designed to put money into lawyers pockets rather than provide prompt compensation for victims". Rathee however would like the Indian Government to file a suit on behalf of the victims in a US court, and also set up a body to supervise the distribution of any compensation that the US courts may award.

There is also the other matter of which lawyer will be held by the courts to actually represent the complainants. This question is particularly pertinent because several victims have given the power of attorney to more than one lawyer. There continues to be enormous confusion as well about how precisely the lawyers will seek compensation. Godha says that according to Coale's advise, the most sensible course would be to seek an out-of-court settlement before filing a suit and he has already reportedly sought a meeting with Warren Anderson.

RAGHU RAI

One of the American lawyers with victims outside the Carbide plant

Apart from individuals, Coale is also representing the Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) for the losses and expense involved in the extra burden of work following the tragedy. Bhopal Mayor Dr R.K. Bisariya says that Coale has consented to claim US $ 6 million in damages for BMC and—without charge. (According to reports lawyers have been claiming fees ranging from 33.33 per cent and upwards of the claim received as their share.) Says Bisariya: "We have been advised that US courts are considerably more liberal in matters of compensation than Indian courts which is why we decided to go there. Coale was among the first available in Bhopal, he has a good reputation, and he has an associate here with whom we can keep in touch. So we thought, why not him?"

But among legal circles in Bhopal, there is tremendous suspicion about the foreign lawyers.

One of the most severe critics is Ladli Sharan Sinha, 59-year-old chairman of the Madhya Pradesh Congress(I) Committee's legal cell. Sinha has already filed 120 cases in the court of the district judge, Bhopal, and claims to have another 700 cases ready. Says Sinha: "In the first place, the exercise of taking these cases to the US will prove futile. Secondly, how can all these strangers be trusted? Who are they and what are their interests?"

Sinha is claiming Rs 205,000 for each victim: Rs 100,000 for mental agony and shock, Rs 100,000 for physical disability that may occur in future and Rs 5,000 for incapacity to work. In death cases, he says, the amount will be Rs 300,000. Sinha is convinced that Indian courts too are liberal and is going to press for interim relief of Rs 50,000 to each of the affected. His main grouse is the governmental delay in implementing one of its announcements earlier in December. In compensation cases, claims are severely limited in India because about 10 per cent of the total claim has to be deposited at the outset as court fees. The state Government had announced its intention to waive court fees in the case of those affected by MIC. It was an important step but Sinha says that "because of the delay in the issue of a gazette notification, the decision does not become effective, and the cases I have filed will get delayed".

In the midst of all the legal wrangling, which may last months, and probably years, it will be a time of disquiet for the affected thousands in Bhopal, as also for Union Carbide in the US, which is now arguing with its auditors not to qualify the company's financial report for 1984. An auditor's qualification is intended as a warning sign to investors that the company's financial statements are subject to adjustments, such as would have to be made in case the courts uphold the demand for damages worth billions of dollars.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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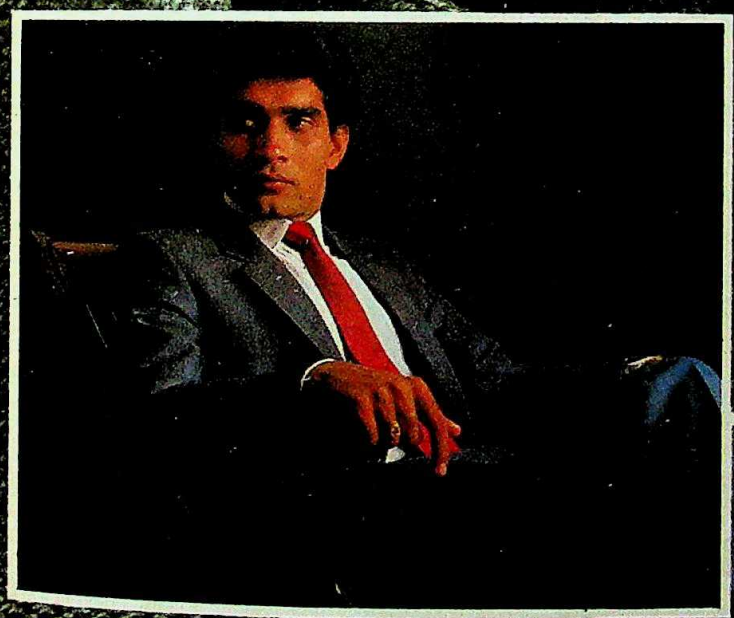

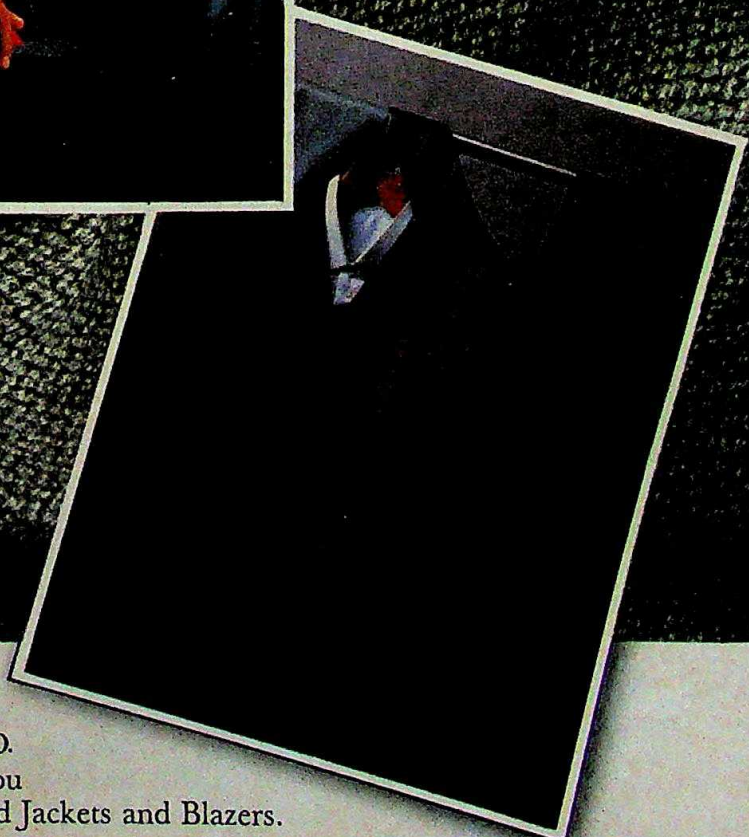

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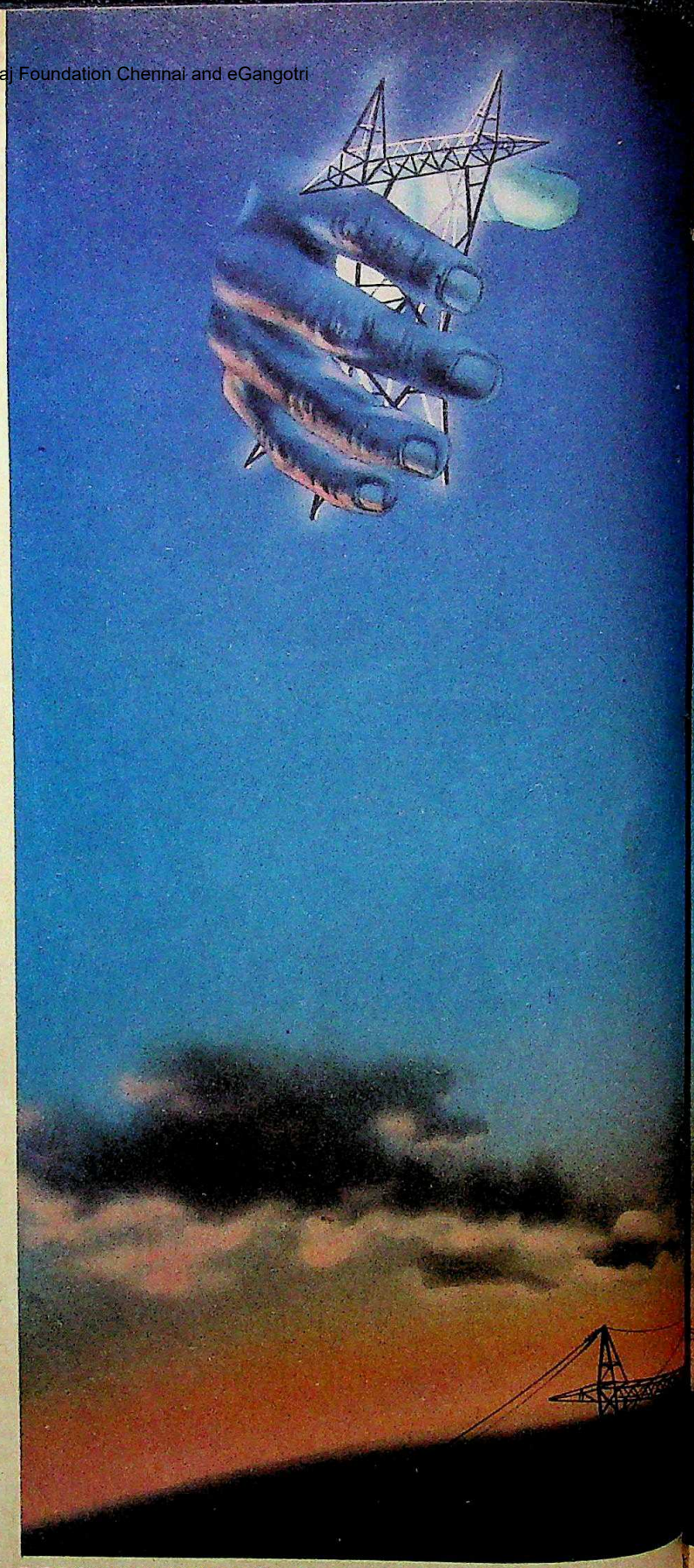

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MIZORAM

A Farewell to Arms

THE WORD *Laldenga* in Mizo means one born on a Sunday. But the maverick leader of the two-decade-old insurgency who goes by that name must have had much more than a one-day holiday in his mind as he boarded the flight for London at Palam last fortnight. He was, in all probability, looking forward to a permanent break from the bloody trek through the bush. And obviously his 600-odd followers in the jungle fastnesses of the Arakans in Burma and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh would be waiting just for the right kind of signal from him for a farewell to arms.

Going even by the flip-flop-flip tradition of the negotiations between the Mizo rebel leader and the Government during the past seven years, the optimism this time seemed based on firm ground. "The Mizo problem has basically been solved," said Laldenga before leaving for London to celebrate Christmas with his exiled family there, and mildly added the rider: "Only a few issues remain, and these are being referred to the prime minister." The veiled hint was that the "few issues" included some vexed questions, but that the Government had agreed to make concessions which could be announced only after the elections.

According to sources, Laldenga and his aides—chief of staff of the outlawed Mizo National Army (MNA), the self-styled brigadier-general Tawnluia, the Mizo National Front (MNF) and Thankima, member of the underground cabinet—have been able to extract the promise of statehood for Mizoram, which is at present a Union territory. There is also the offer of special safeguards for the Mizo language and people, amnesty and a resettlement bonanza for the underground men and, most important, there is the offer of chief ministership, *a la* Sheikh Abdullah in Jammu & Kashmir as soon as the agreement is finalised.

This, sources say, is the key to the whole issue. For years, Laldenga has baulked when presented with draft agreements that promised him everything but the chief ministership, on a platter, in spite of the fact that he had repeatedly offered to align with the Congress(I). Even if the Government wanted to make that last concession there was a stumbling block in the form of Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo and his Peoples Conference government. But the assembly election last June changed the picture as the Congress(I) came into power.

A few days before Laldenga's optimistic announcement, the Congress(I) Chief Minister Lalthanhawla had clearly stated that he would have no hesitation in stepping down to clear the way for Laldenga. But in Delhi, it seems, the Government is still not sure as to whether it would be wise to let Laldenga join the Congress(I) right away. Laldenga, in turn, has made concessions too. He is no longer insistent on a Jammu & Kashmir type status (read Article 370 of the Constitution). He has also dropped demands like the assimilation of vast forest reserves of the neighbouring states of Assam and Manipur, which are inhabited by Mizos or tribes akin to them, and which have formed part of the MNF's dream of a greater Mizoram.

BHAWAN SINGH

"The Mizo problem has basically been solved. Only a few issues remain, and these are being referred to the prime minister."

LALDENGA
Leader of the Mizo National Front

But if there are broad areas of agreement, there are also sharp points of disagreement that remain to be sorted out. Prominent among these are:

▶ The Government's insistence on giving the state governor special powers as in the case of Nagaland, where the governor has a special responsibility for the maintenance of law and order.

▶ The rebel demand that all those convicted for insurgent activity in the past should be brought under the ambit of the amnesty order.

▶ Laldenga's demand for the regularisation of trans-border trade between tribals living in Mizoram and those in the adjoining territories of Burma and Bangladesh.

Officers in New Delhi's South Block say a concession on any of these will be difficult, but the provision regarding the governor's special powers could still be toned down and a promise to take up the issue of border trade with the concerned governments could be a point of compromise. Said a senior official: "G. Parthasarathy has been dealing with Laldenga for long enough to know that what he really wants is power in his little fiefdom and a feeling that he has won. He really couldn't be too bothered about the constitutional niceties unless there are special provisions that stick out much too prominently."

With an agreement round the corner now, new questions are also being raised by many Mizos on the other side of the fence. This includes people like Brigadier Sailo and former district executive council chairman Bawichhuaka, who have been fighting the MNF in there own ways. Many of them fear reprisals. Said a former Peoples Conference minister: "Our worst fears have come true now. All along, as we fought the MNF, the undergrounds used to say 'let *pu* (Mizo for Mr) Laldenga come back. We'll sort you out.' That threat has become a reality now."

Even greater is the fear among the large ex-underground element which surrendered in the late 1970s following a split in the MNF ranks. This includes former MNA commander-in-chief Biakchhunga and Laldenga's one-time ADC and self-styled colonel Lalsangliana, who also happens to be a son of Brigadier Sailo.

But, while the Government will try to extract a firm promise of restraint on reprisals, there can be no stopping yet another, greater question from being raised in the weeks to come. How is it that a government which castigates opposition leaders for having truck with the Akalis, suddenly makes up with a man who ran a 20-year insurgency from foreign soil, causing a degree of bloodshed far greater than witnessed in Punjab?

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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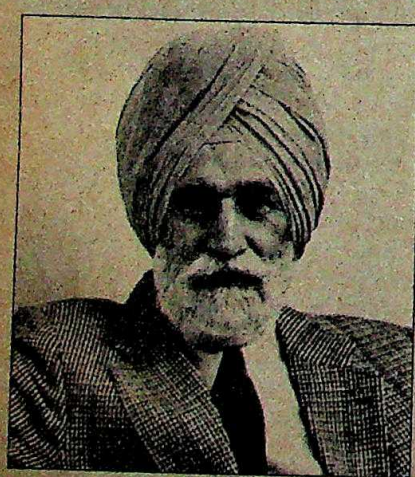
SIKHS

Ripples of Fear

RAMINDAR SINGH



"If the Government wants to keep the Sikhs it must rehabilitate them without delay... We should not consider ourselves second class citizens... The answer lies in asserting ourselves in the mainstream."

ARJAN SINGH
retired air chief marshal

THE MODEST chemist shop near the main entrance to the Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC) township near Ranchi is deserted and silent. It is also empty, looted of its contents, its shutters prised open. The vacant shelves are a stark reminder of the rampaging mob that descended on the township on November 1. A stone's throw away, owner Karambir Singh's home is now a smoke-blackened shell. It too is empty. Karambir, neighbours say, has taken his wife, son and parents away to Punjab.

Karambir and his family are indeed in Punjab, more than 900 km away. Squatting on the floor of a tiny room attached to the historic Dukh Niwaran gurudwara of Patiala, Karambir narrates a sorry story. A qualified pharmacist, Karambir and his family moved to Ranchi in 1960. His was the best chemist's shop in the locality, he says proudly, and life was good, till November 1 when the marauding mobs brought havoc to his doorstep. Nothing was spared—the shop, his home, the possessions inside including a television set and video recorder.

In desperation, Karambir moved to a relief camp but, determined to begin afresh, returned home on November 13. It was a futile move. "I was threatened by the same people who looted my shop," he recalls. "They said I should go away. We were stoned." The unkindest cut was the offer of a few hundred rupees in compensation for lakhs worth of damage. Karambir resents the remark of Ranchi magistrate Balbhadra Prasad Sinha who said the money wasn't meant to compensate him for his loss but only to "buy a handkerchief to wipe your tears". Karambir decided that he had had enough, and spent whatever money he had left to travel to Patiala.

Like Karambir, most of the refugees who have made their way to Punjab did not by and large want to abandon their homes and businesses. Like him, many of them tried to go back to their old lives after the November 1 attacks. And they too were frustrated. Like Raminder Singh, who returned to his home in Dera Gopipur in Himachal Pradesh after escaping to a relief camp. "The moment I reached, the local toughs threatened me," he says. Raminder had little faith in the administration, so he moved once again to Mohali in Punjab, a town on the outskirts of Chandigarh.

Karambir and Raminder are tragically typical of several thousand Sikh fami-

Sikh refugees at the Dukh Niwaran gurudwara in Patiala (top)

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Refugees from Himachal Pradesh in Mohali in Punjab

lies who have been driven to Punjab to escape continuing harassment and intimidation in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar and Himachal Pradesh. The numbers are still insignificant in comparison with the 7 million-odd Sikhs who live outside Punjab, but they are frighteningly large in the context of homes and localities left behind and the relief camps to which they have headed.

Jagteshwar Singh, who is in charge of the relief camp in Patiala's Dukh Niwaran gurudwara, says that the bulk of the 700 refugees there arrived after December 10, swelling quickly as the Lok Sabha elections drew near. The largest number arrived in Patiala on December 21 and 22. At Ludhiana, railway officials said that 100 to 150 Sikh families were arriving on an average every day in the first three weeks of December. Jagteshwar says that most of those that came to him complained of increasing intimidation as the election campaign hotted up. He repeats one slogan the Sikhs say they heard shouted at them: "*Jeeten gay to looten gay, haaren gay to maaren gay*" (We will loot if we win, we will beat you up if we lose).

The chairman of the Central Relief Committee in Ranchi, Lakhbir Singh, believes that rumours of impending violence which drove away so many families were deliberately floated to keep Sikhs away from the polling booths. After all, Ranchi has 35,000 Sikh voters, and their franchise could have made a difference.

To back up his allegation, Lakhbir brandishes a postcard that he and other prominent Ranchi Sikhs received allegedly from the South Chhotanagpur Youth Congress(I). The postcard misinterprets Rajiv Gandhi's speech in New Delhi on November 19 in which he said that the murder of Mrs Gandhi had to be avenged not by violence but by closing ranks and strengthening unity. The offending postcard advises its cadres to avenge the murder of Indira Gandhi by "finishing off the country's traitors".

THAT this was not a threat to be lightly dismissed was affirmed by Ranchi Commissioner N. P. Singh who took serious note of the postcard and sent off copies to Patna, requesting the state Government to take action against the offenders. Commissioner Singh says that other letters were also circulated demanding that Sikhs leave Ranchi before December 18, the day of Rajiv Gandhi's visit. "The timing was very ominous, so the deputy inspector general of police and I wrote to the state Government," he says.

Ranchi isn't by any means unique, and though precise numbers aren't available, there is already considerable difference between what the Government says and what others believe. The Punjab Government says that it has the names and addresses of about 20,000 Sikhs who have come into Punjab from other states. Most of them are from Delhi, Patna, Kanpur, Bareilly, Ranchi and numerous smaller towns. The Akali Dal, on the other hand, says that 40,000 refugees have arrived in Ludhiana alone. One intelligence estimate puts the state-wide figure at 40,000.

Whatever the number, the refugees are already a visible presence in the towns to which they have flocked such as Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Patiala and Ropar. Most of them are lodged in gurudwaras, which have been converted into temporary relief camps run with the help of voluntary agencies. Some of their inhabitants, those who suffered personal loss in the violence, still appear to be shell-shocked. Others have already begun to look for a new life: they are seeking jobs, keeping an eye out for a new shop or even pushing handcarts to make a living.

Inevitably, the stories that they have brought with them are increasing tension in an already charged atmosphere. As Jagteshwar Singh, in Patiala narrates his tales of the atrocities perpetrated against innocent Sikhs, villagers from the surrounding area who are supplying milk and vegetables to the camp shake their heads in disbelief and mutter "*Wahe Guru*". The stories will undoubtedly be retold a hundred times, and in all probability get exaggerated as they pass from mouth to mouth. The bitterness, instead of subsiding, will live on.

Understandably, the refugees have put the authorities in a tight corner. The Punjab Government, says Chief Secretary S.S. Dhanoa, "would not like to encourage Sikhs to move here. Our policy is to keep these people out, to ask the Governments of their states to look after them." He adds that those in need of help in pressing their claims for compensation and insurance are being helped.

The Government is understandably concerned that the trickle of refugees, if it isn't reversed, could easily become a deluge that would swamp the state and its prosperous economy. Dhanoa feels that for the majority of the refugees, the move to Punjab is only temporary. Sikhs started to come to Punjab only after electioneering started and "indications are that most of them will go back if nothing further happens". He has written letters asking the chief secretaries of the states from which they've come to ensure the security of their lives and property. Home Secretary N. N. Vohra feels that 80 per cent of the refugees will eventually go back.

The refugees themselves don't seem to think so. Asked if he would go back to Shahdara in Delhi from where he fled after the massacres of November 1 and 2, Santokh Singh shakes his head, muttering, "*Toba, toba.* I will earn my bread here." Kulwant Singh, a machinist in the ordnance factory in Kanpur, took a week's leave to come to Punjab, but is ready to abandon his secure job rather than return to the city where he saw three Sikh colleagues burned alive. Sixty-five-year-old Lakha Singh, who moved to Sheikhpura in Bihar's Monghyr district some 35 years ago to set up a small cloth shop, says: "I don't trust the people or the

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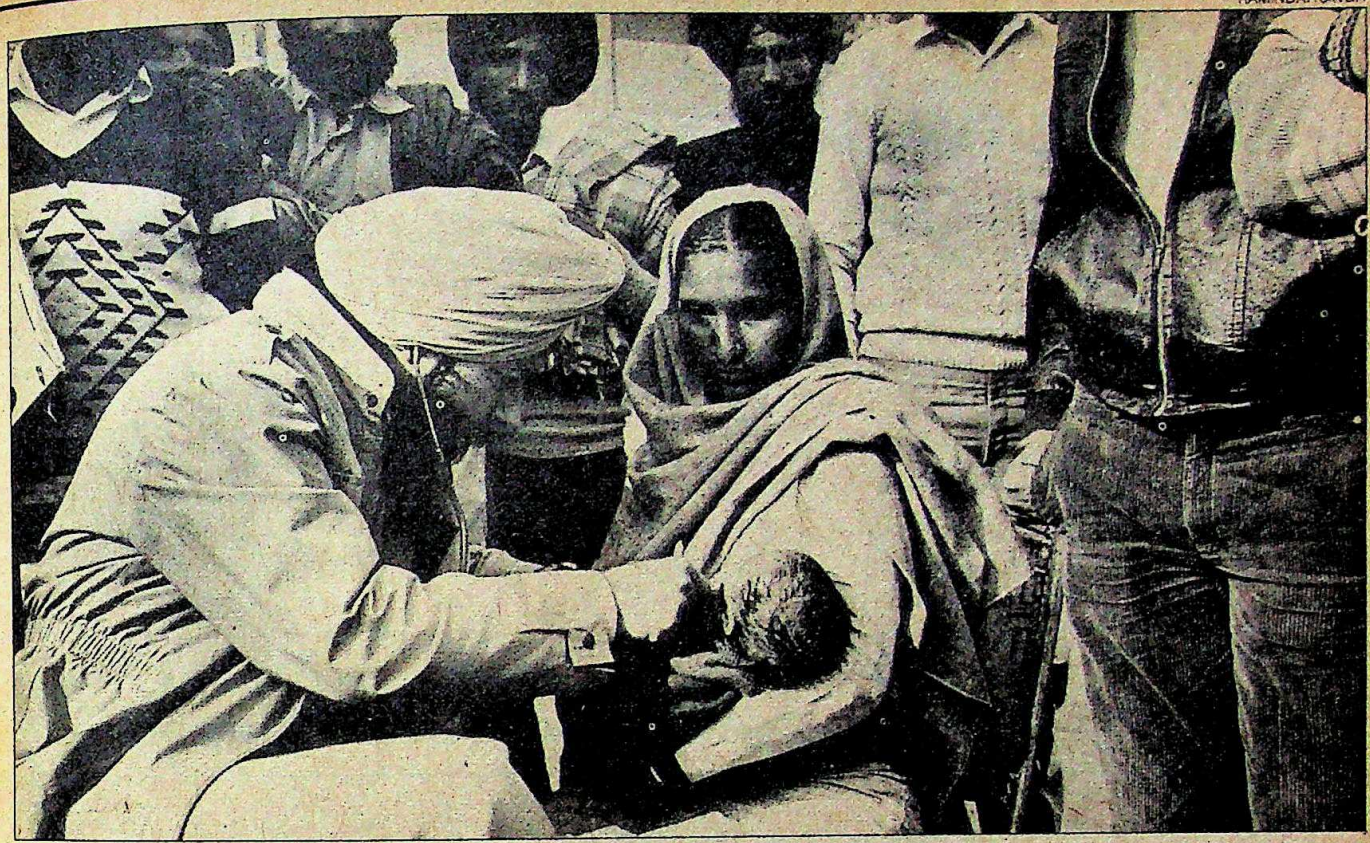
RAMINDAR SINGH



A doctor examines the baby of a woman widowed in Delhi's Trilokpuri violence

authorites any more." He has no intention of returning.

The refugee influx has already begun to force up property prices in parts of Punjab! There is now a brisk demand for shops and homes that went abegging for two years when extremist violence brought commercial activity to a virtual halt. Land prices in Chandigarh have risen 30 per cent in one month and over 100 plots and houses have already changed hands at these prices. Prosperous Sikh farmers from Haryana are among the buyers. "We have never done such business," says real estate agent Amarjit Singh Sethi. "I have sold 20 plots and houses in Chandigarh and Mohali in the last six weeks."

The price of agricultural land has also doubled and it is now selling for Rs 75,000 an acre in the area around Ludhiana. Land just outside the Ludhiana municipal limits was recently bought at this price by Sikhs coming from Ranchi, and in one instance 80 Sikh families have joined together to form a cooperative housing society on 3 acres outside Ludhiana. Each family will get a small two room apartment.

Predictably, some of the property changing hands belongs to Hindus who want to move out of Punjab. Hardev Singh, a Patiala property dealer, opens his register and rattles off the names of 51 persons, most of them Hindus, who have asked him to help them sell their land or homes.

Punjab Home Secretary N.N. Vohra accuses property dealers in Mohali of "scalping" outstate Sikhs. He points out that some landlords fell prey to the temptation of several months rent in advance only to find their premises locked up and deserted with no prospects of further rent payments.

There has also been a run on bank lockers with the arrival of refugees. Some 700 new lockers were rented out in Ludhiana alone in December. Some Sikhs came to reconnoitre hired lockers in anticipation of a move to Punjab. They've also opened bank accounts. Intelligence estimates say that at least Rs 1 crore has been sent to Ludhiana since the trouble began.

The Punjab Government isn't alone in wishing away the refugees. A sizeable section of Sikh opinion also feels that the answer to the problem does not lie in large numbers of Sikhs trooping off to Punjab. "The answer lies in asserting ourselves in the mainstream," says retired air chief marshal Arjan Singh. "We should not consider ourselves second class citizens." But he adds that if this is to come about and if the Government "wants to keep the Sikhs, it must rehabilitate them without delay," and punish those guilty of the crimes against them. "The Government has done nothing to arrest the culprits of the November violence," he adds.

The former air force chief isn't alone in voicing this opinion. Many others, both Sikh and Hindu, feel that the essence of the refugee problem cannot be tackled unless confidence is built up. In its absence, the only things being built up are barricades on gurudwaras in such diverse places as Calcutta, Patna, Ranchi and Kanpur. Applications for gun licences are pouring in by the hundreds. Ranchi Commissioner N.P. Singh feels that these requests are justified and he plans to issue them after the elections. He admits that the main obstacle in restoring Sikh confidence is their "lack of faith in the administration, primarily the police". Singh, a Rajput from Uttar Pradesh, addressed Sikh congregations in the main Ranchi gurudwara and sought forgiveness for the violence against the community. Along with the DIG, he took a vow before the assembled congregation that their blood would be shed before that of any Sikh.

But attitudes such as this are still rarely expressed, and as long as they remain the exception the refugee traffic is not likely to ebb.

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Ranchi and Patiala
with GOBIND THUKRAL in Ludhiana

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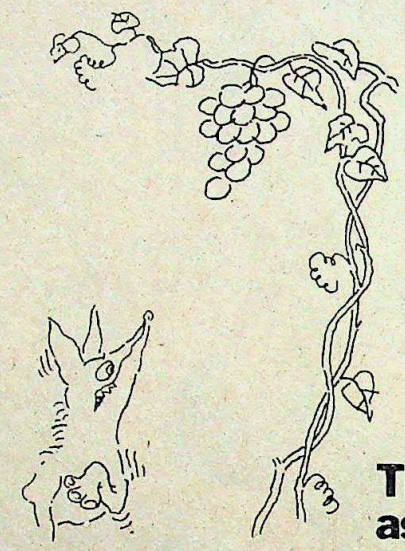

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As a vulgar show of power, they've got 83 service centres fully equipped with spares, spread all over the country.

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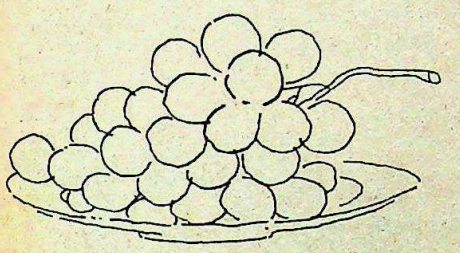

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SRI LANKA

The Battle Within

PRESIDENT—and Commander-in-Chief of the Sri Lankan Army—J.R. Jayewardene, whose passion for military affairs makes books on the subject his favourite bedside reading, took his industries minister Cyril Mathew by complete surprise when he removed him from the Cabinet last fortnight. The pre-Christmas sneak attack on Jayewardene's most formidable cabinet dissident on the issue of the draft district and provincial council bill seemed to be perfectly timed. But eventually, mounting pressure from the majority Sinhala Buddhists—whose champion Mathew is —forced Jayewardene's Cabinet to drop the draft bill. Typically, though, the official explanation given was that the response of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) had been negative. In Madras, TULF General-Secretary Appapillai Amirthalingam protested: "That's preposterous. Certainly we felt that the proposals left a lot to be desired. But that doesn't mean we are not prepared to talk."

Jayewardene's hand was evidently forced by the threat of a protest march by Buddhists, who felt the proposal contained too many concessions to the minority Tamils. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, whose civil rights have been suspended by the Jayewardene Government, did a *volte face* to discredit the very proposal she had earlier favoured. But Jayewardene had come under increasing pressure from both India and the US to find a political solution to the vexed problem of ethnic minorities. His dilemma now provides ironic amusement to those who see it as some kind of "retributive justice". In 1956, when the then prime minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike almost conceded Tamil regional autonomy in the famous Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact, it was Jayewardene who managed to force its abrogation by organising a march of Buddhists. "Jayewardene is hoist with his own petard now. He was the one who courted trouble by inviting Buddhists to the all-party conference," remarked Amirthalingam.

Not many believe that Jayewardene's buckling in to pressure is a setback. "We are more determined than ever to fight for a separate Tamil Eelam state. The Sinhalese Government has shown itself in its true colours. All Tamils will now see beyond any doubt that there is no alternative to fighting for a separate state," says a source close to the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. But Amirthalingam cautions against such an extreme stand. "Guerrilla warfare, landmines and ambushes are all factors to reckon with only up to a point," says the TULF leader. "If the Sinhalese army mounts an all-out attack on the Tamils, it could be disastrous. For every handful of Sinhalese soldiers or policemen who are falling victim to terrorist attacks, hundreds of innocent Tamils are getting killed in return."

For Jayewardene at least, it was something of a defeat. For strategic reasons, he thought it fit to make the boldest tactical move of his political career in sacking Mathew. The former industries minister has not only been the most consistent and uncompromising champion of the Sinhala-Buddhist cause in the ruling United National Party (UNP), he is also the president of the party's powerful trade union federation. But Jayewardene evidently thought, after much deliberation, that it was worth making a martyr of Mathew if only to win approval with the international community. He calculated that the pressure for a political settlement could no longer be resisted without disastrous consequences, especially economic. A top presidential advisor, Dr Esmond Wickremasinghe has warned of "insurgency conditions" in the south of the country if prices continue to rise.

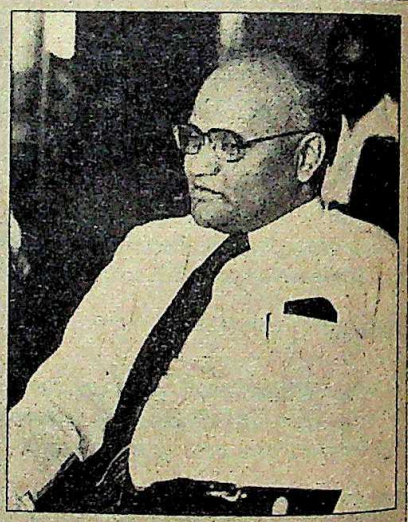
The recent visit of the US President's special envoy, General Vernon Walters may have been the clinching factor. The US has made it clear that a political settlement acceptable to the minority Tamils must precede any serious US statement on the fight against "residual terrorism". In this at least there is substantial and, to many Sri Lankans who expected an open-ended US comment, a surprising convergence of Indian and American approaches. In fact, there is a small minority of Sri Lankan analysts who believe that a parallel Indo-American exercise on the Sri Lankan crisis could be the first step in the

J.R. Jayewardene

Jayewardene's hand was forced by the threat of a protest march by Buddhists, who felt the proposal contained too many concessions to the minority Tamils.

"Jayewardene is hoist with his own petard now. He was the one who courted trouble by inviting Buddhists to the conference."

APPAPILLAI AMIRTHALINGAM
general secretary, TULF



Appapillai Amirthalingam

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widely predicted improvement in relations between India and the US.

There has also been pressure from the World Bank, Sri Lanka's all-important aid-giver and creditor. Only a negotiated settlement, goes the argument, can help restore stability and business confidence. But none of this stood up against the protests of the Buddhists both outside and even within Jayewardene's own party and cabinet. The movement against the draft proposals cuts across party lines, unifying disparate political forces including Mrs Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the Buddhist clergy, smaller opposition parties and even the ruling UNP dissident groups and partymen who had scores to settle with Jayewardene.

Sinhalese sentiment has been outraged at the killing of Sinhala soldiers and policemen by Tamil terrorists, and the attitude of the Sinhala middle class, the influential businessmen and petty traders has visibly hardened. Though every significant group renounces the idea of a military solution, the thought of a military victory is a comforting hope.

According to one point of view, Jayewardene did not expect much from the draft proposals anyway. It is believed that the President's capitulation has not lost him any of the ground he hoped to gain internationally—he will now be able to say with perfect sincerity that he did attempt a political settlement but it was not acceptable to the Tamils. Says Amirthalingam: "I had a hunch it was going to happen...the only hope for us is now India. We entered into negotiations with the Sri Lankan Government only because of India." Amirthalingam's party now banks on Rajiv Gandhi's promise that the policies of the late Mrs Gandhi would be followed on this issue. "Which means that India will continue to take an active interest in finding a quick solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka," says Amirthalingam hopefully.

According to the Sri Lankan National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali, renewed efforts to resolve the issue will be made after the Indian general elections. But Athulathmudali himself has along with Prime Minister R. Premadasa characterised Mathew's sacking as a ritual sacrifice to an imperious and blood-thirsty "big-brother"—India. Whatever the merit of this combative statement, and whatever the worth of the draft proposal, the latest development on the ethnic issue in strife-torn Sri Lanka seems to preclude undue optimism.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI with MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

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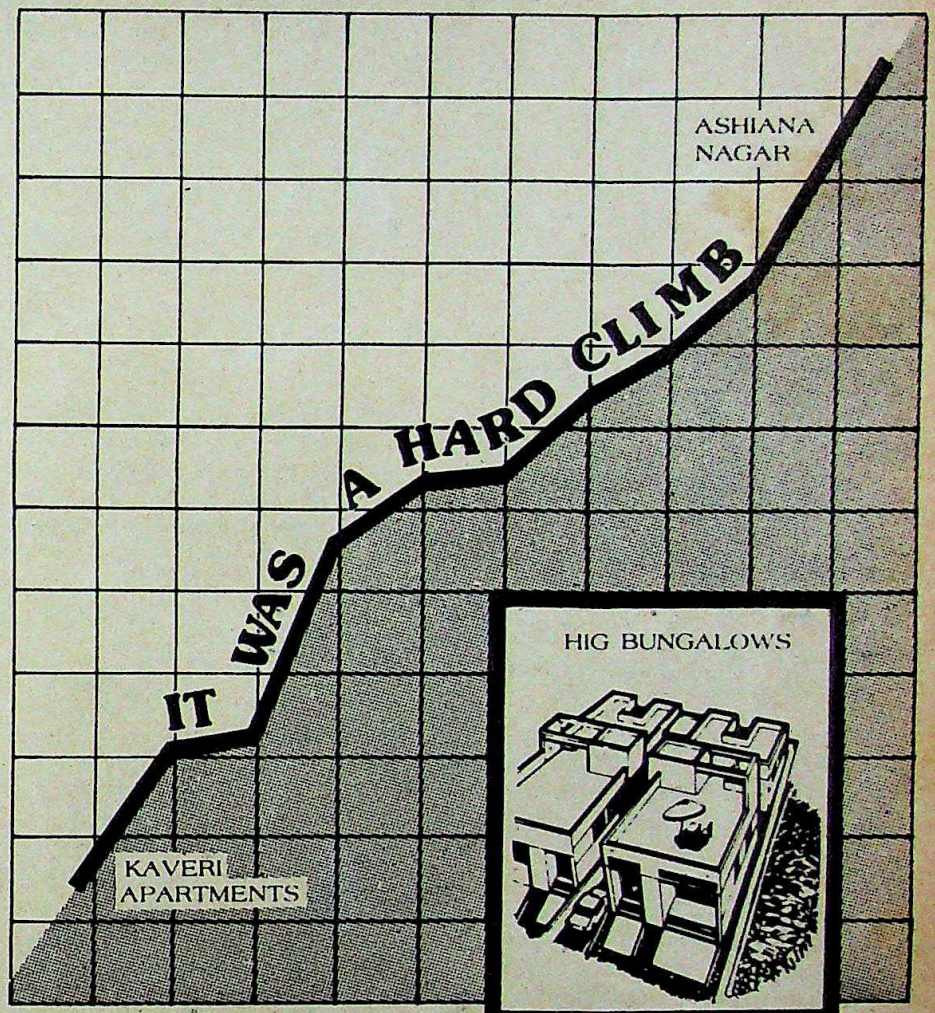

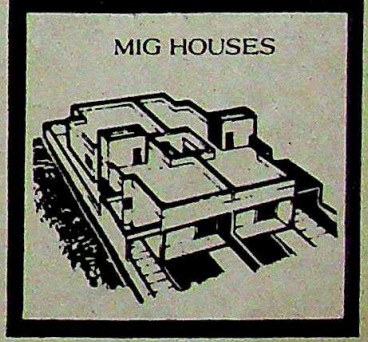

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

SWRAJ Paul, whose bid to buy substantial shareholdings in two Indian companies suffered a serious setback following an adverse Bombay High Court judgement in November, now has a new option in case the Supreme Court upholds the Bombay judgement. Paul is thinking of the possibility of donating the shares he has paid for to a new society that will be devoted to "cleaning up Indian business". The London-based businessman calculates that the Indian companies involved can hardly refuse to register the shares, worth Rs 1 3 crore, if they are given to a local trust, and that the trust will act as a permanent watchdog and keep an eye on and expose malpractices by company managements. Paul is yet to take a final decision, and describes the proposed trust as a "thought" that has come to mind.

BIFURCATION

THE GOVERNMENT has revived a three-year-old proposal to divide the public sector Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) into two separate organisations, one comprising the southern units at Bangalore and Palghat, and the other being constituted by the units in the north, at Naini, Rae Bareli and the project in Gonda. The controversial move is based on the argument that the northern and southern wings of the company have not always pulled together, but senior company managers are opposed to a bifurcation.

The company, meanwhile, has been headless for six months since the last managing director resigned in June. The contenders for the top slot are K.P.P. Nambiar, chairman of the Kerala State Electronics Development Corporation (Keltron), and R.P. Subramanian, now acting managing director at ITI.

BUMPY TRAIL

THE AUTOMOBILE companies may be seen as a growth sector in Indian industry, but an analysis of 12 established companies in this sector shows a deteriorating sales and profit performance. Six of the 12 companies suffered a decline in net sales during their financial year that ended in 1983-84, while two others saw only a marginal rise in sales. The profitability picture is even bleaker, with eight companies suffering a drop in profits before tax and three others showing only a marginal improvement. Those suffering a drop in both sales and profits are Automobile Products of India, Ashok Leyland, Bajaj Tempo, Mopeds India, Premier Automobiles and Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company. Overall, the 12 companies saw sales rise by barely 4 per cent to Rs 2,046 crore, while profits before tax dropped almost 20 per cent to Rs 107.6 crore. Profits after tax dropped over 27 per cent to Rs 76 3 crore.

TELEVISION TURN AROUND

TELEVISION sets have been in short supply for months because of the rapid growth in the number of TV transmitters. Numerous manufacturers have as a result enjoyed waiting lists and even premia on the official prices of the sets. Suddenly, however, the shortage has given way to an easy market situation, and the prices of a number of sets have dropped by upto 15 per cent. Only one company still enjoys a waiting list, while several others have seen their waiting lists disappear almost overnight.

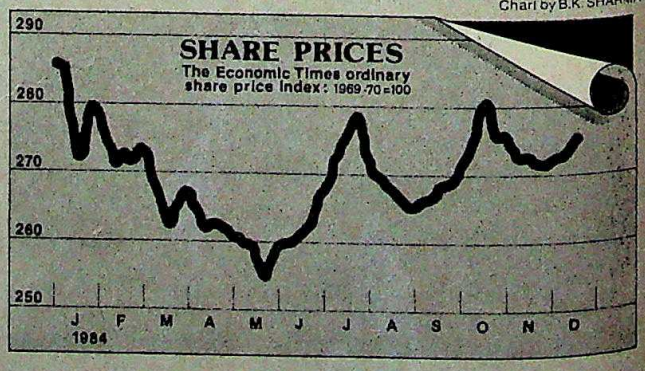
ABORTED MOVES

A CONCERTED move to form a new drug lobby, in addition to the three that exist already, has made little headway despite prolonged confabulations. Several Indian drug companies with a stake in the manufacture of Indian drugs had felt that the three industry associations representing the foreign drug companies, the wholly Indian-owned ones and small units were not speaking up in favour of Indian-owned bulk drug manufacturers at a time when the Government was framing a new policy for the drug industry. Companies like Ranbaxy Laboratories, Alembic Chemical Works, Sarabhai, Unichem, East India Pharmaceuticals and Cipla Pharmaceuticals have also wanted preferential treatment for wholly Indian companies vis-a-vis foreign-owned ones and therefore started talks on forming a new association. But differences arose when some of the participants insisted that all the members of the new body proposed would have to leave the existing associations. The majority is unwilling to do this, and only Cipla has so far quit the Indian Drug Manufacturers Association.

STEADY SLIDE

THE STOCK-markets in the country did poorly during 1984, with *The Economic Times* share index registering a drop from 286.7 in early January to 277.7 towards the end of December. This decline of over 3.1 per cent is in marked contrast to the rise in the index of over 20 per cent during

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



1983. In fact, the index was on the decline during most of 1984, dropping to a low of 259.4 at the end of May before beginning a gradual climb and peaking at around 282 in mid-October, but only to slide again. The closing weeks of the year saw a steady trend and if the election results are to the stock-markets liking there could be a pick-up in the new year.

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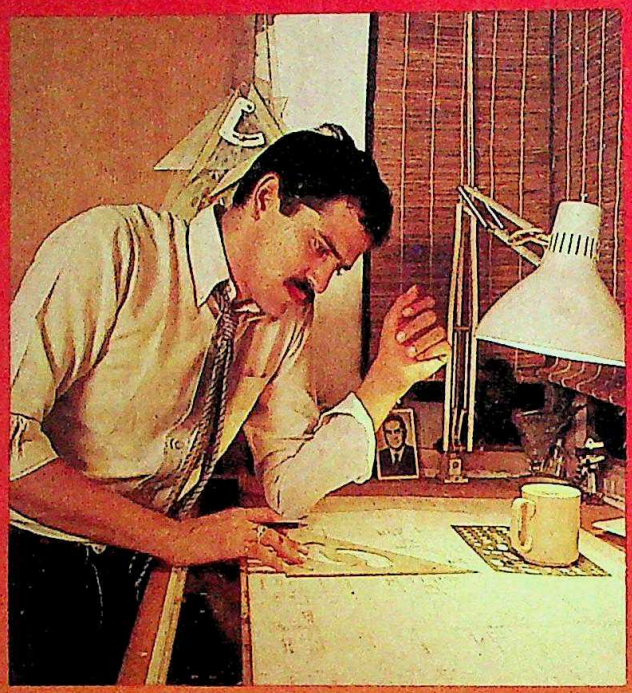
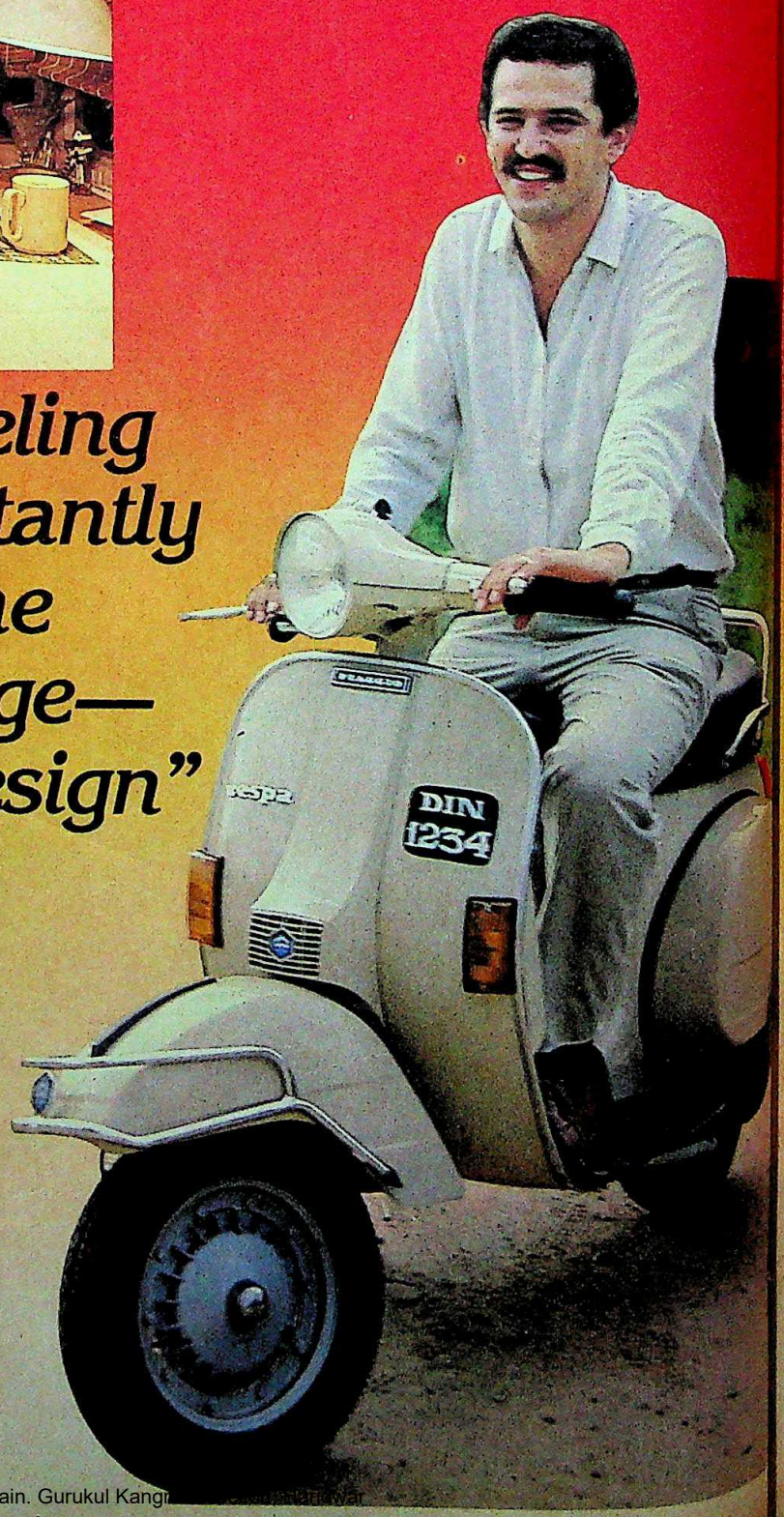
ON THE ROAD WITH A VESPA XE RIDER



"I enjoy the feeling because it constantly confronts me with a challenge— excellence in design"



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AND PIAGGIO OF ITALY.

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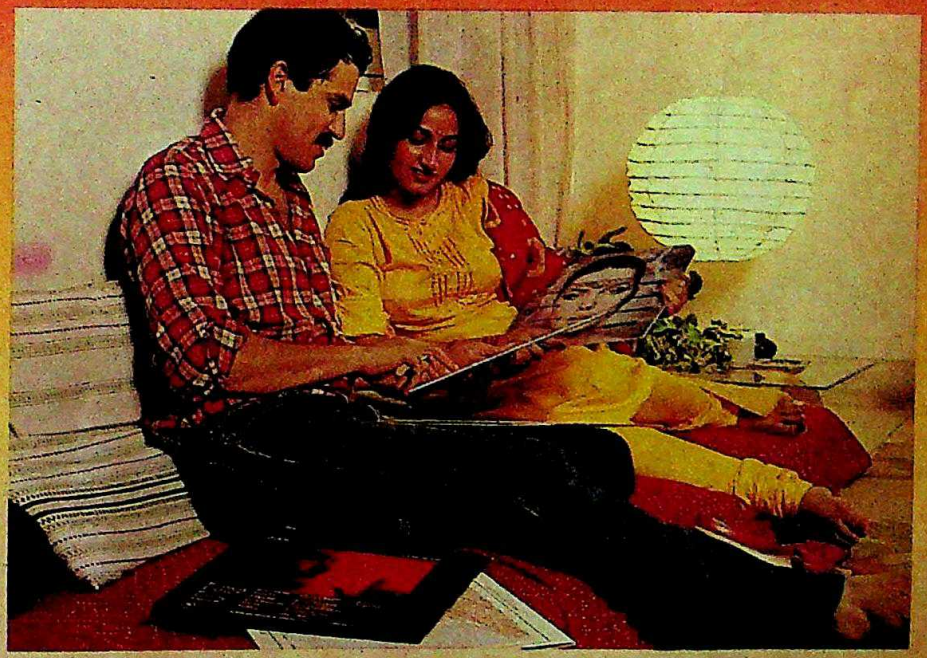

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INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

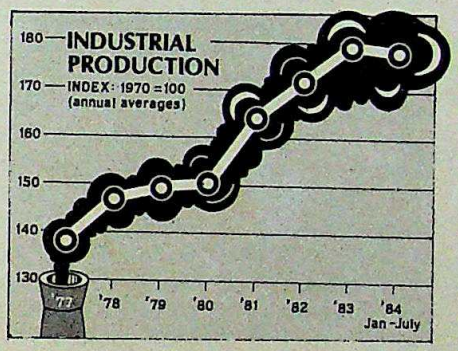
Independent Course

THERE is good news for the countries of the Third World. Most economists in the West are saying that the recession is over and things will start looking up in 1985. They have of course said this, or something like this, before, but one should not look a gift horse in the mouth, particularly when he is trooping in with glad tidings. A US newsmagazine has predicted that the US gross national product (GNP) will expand 2 per cent this quarter and then grow a healthy 3 to 4 per cent by the end of the year. Consumer confidence is apparently returning and the US Commerce Department said last week that November retail sales were up 1.8 per cent, the first such monthly increase since April. Industrial production is also up, in the United States as well as in Europe, while stocks of unsold goods remain lean.

This is cheerful news for Third World countries, for there is evidence that most developing countries depend for their growth on steadily expanding trade and capital inflows, both of which are closely related to the level of world economic activity. You only have to look at the growth pattern over the last 20 years or so to see how close the link is. If you take the industrial countries as a group, their rates of growth have been coming down steadily since 1960, from 5 per cent a year during 1960-73 to 2.8 per cent in 1973-79, and further down to 1.3 per cent in 1980 and a negative growth rate in 1982. For the developing countries as a whole, you have also more or less the same pattern, with one major exception, or rather two—India and China.

While the rates of growth all over the world were going down between 1960-73 and 1980, they were actually going up in India (as well as in China). In fact, they nearly doubled in India, from 3.6 per cent a year to 6.6 per cent. The point I am trying to make is that the fact that the recession is lifting in the industrial countries may have a bearing on the economies of other countries but not necessarily on that of India. India's is a unique economy, a largely autonomous one, which is only slightly affected by currents, favourable or otherwise, elsewhere in the world.

You only have to look at the growth figures during the last five years to realise this. They have been good years for India—though not as exceptional as the Government would like us to believe—with an average growth rate, taking good years with bad ones, of well over 5 per cent a year, while they were anything but good years for the industrial countries. It is true that growth did not come, not all of it anyway, from the country's own resources, and we had to



go in for a huge borrowing from the International Monetary Fund as well as from private lenders.

Was it perhaps due to the fact that our exports were also booming? There is no evidence whatsoever for this. There is apparently no clear connection between growth and exports, no positive link anyway. If there is any connection at all, it is of a reverse kind, exports going up when the growth rate is low and vice-versa. In 1976-77, the GNP growth rate was only 0.8 per cent while exports went up by 27 per cent, something of a record. In the following year, the export rate fell sharply to 5 per cent while GNP went up by 8.8 per cent, also something of a record. The same pattern repeats itself year after year, pin-pointing the fact that the Indian economy is not overly dependent on foreign trade. This is what you expect of an autonomous and a self-reliant economy and the expectation is not belied by the figures.

The word 'autonomy' is V.S. Naipaul's. Writing in a Bombay magazine after Mrs Gandhi's assassination, Naipaul maintains that India is too large, too autonomous to collapse just like that. The economic organisation of the country is such that it can perpetuate itself. The same point is made by another student of the Indian scene, Robert Hardgrave Jr, whose controversial book, *India Under Pressure* made headlines in the press last week. In reviewing various aspects of India's political, social and economic fabric, Hardgrave says that over the past three decades, despite relatively low rates of growth, the Indian economy has acquired considerable muscle. It remains a half-filled vessel, bemoaned by those who see only poverty, inequality and disparity but applauded by those who see self-sufficiency in agriculture and industry and more Indians better off than they have ever been.

India's basic strength lies in the self-reliance of its economy, particularly the industrial economy, and anything that undercuts that strength would be not only immensely damaging to our stability as a nation but also to its growth prospects over the long run. One would not go so far as to maintain, as Naipaul does, that we have become autonomous, because autonomy by itself means nothing, and can be misleading. After all, India has been an autonomous economy for centuries with only marginal trading with the outside world, but that kind of low-level autonomy did not prevent us from going under when attacked. What we have now acquired is an autonomy at a much higher level of technology and management, and one with an inbuilt mechanism for self-perpetuation. As between growth and self-reliance we have deliberately chosen the latter and one does not have to rely on US and other experts to reassure ourselves that it was the right choice to make.

But just because it was the right choice during the first critical years of development need not mean that it is the right choice for all times. There is now considerable pressure on India from the outside as well as inside for shifting gear from autonomy to faster growth through foreign investment and heavy imports of new technology. Not a day passes without one foreign delegation or another calling at Udyog Bhavan and other higher reaches of the Government. Indian businessmen too are doing their bit and one of their leaders said last week that there was enough scope for borrowings abroad to the tune of US $5 billion (Rs 6,000 crore) instead of the current level of around one. All this is heady wine, but growth, like love, is a many-splendoured thing, and its cost is ultimately measured as much in social and political coin as the gross national product.

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ECONOMY

Hoping for Change

WITH an overwhelming number of voters plumping for the Congress(I) and Rajiv Gandhi, the new government in New Delhi is not short of friends. But great expectations come close on the heels of great victories. And within hours of the Congress(I)'s election victory last fortnight, it was clear that while businessmen were optimistic in their mood about the new government, they were also pitching high their expectations of what the Government would do.

Industrialists, company executives and businessmen said they looked forward to more "pragmatic" government policies, an opening up of the economy, a frontal attack on corruption, a modernisation drive, lower taxes, the cutting of red tape, and much more. Asked for specific suggestions on what they would like the new government to do, they mentioned the need to vastly increase investment in housing, to allow the private sector a greater role in power generation, and a focusing of attention on the constraints posed by infrastructural bottlenecks.

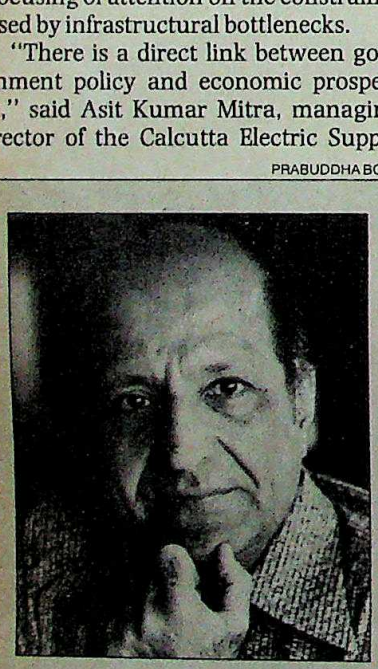
"There is a direct link between government policy and economic prosperity," said Asit Kumar Mitra, managing director of the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation. "Greater efficiency and productivity will save the country crores of rupees, and the Government must preach the gospel of work ethics." Praful Anubhai, managing director of Rustom Mills, expected the new government to "bring about major policy changes to boost business." Jahar Sengupta, chairman of Chloride India, felt "the Government must continue with the trend towards liberalisation of economic policy, specifically in the areas of industrial licensing, import policy and tax policies." Industrialist B.K. Birla said: "The new government must realise there can be no going back and it must be able to adopt policies for fulfilling the aspirations of the new generation." And Brahm Vasudeva, chairman of Pressure Cookers and Appliances, said: "We want a pretty rapid dismantling of controls and protection across the board. An industry which thrives on this kind of protection is not an industry."

Much of the expectation hinged on the person of the prime minister, and the hope that he would introduce new ideas and a fresh approach to economic problems. Said R.V.Ramani, managing director of Mettur Chemicals: "Rajiv has shown a lot of interest in industrialisation and modernisation, and he is sure to introduce a new system of working that we have not been used to before. And he has also developed political clout now." Added Dipak Roy, director of the tea broking firm J.Thomas and Company: "What the economy needs now is new ideas from Rajiv to give it fresh momentum."

Even in terms of economic priorities, many businessmen spoke the language of the Congress(I) election manifesto. N.Shankar, managing director of Chemicals and Plastics Ltd, said: "I expect Rajiv to accelerate the pace of development of communication facilities, telephones and television. These measures may initially be ad hoc, but even that will do a lot of good." And B.K. Birla highlighted the importance of housing: "The housing crisis can only be solved if the Government allows banks to advance long-term low-interest loans to the middle class." And indeed, the Congress(I) manifesto talks of setting up at least three more housing development finance corporations and giving a major thrust to housing programmes.

Many see in past initiatives taken by Rajiv Gandhi a pointer to the directions of future policy, and the most common reference is to the changes introduced in electronics and computers. Said Inderjit Singh, chief executive of Fusebase India Pvt Ltd, which makes cooking appliances and television sets: "The computer policy is an indication of the direction in which Rajiv will take the country, so one can expect further liberalisations." Added

PRABUDDHA BOSE



"We should have a meritocracy. We've been governed by mediocre people for too long."

NANI PALKHIVALA,
Chairman, Associated Cement

PRABUDDHA BOSE

"The government must allow banks to advance long-term low-interest housing loans."

B.K. BIRLA
Chairman, Century Spinning

PRABUDDHA BOSE

"The government must continue with the liberalisation of economic policy."

JAHAR SENGUPTA
Chairman, Chloride India.

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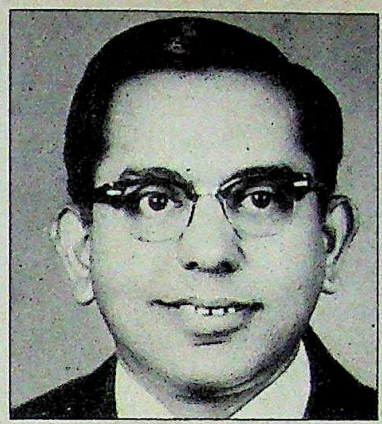
HARI OM GULATI

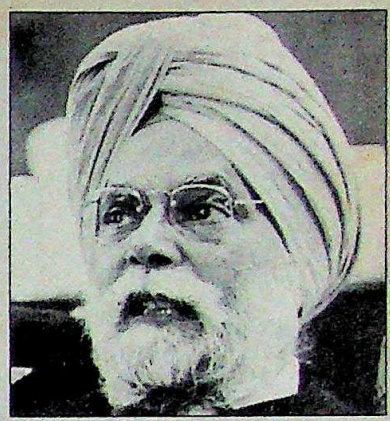
"We don't need relaxations in policy. What we need is a removal of unnecessary procedures."

V.P. PUNJ
President, Federation of Indian Export Org.



"Rajiv's pronouncements lead one to believe that he is not wedded to doctrines."

M.V. ARUNACHALAM.
Chairman, EID Parry.



"The government can give the task of simplifying procedures to a management consultancy agency."

MANMOHAN SINGH
Chairman and Managing Director, Frick India.

Apoorva Shah, chairman of Gujarat Steel Tubes: "With Rajiv, one expects India to leap into 21st century technology." M.V. Arunachalam, chairman of EID Parry, said: "Rajiv's pronouncements to date lead one to believe that he is not wedded to doctrines, and that he realises there are limits to what the state can effectively and justifiably undertake."

There was also broad support for the notion that private experts should be called upon to improve government functioning. Manmohan Singh, chairman and managing director of Frick India, said: "The Government can give the task of simplifying procedures to a management consultancy agency, and government departments dealing with exports should be handled by people on deputation from the private sector. The United Kingdom has done this with some effect." Added Shankar of Chemicals and Plastics: "I hope Rajiv will induct capable people into government, not necessarily bureaucrats or politicians, but lawyers, tax experts, industrialists and others also." V.P. Punj, president of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, spoke in a similar vein when he said: "We don't need relaxations in policy. What we need is a removal of unnecessary procedures." And Nani Palkhivala, chairman of the Associated Cement Companies, said: "We should have a meritocracy. We've been governed by mediocre people for too long."

Sikh businessmen, naturally, had a special point of view. And Manmohan Singh of Frick India said that while he and most Sikh businessmen will continue to invest outside Punjab, they expected justice from the Government. "The only thing the Sikhs want is that identifiable culprits who took part in the riots should be punished." But even other businessmen saw the prospect of stability as a major asset. Said Arvind Dalal, director of the Bombay stock exchange: "Whatever the policies Rajiv follows, at least we have stability—and this is the most important thing for a businessman."

IN THE final assessment, most businessmen however seem to expect what they would from any government: lower taxes, liberalisations, pragmatism, an easing of controls, and so on. The distinguishing feature now is an edge of real hope that at least some of all that will now come to pass, that a new man at the helm with ideas of his own might think their language.

Certainly, if the new government wants to move quickly in new directions, it has a body of expert opinion waiting for attention. A number of expert reports on tax reform are already with the Finance Ministry, another on black money will be submitted this month, and yet another on ways of replacing physical controls with fiscal ones is being readied. A shift away from a "dos and don'ts" approach to one that guides economic behaviour through differential taxes has also been recommended by the Reserve Bank of India Governor Manmohan Singh, while L.K.Jha has recommended still further liberalisation of controls on industry.

The best indication of the thinking of the Congress(I) under Rajiv Gandhi is, of course, the party's election manifesto. This, like all its predecessors, is full of a series of limitless commitments, but some stand out as being meant seriously. There is, for instance, the obvious intention to give a boost to housing activity, a repeated emphasis on improving rice productivity in the eastern region (seen by experts as an area that is already showing signs of a production spurt), stress on modernising industry and upgrading its general technological level, a promise to formulate a new policy to deal with industrial sickness, persistent references to the need to register a presence in sunrise industries like electronics and biotechnology, and a clear desire to modernise the educational system.

Oddly enough, there is no real reference to the need to radically rewrite tax policies, let alone the lowering of taxes. The only budgetary promise is to abolish the compulsory deposit scheme, which affects just four million income tax payers.

The key word through all this, however, is change. That is what the industrialists, executives and businessmen expect, that is what the party manifesto indicates, and that is what the new government will first be judged by.

—T.N. NINAN with bureau reports

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DCM

Troubled Transition

DCM COMPANY shareholders' meetings can be quite boring. Even if a company chairman or managing director is bidding goodbye, the only distinguishing feature is a slight overlay of sentiment. This one, however, was indeed quite different.

Under a giant pandal erected to hold DCM's 96th annual general meeting, Chairman and Managing Director Bharat Ram announced that both he and younger brother Charat Ram, who is also managing director, would be laying down office in March. Bharat Ram then invited Charat Ram to make his farewell comments, and that was when a dispute that had till then been confined to family councils and the company's boardroom finally erupted in the open.

In a blistering attack on the period during which Bharat Ram had stewarded the company, Charat Ram said DCM had lost its earlier "velocity", that there was now a "crisis of confidence", that things had reached a stage when a freeze had been declared on all investments, that profits had stagnated despite a trebling of investments since 1970, and that the company's shareholders had not got the benefits that those of even sister companies had.

The long-standing dispute between the two brothers had been an open secret in the company for years. And it was equally well known that matters had come to a head after Charat Ram was forced to accept a board decision that he should relinquish office simultaneously with Bharat Ram (INDIA TODAY, November 15, 1984). But with the dispute out in the open at last, the shareholders now joined the fray.

For the next hour and more, it was a virtual free-for-all. One shareholder asked why Charat Ram was being forced to leave the company against his will, another alleged that the company had been forced to doctor its accounts to show even the modest level of profits declared in the profit and loss account, and a third launched a frontal attack on Bharat Ram himself. At the same time, another band of shareholders extolled Bharat Ram's services to the company, drew attention to his stature in the world of business, and proposed that he be conferred the honorary status of chairman emeritus—a move that eventually got the approval of the general body. No comparable status was proposed for Charat Ram.

But there was no getting away from the difficult situation faced by the company. The shareholders were told that one textile mill was closed, that another was being converted into a separate company so that it could be sold, and that a third would be closed and its land used to develop real estate complexes.

Vinay Bharat Ram

Bansi Dhar

A final decision on the precise powers of the two new managing directors is still to be taken by the board, and it remains to be seen whether the issue will be settled amicably.

The company's auditors chipped in with their own comments, telling the shareholders that no provisions had been made in the accounts for a number of liabilities and that the changing of accounting methods had inflated the profits after tax by Rs 1.33 crore to Rs 2.96 crore (on a turnover of Rs 502.6 crore). A similar change in accounting for depreciation last year had converted a financial loss into a profit for the year 1982-83

For all the dissension, however, the shareholders' meeting did not reflect two crucial disputes that had taken place behind closed doors. One concerned a move by the government-owned financial institutions, who hold more than 40 per cent of DCM's shares, to increase their representation on the DCM board from three to five. And the second involved a continuing dispute over the new management structure for the company.

DCM has a board strength of 14, of which three directors were due to come up for re-election this year. In October, the financial institutions indicated that they would like to avoid re-electing all the present directors, and sought to replace two of them with institutional nominees. This was specially significant in the context of London-based Swraj Paul's bid to buy shareholdings in DCM, and the help that the institutions had given him in a similar situation in Escorts.

But Bharat Ram was quick to lobby behind the scenes, and the institutions backed off, so that last fortnight's shareholders' meeting saw the routine re-election of the existing directors.

Interestingly enough, the institutions did not lend their approval to the succession plan in DCM, which envisages Joint Managing Director Bansi Dhar (nephew of the two present managing directors) taking over as chairman and senior managing director, and Vinay Bharat Ram (Bharat Ram's eldest son) moving up from deputy managing director to managing director. The institutions chose to remain neutral at all the board meetings which discussed the succession issue.

Also, despite the official announcement of the succession plan at the shareholders' meeting, things are far from settled. Bansi Dhar is holding out in favour of the principle that there should be only one man at the helm of a company. But it is still far from certain whether Vinay Bharat Ram will be asked to report to Bansi Dhar or directly to the board. The latter course would almost certainly weaken Bansi Dhar's ability to control the company, especially at a time when the board itself has been hand-picked over the years by Bharat Ram. Some company officials therefore forecast that dual control can only lead to continued dissensions of the kind that have existed between the outgoing managing directors.

A final decision on the precise powers of the two new managing directors is still to be taken by the board, and it remains to be seen if the issue will be settled amicably or whether it will continue to fester. But there seems little doubt that while DCM's shareholders have been told of a change at the top, the last word on the succession issue in northern India's biggest corporate giant has not yet been said. —T.N.NINAN

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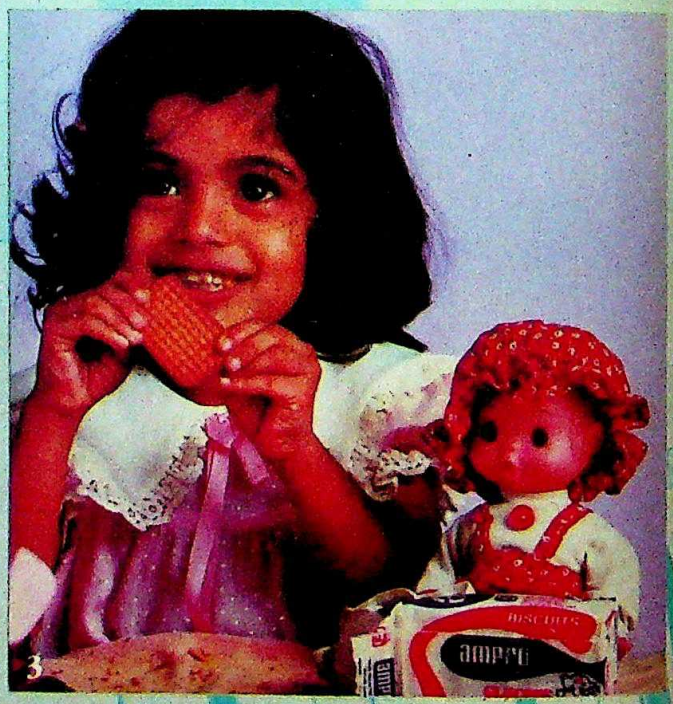

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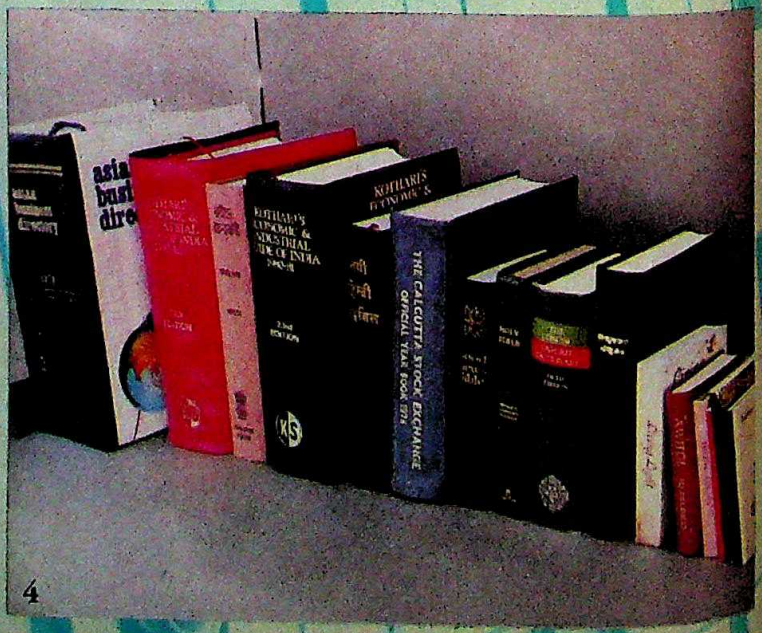

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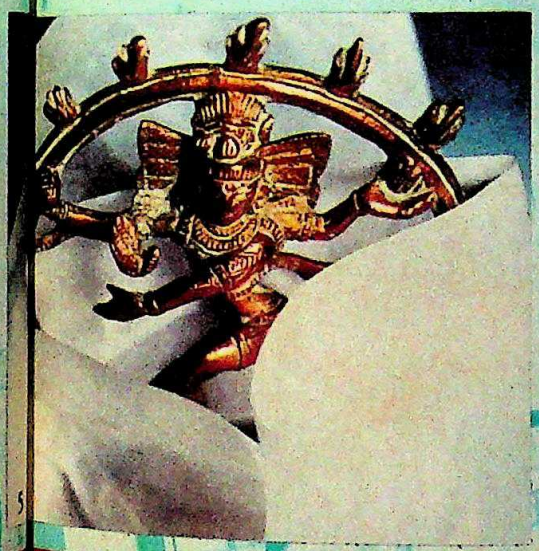

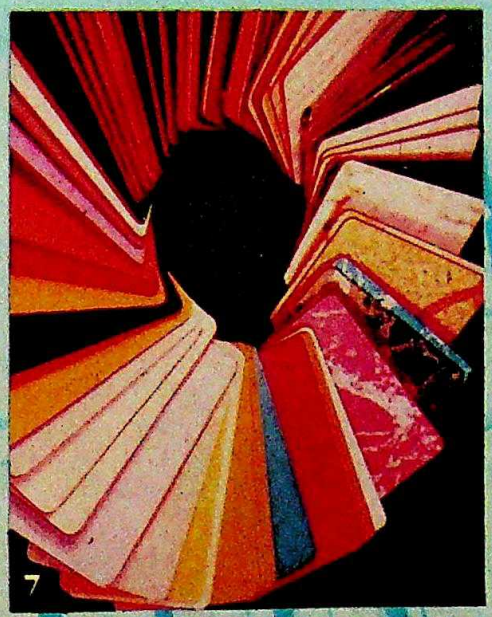

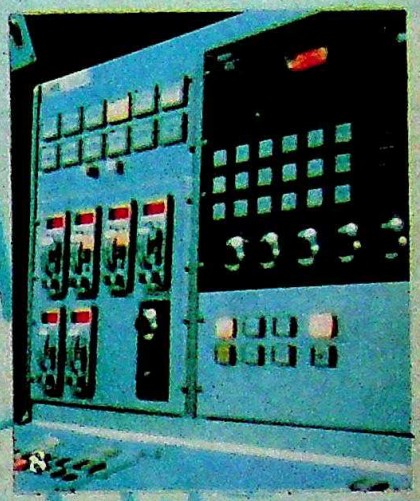

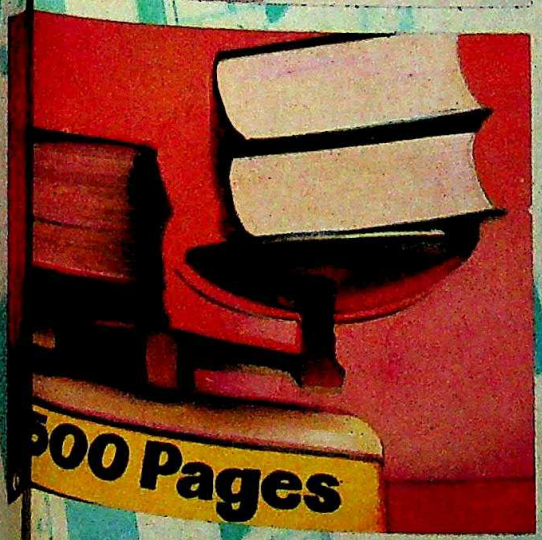

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TRADE MARKS

The Name Game

NEON lights in India have always been different from those in most other countries, spelling Amul cheese rather than Kraft, or Rajdoot motorcycles instead of Steyr-Puch. The last two years have seen a change—the advent of Rothmans cigarettes, for instance—but sweeping amendments now under official consideration could open the floodgates and allow the storming of the Indian market by companies using foreign brand names.

The committee of secretaries has already cleared the move to rewrite the law restricting the use of foreign brand names, and cabinet sanction could follow soon after the new government is sworn in. If that comes through, the present trickle of new foreign brand names could turn into a flood.

As word of the changes being considered leaked out last fortnight, industry responded in conflicting voices. Said the executive director of a scooter manufacturing company: "Foreign brand names in combination with that of the Indian collaborator should be allowed in order to encourage foreign companies to collaborate with Indian companies." And Kisan Mehta, president of McDowell & Co, argued that the entry of foreign brand names would help the Indian consumer. "Poor quality products will disappear from the market since the consumer will shift to brand-name products," he says.

On the other hand, a soft drinks manufacturer argued that a country could establish its industrial presence internationally only if it promoted and protected its own brand names. "No Indian soft drink manufacturer would have been able to sell his franchises abroad if Coca-Cola had continued to dominate the Indian market. The Japanese did not depend on foreign brand names when they were developing industrially. Instead, they developed their own, and today they are world leaders."

The Government has taken account of several arguments while proposing a more liberal policy. One of them, ironically enough, is the failure of existing laws to achieve the stated objectives. Foreign collaboration agreements have a standard clause prohibiting the use of the collaborating partner's brand name, but this is easily breached by using the names in tandem with the local one, as in the case of Hero-Honda or Maruti-Suzuki. In another instance, the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA) prohibits the use of foreign brand names, but allows them if no payment is made on this account. This is an effective loophole because payments for the use of the brand name can be disguised by padding them on to the price of imported raw materials. A third restrictive law is the Trade and Merchandising Marks Act (TMMA), under which the Government has often turned down applications for registering foreign brand names. But registration merely protects companies legally from infringement, they are not barred from using unregistered brand names. As an official of a multinational corporation said: "The TMMA was not designed to regulate foreign brand name use, and the Government has no clear-cut policy on this."

Internal government memos have put forward several other reasons for liberalising the policy on foreign trade marks. One is the fact that companies with long-standing overseas shareholdings were allowed to use their parent companies' brand names in India (as in the case of Cadbury, Nescafe and Exide) before any restrictive laws came into force, placing newer entrants with foreign collaborations at a competitive disadvantage. Another is the assessment that the Indian economy "has attained enough maturity to view foreign brand names without undue apprehension". A third is the claim that foreign brand names are required because they bring with them the foreign manufacturer's assurance of quality. And a fourth is the argument that restrictions on the use of foreign brand names have been an irritant in international economic relations, with the issue being raised at numerous joint commission meetings.

But those who see dangers in the relaxation of the policy dismiss these arguments as meaningless. Said a manufacturer of electric bulbs: "The bulbs that we sell and those sold by our multinational rivals often are made by the same producer; only the brand name is different. Where is the question of extra quality coming with a foreign brand name?" A hotelier asked: "Is the Maurya Sheraton a better hotel than the Taj because it has a foreign name tagged on?" And another industrialist said that if the problem was one of quality the solution lay in improving the standards and monitoring mechanisms of the Indian Standards Institution. "Are we saying that Indians are incapable of achieving quality without foreign supervision?" he asked.

The liberalisation of government policy, if it comes about, will also mean a reversal of an earlier process of gradually phasing out foreign brand names. Thus, Parker became Chelpark, Vespa became Bajaj and Mercedes Benz trucks became Tata trucks. Many of these were the result of foreign collaboration agreements expiring, and the current reversal of this Indianisation trend is similarly a by-product of the new rush for foreign collaborations. But an across-the-board liberalisation of the rules on the subject can only reduce much of Indian industry to subsidiary status, devoid of independent stature.

—PALAKUNNATHU G.MATHAI

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TOURISM

Downward Destination

AS AN industry highly susceptible to the vicissitudes of political change, tourism can be a dicey business at the best of times. India's luck had miraculously held as a burgeoning destination in Asia, till Mrs Gandhi's assassination in October-end put the clock backwards by a season. The riots in the capital, followed by the Bhopal gas leak and the hurly-burly of the elections have all had a cumulative effect on the business, with industry sources claiming that it is the worst-ever set-back in the quantum of business lost, worse than the country's years at war. While the major travel agencies and hotel chains have been busy registering cancellations in the past six weeks, the pessimists feel that another wave of violence anywhere in the country, could write off business prospects for the season of 1985-86.

Two major travel agencies and tour operators in the capital, Sita and Mercury, claim they have lost business to the tune of Rs 1 crore each since the first week of November. And nationwide hotel chains such as the Taj Group and Oberoi candidly admit that were it not for the influx of foreign media and business traffic, they would be hard pressed to tide over the loss. "The next 10 days, of poll results and formation of a stable government, are crucial," says Ravi Dubey, general manager of the Taj Mahal Hotel in New Delhi. "If there is instability of any kind, all trade efforts to resuscitate bookings will go for a complete toss." Inder Sharma, chairman, Sita World Travel sums up the situation: "All our clients abroad are waiting and watching till after the elections. And so are we."

Acknowledgement of the suddenly beleaguered fate of the industry comes from official quarters as well. Nitesh Sengupta, Director-General of Tourism concedes that in the immediate and bloody aftermath of the assassination, almost all foreign missions in New Delhi had advised their governments to discourage travellers to India and it was not till November 10, after repeated assurances from him and other departments of the Government, that they withdrew their warnings. "Tourism is an easily perishable commodity," he says, adding that while the foreign media swooped down to report the Delhi riots, no one has bothered much to explain the return to normalcy. "As a result, the magnitude of damage done is considerably greater than it was during the Sino-Indian or Indo-Pakistan wars."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The number of foreign tourists dropped from 88,000 in November 1983 to 65,000 in the same month this year—a 26 per cent drop that could grow in the remaining months of the peak season.

NITESH SENGUPTA
Director-General, Tourism

According to his department's calculations, the number of foreign tourists dropped from 88,000 in November 1983 to 65,000 in the same month this year —a 26 per cent drop that could grow in the remaining months of the peak season, which lasts till March. This has come as a rude shock to an industry that was gearing itself for one of its best seasons ever: at the 18th world congress of the Universal Federation of Travel Agents' Association (UFTAA) held in New Delhi in October, India was unanimously slated as a major tourist destination, with the release of major television serials filmed here and a steady picture of economic growth promoting the country's image. Much of that, however, has come to naught.

Last fortnight, as leading Indian tour operators were rushing overseas to try and reclaim cancelled business, there were ready indicators available on the extent to which business had been hurt. The highly-publicised once-a-week luxury train, "Palace on Wheels", run jointly by the Northern Railway and Rajasthan Tourism, left New Delhi with seven passengers aboard its 98 royal berths. And at the city's premier hotel, the Taj Mahal, the number of room nights booked by foreign tour groups was less than halved, from 1,650 in November 1983 to 770 in November 1984. At Taj Mahal's sister hotel, the 447-roomed Taj Palace which conducts major business in hosting conventions and exhibitions, room nights were down from 3,500 to 1,500 for the same period. The future looked so bleak that the group's Vice-President, Camellia Panjabi, was mobilising a group of foreign journalists in London to travel to India and see for themselves how normal things were.

Inder Sharma of Sita World Travel, who collated a loss of nearly a crore of rupees (annual turnover last year: Rs 34 crore), was also busy defending the country's image in the foreign media. His chief grouse was against New Delhi-based foreign news agencies who, other than repeating disaster stories about India, frequently used the New Delhi dateline for putting out stories about the political instability in neighbouring countries like Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. "The fact that the lay reader abroad sees 'New Delhi' as a dateline, even when the news is about another country, aggravates his bias against visiting," he said irately.

As badly hit as the tour operators were the resort or palace hotels that survive on tour groups during the winter months for up to 80 per cent of their business. As resorts like Goa and Puri, or the palace hotels in Rajasthan, emptied out after the assassination, there was little hope that they would see tour groups jostling for accommodation this winter. And though the Directorate of Tourism has predicted at least a marginal recovery in the new year, Director-General Sengupta was voicing the entire industry's lament when he said: "Just when we were soaring high, this drop has come as something of a body blow. We only hope its effects will be contained in the near future."

—SUNIL SETHI

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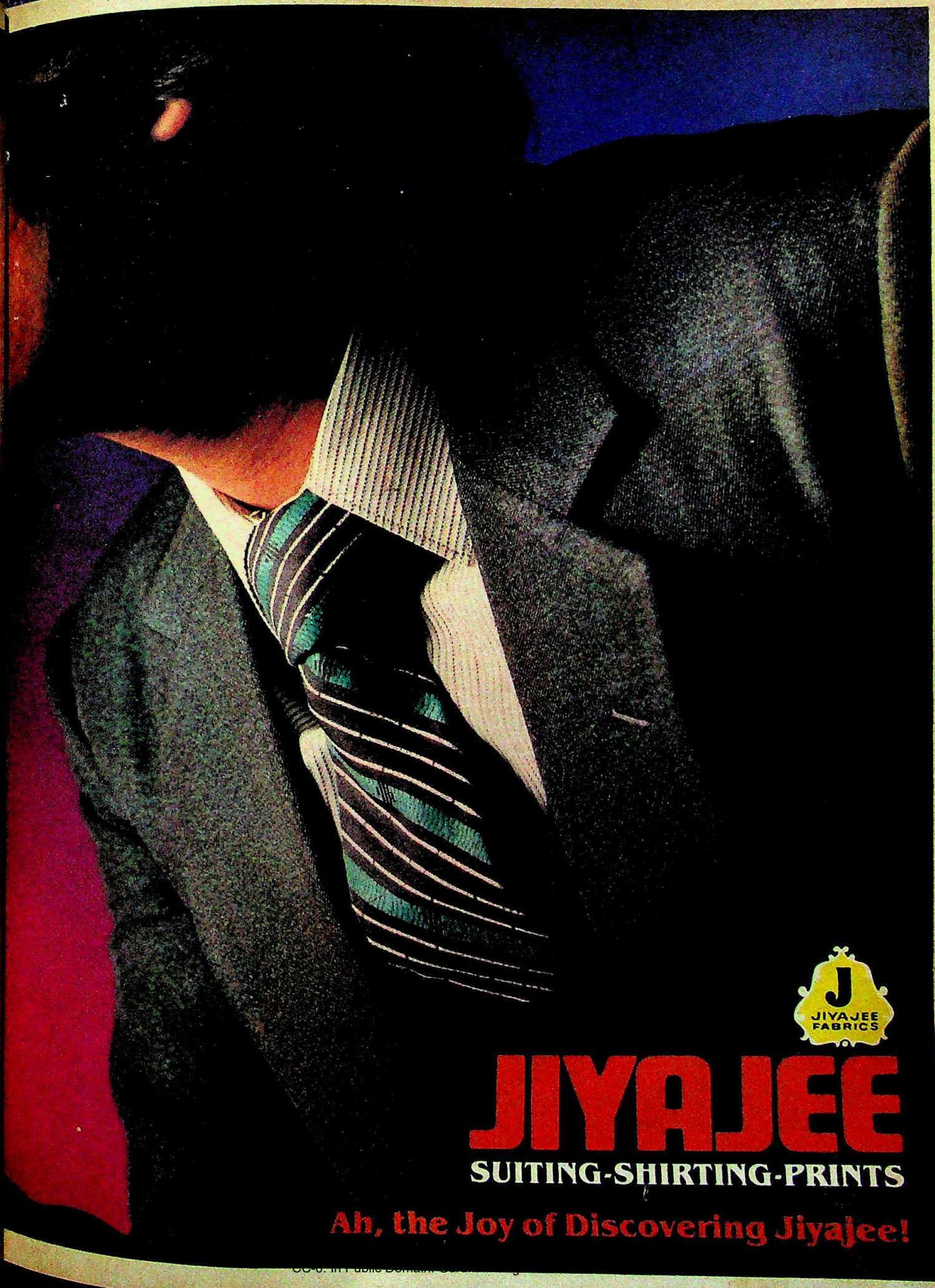

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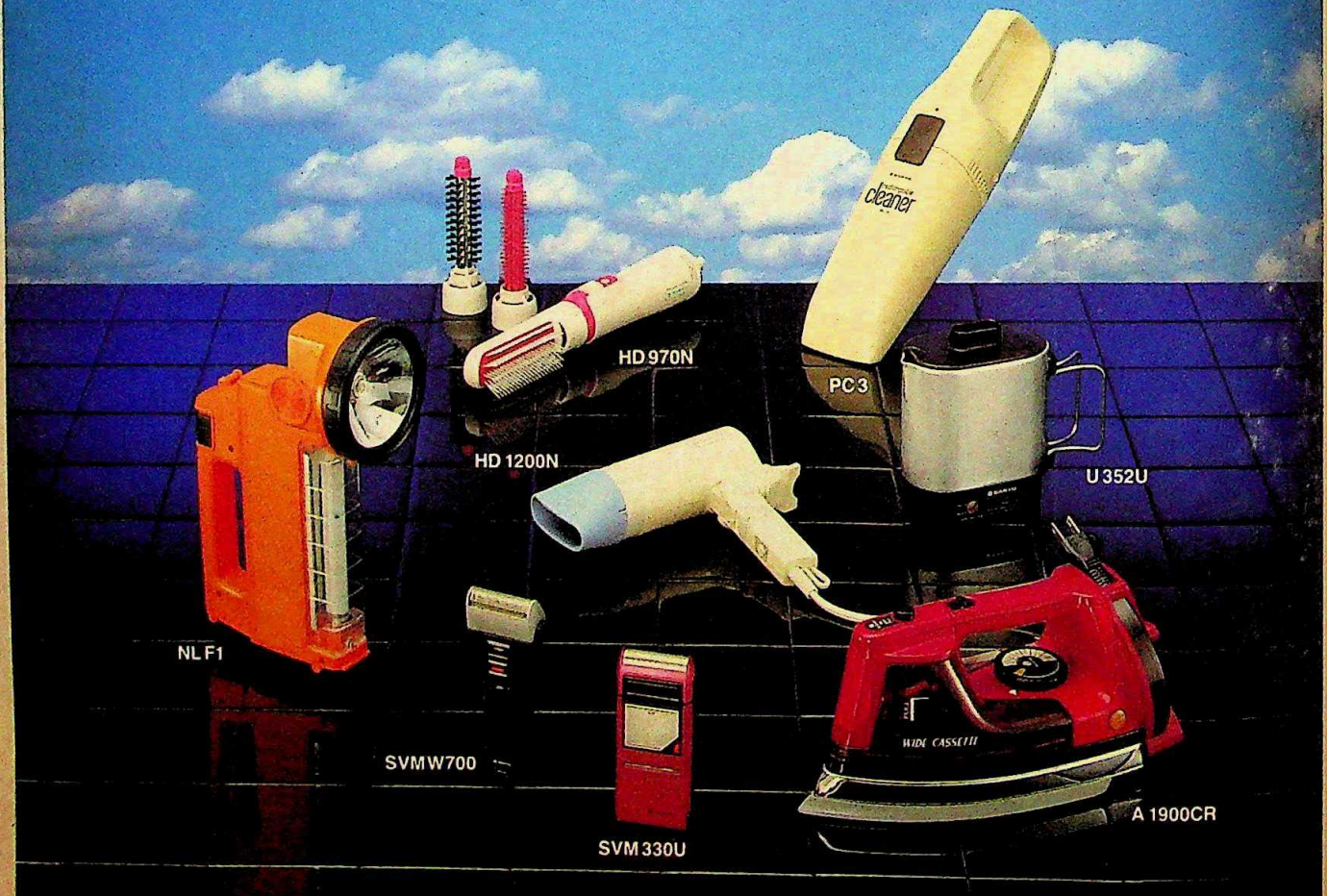

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DUNLOP INDIA

Containing the Coup

FOR WEEKS industrialist R.P. Goenka had been waiting for word from London, making periodic trips to the Dunlop Holdings headquarters, monitoring reports of a change in the top management of the British Company, keeping track of the persistent lobbying by merchant bankers on behalf of rival industrialists. There were times when he came close to giving up, but last fortnight the catch was finally in the bag. And Goenka's younger son Sanjiv, barely 25, moved in as the deputy managing director of Dunlop India Ltd, the tyre monolith that ranks 11th in the country's corporate hierarchy with sales last year of Rs 320 crore.

The biggest coup in India's corporate history was finally official. But there were also indications that Goenka had been forced to change strategy midway in order to land the catch. The 54-year-old industrialist had initially planned to buy a small stake in Dunlop India for himself, get two non-resident Indian friends (one in West Asia and the other in the Far East) to acquire some more of Dunlop Holdings' 40 per cent stake in Dunlop India, and move in to take control. But the announcement last fortnight made it clear that there was no one from the Far East involved, and that the only shares to change hands were acquired by Sanjiv Goenka and the West Asian non-resident, Manohar R.Chhabria, who in an unexpected move became the chairman of the company. Dunlop Holdings continued to hold 30 per cent of the Indian company's shares.

There was no explanation coming on the reason for this new game plan, but one reason for the delay in effecting the change of control was the fact that Dunlop Holdings had wanted to unload its full shareholding in Dunlop India in order to raise badly needed funds. However, Goenka's proposal meant that the British company would have to continue holding on to most of its shares. As Goenka told INDIA TODAY during the weeks he spent tensely waiting for a decision from London: "The problem is that I am not trying to buy out Dunlop Holdings shares, only to buy into Dunlop India's management."

That sounded suspiciously like Goenka's earlier acquisition of Ceat Tyres, where he bought only 11 per cent of the Italian parent company's 51 per cent shareholding. A subsequent bid to buy out the remaining Italian shareholding was, however, negatived by the Government. A similar attempt may now be made in Dunlop, but Goenka was tightlipped about future plans.

Sanjiv Goenka

M.R. Chhabria

Manohar Chhabria said he would not be an ornamental chairman, but Sanjiv Goenkaas deputy managing director will look after Dunlop's day-to-day operations.

Meanwhile, he is sharing the spotlight at the moment with Chhabria, a little-known 38-year-old businessman whose chief claim to fame so far has been his association with Sony of Japan. Having started life selling consumer electronics goods in his family shop in Bombay, Chhabria had little to his name when he arrived in Dubai 10 years ago. But he persuaded Sony to let him market its products in West Asia, grabbed 40 per cent of the market through his Jumbo Electronics, and soon persuaded Sony to collaborate with him in setting up a unit for taping Hindi films on video at the Santa Cruz Electronics Export Processing Zone. Last year, he set up another company, Orson Electronics, to manufacture television sets using Sony technology, and he expects the company's turnover this year to hit Rs 20 crore. Dunlop is for him the biggest catch yet.

Chhabria was in Calcutta last fortnight to take over as Dunlop chairman, replacing J.E.S. Hammond who stays on as managing director. Losing no time, Chhabria organised a grand puja in Dunlop's plush headquarters on Calcutta's Mirza Ghalib Street, specially bringing in four priests from Varanasi. And scotching any rumours that Dunlop would henceforth be run by the Goenkas while he remained a figurehead chairman, Chhabria said before he returned to his Dubai base: "It is not my intention to be an ornamental chairman".

How Chhabria will play more than an ornamental role from his base thousands of miles away is not clear, especially when R.P. Goenka had made it clear to INDIA TODAY in the past that he was acquiring Dunlop in order to give son Sanjiv "a metropolitan base" in the same way that the Ceat takeover had pitchforked older son Harsh Vardhan into corporate prominence. Managing Director Hammond also sees Sanjiv Goenka as the man who "will look after current operations, leaving me free to tackle the long term interests of the company."

What changes will the new team bring about in Dunlop? The Goenkas' immediate objective is to pull the company out of a slide since both sales and profits have been falling. The Goenkas feel that the company "was attuned to the culture of a sellers' market and could not change when the tyre market was transformed after 1977 into a buyers' market". There is likely to be a trimming of considerable fat in the company, and Sanjiv Goenka talks of making fresh investments in the huge Sahagunj factory outside Calcutta. Technology from Sumitomo (with which Ceat has a new collaboration) may be used to revamp the rubber products operations, and a diversification into steel cord conveyor belts is also on the cards. Finally, if the Goenka record in Ceat is anything to go by, they are likely to take firm control of the company's purchase operations by bringing in people from outside.

In many senses, therefore, the Dunlop story is just beginning. How exactly will the new Goenka-Chhabria partnership work? How successful will the Goenkas be in pulling Dunlop out of the rut? Will they face any problems in getting government approval for the change of share ownership? And will they finally acquire the 30 per cent shares that remain with Dunlop Holdings? As Dunlop turns the corner with a new driver at the wheel, no immediate answers are in clear sight.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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NON-RESIDENT INVESTMENT

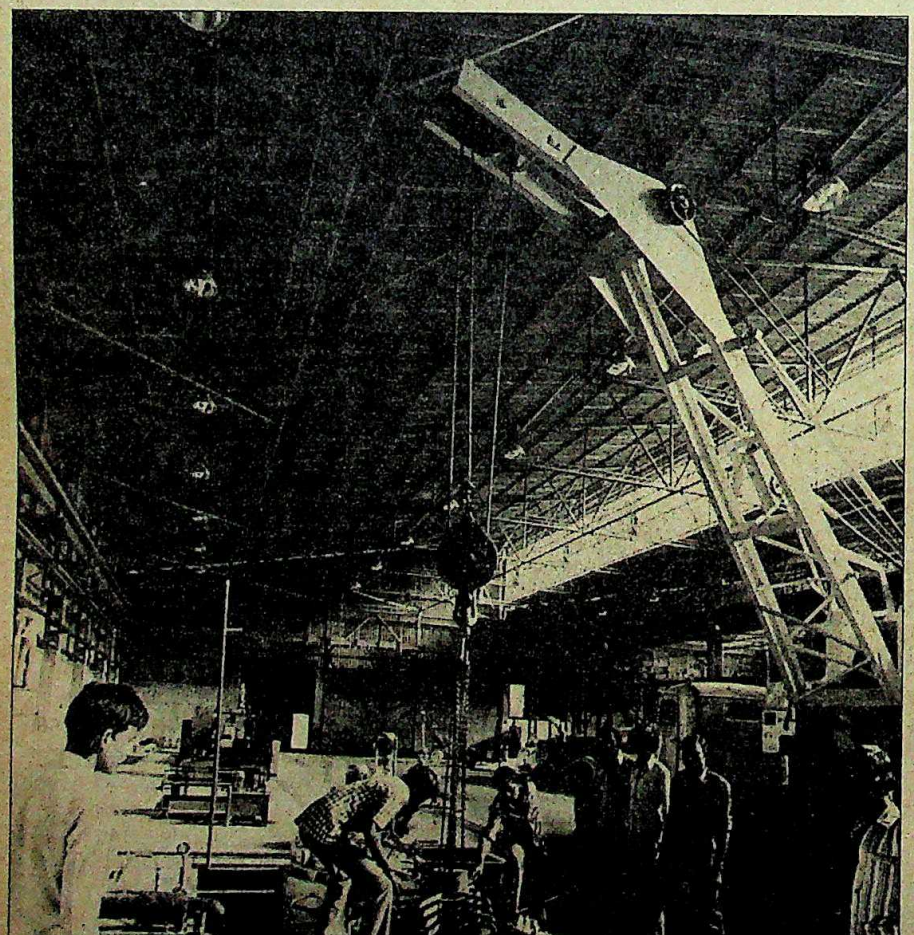
Paving the Way

A NEW company in Andhra Pradesh last fortnight began turning out high-grade bimetal steel strips and industrial blades for the cutting tools industry. In Kerala, the first of many motels will open its doors early this year on the Trivandrum-Quilon road. In Gujarat, Kumar Lamba from the United States is setting up a chlor-alkali plant using the latest membrane technology. And Dharm Ramiya from the United Kingdom has helped induct fresh technology to manufacture transceivers.

These are the latest in a series of ventures that state governments across the country hope will reshape their industrial maps, create new jobs and bring in new technology; and they are the fruits of an intensifying drive by the state governments to tap a new source of money, technology and enterprise: the much-touted non-resident Indian.

The money involved could be big. A private study three years ago showed that the total assets of Gujaratis living abroad amounted to over Rs 8,000 crore. Most of that may not be available for investment in India, but even a small percentage would be a handsome sum. So the eagerness of state governments is understandable. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao made a whistle-stop tour of the United States last June in quest of funds and entrepreneurs. His West Bengal counterpart, Jyoti Basu, headed for the UK and the US two months later on a similar mission. And no fewer than 11 of Kerala's 19 ministers have been to the Gulf. Gujarat's Finance Minister Sanat Mehta has also pitched in for his state. And at least three official delegations have in recent years arrived at the non-resident Indian's doorstep urging him to invest back home.

Bimetallic Steels and Alloys Ltd factory in Andhra Pradesh



A. PRABHAKAR RAO

The bait held out is attractive: single-window clearance so that tiresome formalities are dispensed with as far as the bureaucratic machinery allows, land for factories and homes (often at concessional prices), separate industrial estates earmarked exclusively for non-residents, and even help with such problems as admission to English-medium schools, telephone, telex and expeditious cooking gas connections.

Andhra Pradesh has already started a new corporation for the purpose: the Andhra Pradesh State Non-Resident Indian Investment Corporation (ANRICH), and Kerala is now talking of floating an offshore investment company in a tax haven like the Channel Islands or the Bahamas, with the long-term objective being to provide venture capital for projects in the state.

The response has varied from the gratifying to the ho-hum. Haryana says it has already issued 400 letters of intent for projects mooted by non-residents. Gujarat has moved further up the road, with 302 projects already having been set up over the last six years, with a total capital investment of a little over Rs 150 crore. By last June the state Government had received 1,661 enquiries from Indians abroad, more than half of them living in the US and the UK.

The most spectacular success of the drive so far has been in Andhra Pradesh, where 30 overseas investors have banded together with Hyderabad promoter V. Chakrapani to put on the drawing boards a million-tonne cement plant that will cost Rs 130 crore. Chakrapani also heads Bimetallic Steels and Alloys Ltd, the high-grade steel strips and industrial blades company that went into production in the state last fortnight.

The state chief minister's canvassing tour in mid-1984 drew 176 responses from potential investors. Some 15 of them have already applied for industrial licences, and a dozen non-resident investors have so far committed themselves to chipping in with Rs 10 crore for projects that have a total cost of Rs 90 crore. Five projects have already started production

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of mini-computers, floppy disk drives, watch components, drugs and colour television sets.

Even unhappy West Bengal, shunned by most domestic entrepreneurs, has got a reasonable response from Indians abroad. S. Bandopadhyaya, executive director of the West Bengal Industries Development Corporation, says: "We have received a few dozen enquiries from Indians in the UK and the US, and these are now being processed." Two US-based entrepreneurs who want to turn out computer software in Bengal explain that the state's low wage levels will keep down costs, lending their software a competitive edge in the American market.

Among the less successful states is Kerala, with the state's militant labour force deterring potential entrepreneurs. Says P.J. Koshy, chairman and managing director of the Bombay-based Reunion Engineering: "I have factories in India and construction contracts in West Asia, but being a Malayalee it was always my dream to start something really big in Kerala. But the industrial and political climate there is gloomy." Many Gulf-based Malayalees in fact prefer to invest in other states that are wooing non-residents. Explains Chandran Panakkal, who used to work for an Abu Dhabi oil company but is now leading a clutch of investors setting up a cola bottling plant and a composite spinning mill in Andhra Pradesh: "Some of us find it safer to invest outside Kerala because of the labour problems there."

Even private companies have met with some success in selling shares and debentures to non-residents in West Asia and elsewhere, the two most notable cases being the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company and the Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertiliser Corporation. And foreign banks like Grindlays have spent considerable time and effort trying to facilitate an easier flow of funds and set up projects.

Success in this drive for tapping funds from what was virgin territory till a few years ago has hinged on what exactly the states have to offer, and how well they offer it. Andhra Pradesh, for instance, has driven home the plentiful availability of electricity in the state, with special industrial estates being set up only for non-residents. Says ANRICH General Manager K. Vidyasagar: "Andhra Pradesh is emerging as the most favourable place for potential investors, because the industrial climate is better than elsewhere, and power is available in plenty." So, despite the fact that 17 clearances have to be obtained before an entrepreneur can set up his factory, the investors have been coming through ANRICH doors.

GUJARAT, in comparison, has hinged its formidable effort so far on starting before the others, and then providing single-window clearance through the Industrial Extension Bureau, which also attends to the entrepreneur's personal problems regarding school admissions, housing and so on. The state has also capitalised on its peaceful labour scene to sell itself as an ideal business location. Officials in the state certainly see the effort as worth the trouble. Says Jay Narayan Vyas, executive director of the Industrial Extension Bureau: "India spends crores of rupees every year trying to get advanced technology. Instead, it is worthwhile taking steps to attract non-resident Indians to set up units in India."

(From top) Rama Rao, Basu and Sanat Mehta: the strong suitors

M. RANJITH RAO

RAMESH MENON

West Bengal may not be quite as successful in its wooing of overseas Indians, despite the labour cost advantages. Only two of the enquiries received by the state Government so far have reached the stage of project work. Explains a government official: "It is too early to say when the actual processing will be completed. These things take time here, particularly since we have to get back time and again to those who want to invest, and clarify various points."

Kerala has been even more unlucky. A project promoted by the state Government with non-resident funds during the 70s has done poorly for a variety of reasons. Carbon and Chemicals Ltd shares are now quoted below par. With non-residents understandably chary of fresh industrial commitments, the state Government has allowed them to enter areas barred by other states: cinema theatres, hotels, hospitals, tourist taxis and real estate. Also on the anvil is an offshore investment trust that will manage share and debenture portfolios apart from short-term investments in deposits and inter-corporate funds. The state Government hopes to use the money tapped as venture capital for projects in Kerala and the state's industry minister talks of offering fresh concessions to woo the five lakh Malayalees working in the Gulf. But even these may not deliver the expected results. For one thing, the investment trust planned by the state Government will have to compete with similar bodies planned by at least one business house and a bank. And also, as K.V.Shamsudeen, president of the Gulf Malayalee Forum at Sharjah, says: "How can a cook from Kerala settled in the Gulf understand the basics of starting computer peripherals or carburettor manufacture?"

West Bengal too is making a bid to iron out some of the problems that non-resident entrepreneurs might face. Anxious to get the industrial infrastructure ready before issuing the green signal, the state Government is looking around for suitable land that can be offered because there is little spare land available outside the electronics complex in Salt Lake and the Siliguri industrial estate.

But if land and other amenities are available and if the potential investor can be offered single-point clearance of his project proposal, the years ahead should see still more steel strips, chlor-alkali and transceiver plants, plus motel chains and computer software undertakings.

—PALAKUNNATHU G.MATHAI
with bureau reports

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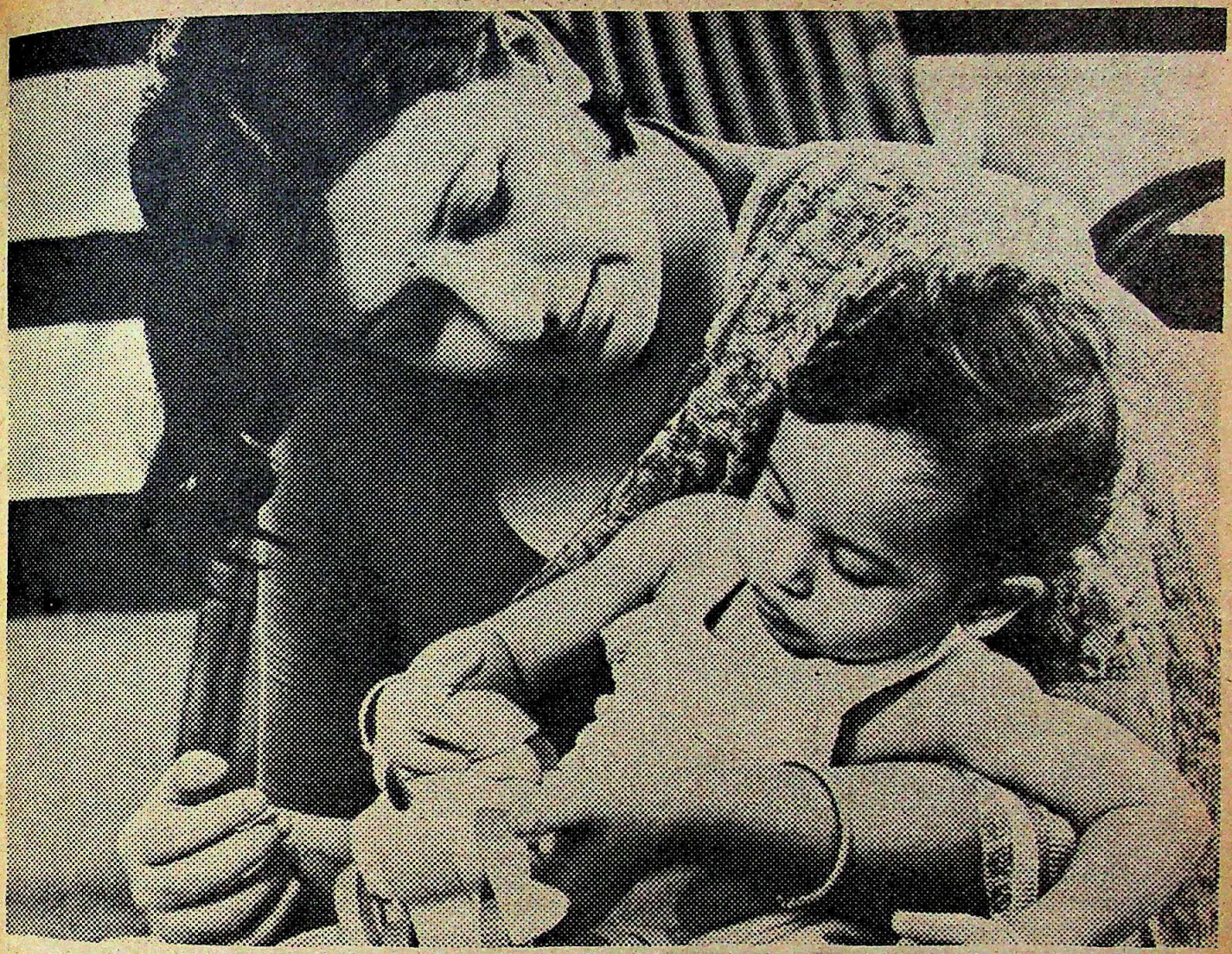

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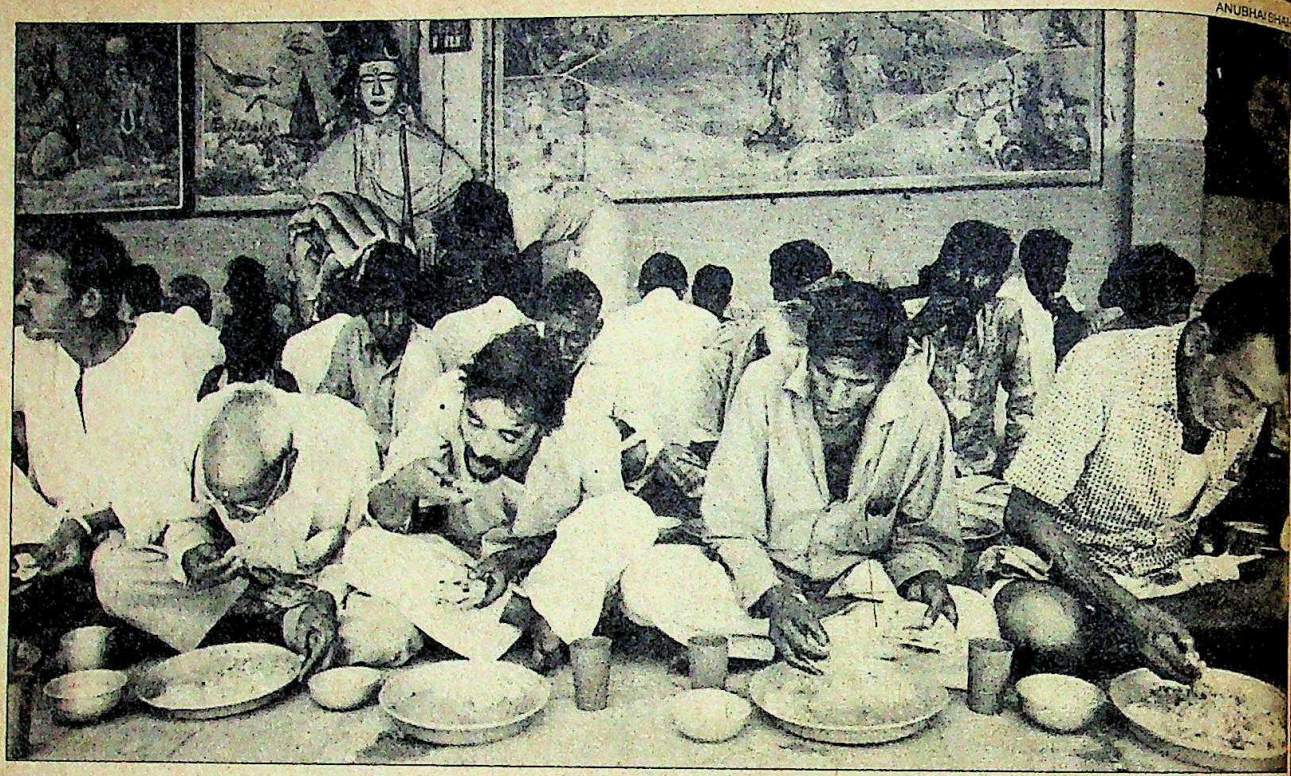
ANUBHAI SHAH



Jobless textile workers having a free meal at a temple: untold deprivation

TEXTILE WORKERS

A Threadbare Existence

SWALLOWING their pride, they queue up in hundreds outside the Chakudia Mahadev temple, run by a private trust, for what probably is their only daily meal—a free lunch shared with beggars. For months they have lived off their savings and drawn liberally on provident fund accounts. But with bank balances down to a few rupees, they are now face to face with starvation.

The daily food line in Ahmedabad is the denouement of an enormous human tragedy being played out on Gujarat's industrial stage. The state's textile industry has been pushed into bankruptcy by mounting competition from cheaper powerloom products and a shift in demand away from cotton textiles. Twenty-four textile mills have folded up in Gujarat over the last two years, 16 of them in Ahmedabad alone, throwing 49,000 workers on the streets. While hundreds of jobless workers have left for their homes in the backward districts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh after hanging around in vain for the mills to reopen, many more have stayed behind to face united deprivation. Says Karim Allahbax, who used to work in Ahmedabad Cotton Mills: "Only we, the helpless workers, have lost out. The millowners have not lost anything. They still move around in cars, and do not think of our hunger."

More than a dozen of the more desperate jobless workers have committed suicide in the last year. All of them were the only working members of very poor families, and had half-a-dozen dependants. Recalls a tearful Shersingh Sisodia, whose son Sajjan Singh committed suicide last February: "There was a lot of tension in the house. For many days we did not have enough provisions for a square meal a day. There were unnecessary fights between members of the family. After one such quarrel about the lack of cereals for lunch, my son killed himself by jumping into a well."

Those grimly clinging on to life eke out an existence through petty trade, take on odd jobs like pulling carts or working as headloaders, or just tighten their belts. Kalidas, who has been unemployed for the last two years, says stoically: "I could make Rs 4 a day by operating an *amber charka*, but I would then need to eat four chapattis. Now I need only one to stay alive." Adds Bhavanbhai, whose 15 dependants make his current earning of Rs 20 a day seem a trifle: "Sometimes we eat only once a day. We have to eat chapattis with raw onions or garlic chutney. Vegetables are out of the question."

Jobs are not easy to come by, and employers have started dictating terms to the former textile workers. Since so many are out of work, wage levels have plummeted. Ramanbhai Parmar, 28, who used to earn Rs 45 a day at Monogram Mills now does the same job at a powerloom unit at Naroda for just Rs 8. Says an emaciated Jaibunisha Ibrahim, who started rolling agarbattis after her husband Mehboob lost his job: "My employer pays me only Rs 3 for rolling 1,000 agarbattis, but it is a lot of money nowadays. It is better than starving to death."

Most of the workers have taken to petty trade. Selling sweets, footwear, bangles, agarbattis or pan nets them a profit of about Rs 10 to Rs 15 a day. Notes Parmabhai Rohit, who used to earn Rs 45 a day before the mill he worked for closed two-and-a-half years ago: "I sell jaggery and earn a profit of around Rs 15. But I am better off than thousands of others who do not have even the initial investment needed for this kind of business." Nor do the less fortunate have any hope of getting loans now. For banks have become chary of granting loans to jobless workers since they cannot repay the loans. A

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Bapunagar bank official points out that bank funds are so hard to come by that the ubiquitous middleman has entered the picture, with touts charging fat commissions to secure loans.

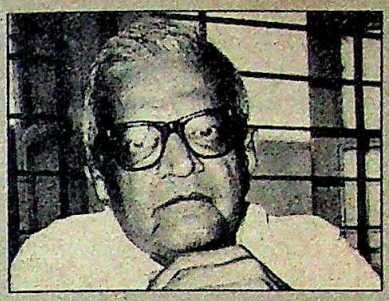
The workers live in shacks at Rakhial, Gomtipur, Sarangpur and other labour localities in Ahmedabad. Many have not paid rent for months even though the rents are usually less than Rs 50 as they have been living there for decades. Says Ganesh Singh, who used to work at Ahmedabad Cotton Mills: "My rent is Rs 50, but I have not paid it for many months. The landlord knows that we struggle now just to eat one square meal a day, but one day he will throw us out."

The crisis that has gripped the city is also clearly worrying traders and industrialists in the state. The thousands of workers who are affected could be a potential cause of social unrest and economic turmoil. Says Deepak Navnital, president of the Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Association and managing director of Maneklal Harilal Mills: "The closure of so many mills can have disastrous consequences. The only hope lies in the Government restarting the closed mills."

LATE last June, the Madhavsinh Solanki Government did make a seemingly determined bid to contain what could become an explosive situation. It exerted pressure on the Industrial Development Bank of India and the nationalised banks to put up Rs 8 crore to get eight mills working again. The workers' hopes were raised by government drumbeating, heralded by the appointment of dynamic bureaucrat H.K. Khan as additional chief secretary in charge of textiles. However, their expectations were soon dashed. The eight reopened mills now function with a skeleton staff, and only 3,800 of the total 16,000 workers have been absorbed.

The state's textile workers have always been a docile workforce. There has been no major strike in the industry in the last 100 years, though Ahmedabad alone has a labour strength of 1.5 lakh working in its 60 textile mills. Most workers were till recently on the rolls of the Textile Labour Association (TLA) which is wedded to the Gandhian path of peaceful negotiation. And while there has been no upsurge in violence or crime in the state as a result of their plight, labour militancy has reared its head, with workers demanding that the TLA adopt a stiffer stand. TLA President Arvind Buch has come under fire from his union's members for not taking to the streets. The upshot is desertions from union ranks. In the last 10 months TLA membership has dwindled from 1.31 lakh to 85,000. Says Buch: "We cannot stop mills from closing. Nor can we check malpractices like millowners disposing of printed cloth and raw materials before they down their shutters. We can only suggest to the Government that it nationalise the industry." Underlining the TLA's helplessness, he adds: "We do not want to be violent. With such a huge workforce we can easily cause havoc. But since we are peaceful, no one listens to us."

RAMESH MENON



"We do not want to be violent. But since we are peaceful, no one listens to us."

ARVIND BUCH,
president, Textile Labour Association

PARTHIV SHAH

"Only the helpless workers have lost out. Millowners are totally insensitive to our hunger."

KARIM ALLAHBAX,
a jobless worker from Ahmedabad Cotton Mills

PARTHIV SHAH

"Employers exploit us. I earn Rs 8 today for the same job I did two years ago at Rs 45 a day."

RAMANBHAI,
a temporary worker in a powerloom unit

The initial beneficiary of the desertions from the TLA was the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) newly formed union, Bharatiya Kamdar Parishad (BKP). A few months ago, crowds of workers used to gather to hear BJP leaders, who are more vocal and aggressive than the TLA top brass. But BKP activity has slowed down and workers suspect that the lull is due to the elections since millowners are major donors of funds. A pall of distrust hangs over all the labour localities. Says Danabhai, an unemployed worker: "Everyone has let us down. Millowners, TLA, the Government and the opposition parties—all have used us."

The big question for the thousands like Danabhai is whether their plight will improve, or whether others will join their ranks as still more sick mills close shop. The Solanki Government on its part has in a fresh fire-fighting move asked the banks to lend mills in the sick bay another Rs 11.50 crore to ensure that they also will not down their shutters. Ruling out government take-over of non-viable closed mills, Additional Chief Secretary H.K. Khan says that the state Government is involved in the process of restructuring and modernising them but they can only get back to business if labour strength is pruned. The surplus belonging to the mills may also be sold, and the money pumped into the mills to make them viable.

The latest silver lining on the clouded textile labour horizon is Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's promise to try and solve the textile crisis. Last fortnight, Gandhi told a lakh-strong crowd at Ahmedabad: "As soon as the elections are over, we will try to solve the textile crisis. This is not just an Ahmedabad problem, as textile mills are shutting down all over India." But till a new government settles down to the business of running the country, the unemployed textile workers will have to line up for their food dole, and make do on the bottom line of existence.

—RAMESH MENON

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INDIRA GANDHI MEMORIAL FUND

INDIRA GANDHI has joined the luminous band of martyrs whose life will remain an inspiration to humankind. Hundreds of millions of people in India and the world over have mourned Indira Gandhi and paid her their homage of love. Besides being a symbol of India's freedom, unity and strength, she was a passionate proponent of reconciliation and peace among nations and of a better life for the deprived of all lands.

The best monuments to the great are their own work. The hope and confidence that Indira Gandhi instilled into the people of India, specially the poor and the weak, the self-reliance which she imparted to its agriculture, industry and science and the capacity which the country has generated under her watchful guidance to overcome the age-old problems of poverty and social injustice—these constitute the collective memorial to her.

Her concern, however, went beyond India. Like her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, she spoke for the entire human community and was the herald of a better world order. As Prime Minister of India and latterly as Chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement, she constantly pleaded for a saner and trusting world, a world which would discard nuclear weapons, and in which wealth and technological skills would serve the needy rather than the powerful.

Indira Gandhi's energy and dedication were legendary. She had an astonishingly wide range of interests: the revitalisation of our entire cultural heritage; the flowering of music, dance, architecture and rural and tribal arts and traditions; the amelioration of the handicapped, the afflicted and the aged; the welfare of women and children; conservation of nature and wildlife; promotion of sport, mountaineering and the spirit of adventure—there was not a cause or a challenge which did not evoke her support. Scientists, philosophers and artistes from many countries regarded her as a friend and ally.

She believed in the wholeness of life and the interrelationship of forces. That is what made her a champion of the all-round growth of the human personality. Her vision even of economic development was a wider one. Material well-being, she pointed out, must be accompanied by a blossoming of inner resources. She wanted the expanding knowledge of the outer world to give us greater power to look within ourselves.

She often said that she was not worried how history assessed her, as long as she had the satisfaction of having done her chosen work to the best of her ability. In her last public speech on the evening before her assassination she declared that every drop of her blood would invigorate the nation.

The building of a united, creative and caring India and a peaceful and compassionate world is the duty which Indira Gandhi has enjoined on us all. To carry forward the work which she started and to support the many causes which were dear to her, it has been felt that an Indira Gandhi Memorial Fund be created. One of its functions will be to preserve Indira Gandhi's writings and memorabilia for the benefit of posterity. It is also important that the various moves to commemorate Indira Gandhi are co-ordinated.

Friends and admirers of Shrimati Indira Gandhi spread over India and the world who are desirous of contributing to the Indira Gandhi Memorial Fund may kindly send their remittances to any branch of the State Bank of India, where a separate account is being opened. Government is being approached to provide tax relief to contributors.

Even the smallest contribution will be welcome. What matters is that the fund should be a people's fund, drawing support from all classes of people in India and abroad.

We must build a memorial worthy of a person whose pride in India and whose love for humankind were unbounded.

R. Venkataraman

(R. VENKATARAMAN)
Vice President of India

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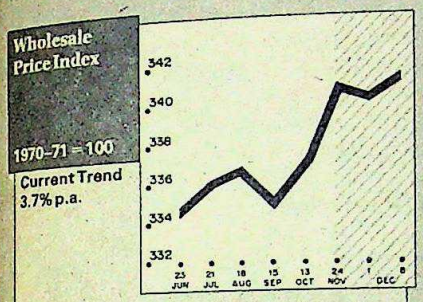
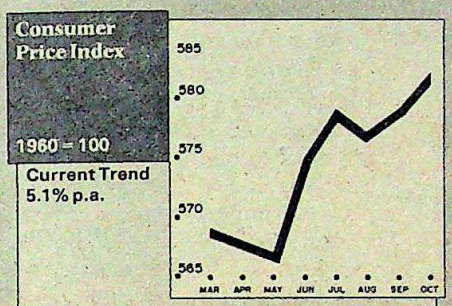
WHILE wholesale prices remained more or less stationary, inflation in consumer prices was above trend. Money supply recorded a sharp spurt owing to expansion of credit to the Government, but bank credit to firms was sluggish. The trade gap narrowed, leading to net accumulation of foreign exchange reserves.

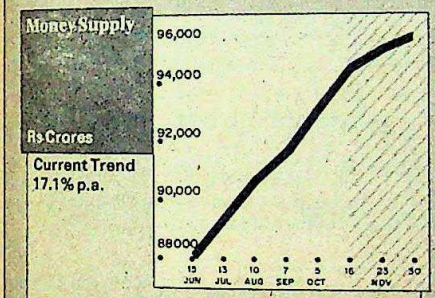
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data, to which a regression is fitted.



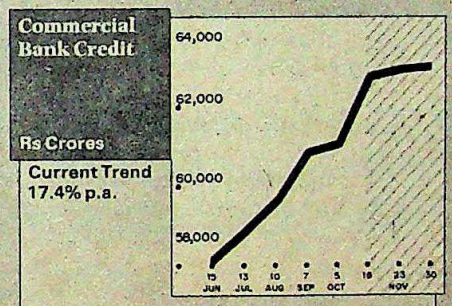
Wholesale prices remained fairly stable last fortnight recording a marginal increase of 0.2 per cent due to a rise in the price of manufactures.



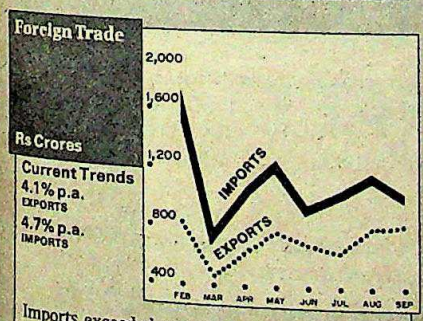
Consumer prices were up by half per cent last month, slightly above trend, with the pace accelerating compared to the previous month



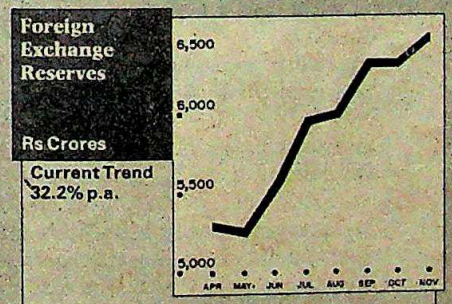
Money supply rose by 1.1 per cent last fortnight mainly due to an increase in Reserve Bank credit to the Government.



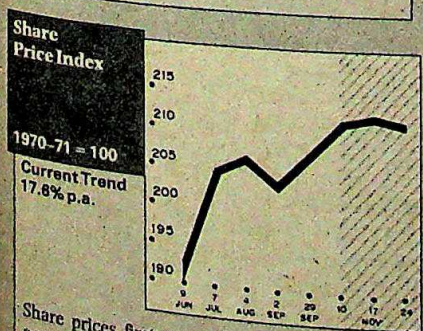
Bank credit to firms and households expanded relatively slowly by about 0.3 per cent last fortnight at less than half the trend rate of growth.



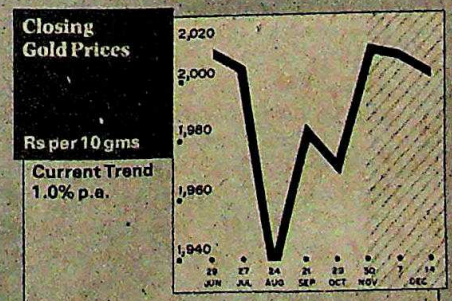
Imports exceeded exports by Rs 226 crore in September, the gap shrinking by about Rs 150 crore compared to the previous month.



Foreign exchange reserves maintained the trend and increased 2 per cent last month after a marginal fall in the previous month.



Share prices first moved up and then down again over the last fortnight recording no net change, well below the trend rate of growth.



Bullion prices dipped by a third of one per cent last fortnight, a much sharper decline than the six month downward trend.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with maximum growth in November 1984

	% Growth
Tea	11.30
Coir Yarn	11.11
Betel-nuts	7.50
Raw Silk	6.05
Raw Hides	4.98
Jute Textiles	4.61
Chillies	4.54
Gur	4.42
Cotton Seed	4.32
Groundnut Seeds	3.94
Solvent Extracted Oil	2.90
Gram	2.76
Fish	2.48
Artificial Yarn	2.29
Milk	2.29
Boilers	2.09
Masoor	1.94
Dairy Products	1.88
Cycles	1.75
Groundnut Oil Cake	1.53
Groundnut Oil	1.49
Turmeric	1.44
Cars	1.40
Tapioca	1.35
Jowar	1.32
Logs & Bamboo	1.15
Urad	1.15
Coal	1.11
Synthetic Fibres	1.10
Polythene Moulding Powder	1.05
Board	1.02
Sugarcane	1.01
Cotton Cloth (mills)	1.00
Machine Tools	0.97
Tubes	0.94
Rice	0.90
Cigarettes	0.89
Furnace Oil	0.84
Silk & Artificial Fabrics	0.84
Skelp	0.82
PVC Compounds	0.79
Soda Ash	0.79
Mustard Oil	0.77
Limestone	0.76
Steel Structurals	0.76
Vanaspati	0.75
Diesel	0.74

Of 139 important series considered, 61 with a weight of 49.7 accelerated and 78 with a weight of 36.9 declerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1984	1983
Coal Thousand Tonnes, November	12205	11999
Crude Petroleum Thousand Tonnes, November	2349	2220
Saleable Steel Thousand Tonnes, November	585.9	532.1
Cement Thousand Tonnes, November	2493	2305
Electricity Million KWH, November	13042	11720

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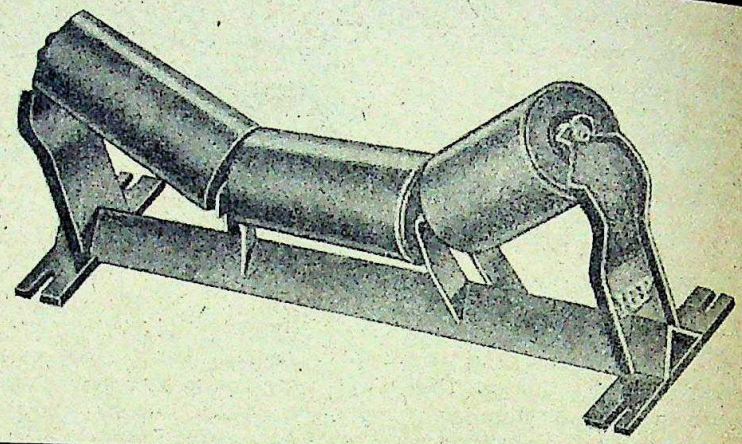

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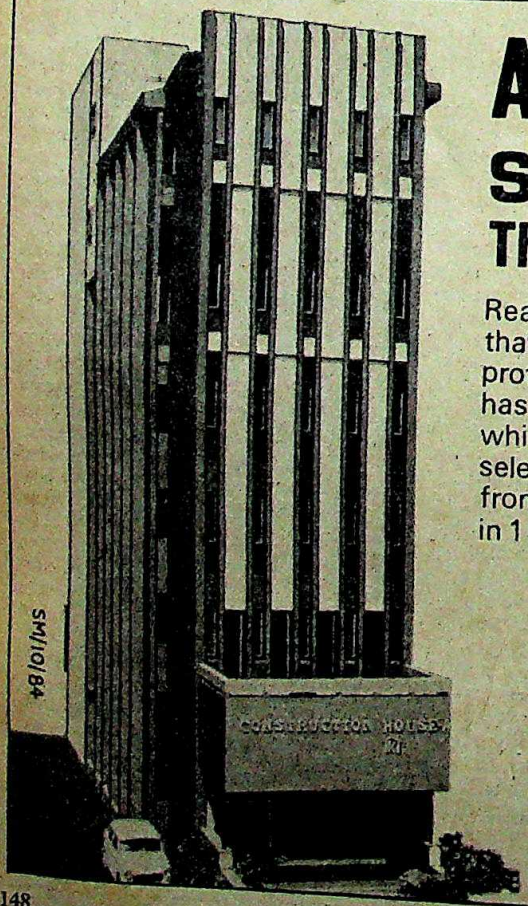

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THE MARKETS

New Highs

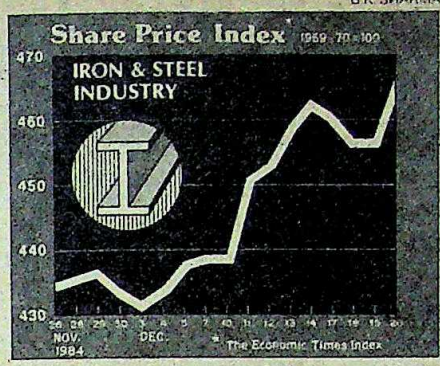
THE SHARE markets are always telling us something though few of us know what. There has been such a big spurt in equity prices on the eve of the polling date that many marketmen believe that the die is already cast. There may be a good deal of wishful thinking in this but this is Christmas time as well as election time when hope springs eternal in the human breast—and even sharebrokers are human.

News on the industrial front is encouraging but what has turned everybody into a buyer is the general expectation that the bull phase which began six months ago after the monsoon has perhaps another six months to go before it begins to level off. What has perhaps affected the sentiment is the pronounced change in the Government's attitude towards what are known as MRTP companies. These companies have done well in the past and are now expected by many people to do even better.

A large number of shares have hit all-time peaks, which is unusual for this time of the year. Among the companies are Baroda Rayon (which has just received a letter of intent for a newsprint unit based on recycled newspapers), Bata India (which used to be a sick company not so long ago), Brooke Bond (which is diversifying rapidly into non-food product items), Chloride India (which seems to be riding high on the crest of the automotive wave), Colgate (which is always hitting new highs), Hindustan Cocoa, Indian Aluminium, Otis Elevator and Hindustan Dorr-Oliver. In the case of a number of these scrips, a bonus issue is either on the cards or cannot be ruled out. There may be more such scrips in the bonus pipeline—Philips is almost certainly one—and so perhaps is Ranbaxy which is reported to have done well this year. The Delhi-based group's stablemate, Max India, is said to be about to go on production which explains, though not wholly, the recent spurt in its price.

Engineering shares had to bear the brunt of the recession during the last couple of years but the worst seems to be over and with a large five-year plan on the drawing-board, they should turn the corner. Actually many engineering firms, like Larsen & Toubro, have now turned away from their main line of business, but they still have a big stake in the capital goods sector and should be expected to do better, though in the case of Larsen & Toubro it may be asking for the moon. Its Rs 10 share is quoted around Rs 75, an unusual thing for that kind of company. However, 1985 is expected to be an unusual year in many ways, for although the corporate sector as a whole is doing pretty well, it is passing through something of a churning pot, with so many new products and so many new companies making a bid for a place in the corporate sun.

B K SHARMA



ACTIVE STOCKS

	1984 HIGH	1984 LOW	CLOSE 19.12.84	Change on month
Asea	75.00	48.00	66.00	3.75 +
Ashok Leyland	37.50	26.50	27.50	0.25 –
Associated Cement	458.00	298.50	368.50	2.50 +
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.00	34.50	3.00 +
Ballarpur	53.30	43.00	43.50	0.50 +
Baroda Rayon	295.00	243.00	286.00	31.00 +
BASF	49.00	28.50	48.00	2.00 +
Bata India	49.35	33.30	49.00	5.00 +
Birla Jute	62.50	51.60	51.60	1.80 –
Blow Plast	48.50	37.00	40.00	3.00 +
Blue Star	34.00	29.50	32.00	0.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	72.00	59.00	67.00	5.00 +
Britannia Industries	46.50	33.60	44.50	4.25 +
Brooke Bond	48.00	34.10	48.00	3.25 +
Century Spinning	907.50	790.00	902.50	42.50 +
Chloride India	56.50	46.25	56.50	2.00 +
Coates of India	30.87	24.00	24.00	2.00 –
Colgate	141.00	100.00	141.00	16.00 +
Cyanamid	45.50	30.50	33.00	1.00 +
DCM	76.12	47.00	49.75	0.25 +
Dunlop	27.60	20.50	21.10	0.10 –
East India Hotels	40.25	25.50	25.50	8.00 –
Escorts	76.00	50.25	50.75	0.50 –
Food Specialities	92.50	69.00	92.50	8.50 +
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	18.60	18.60	0.60 –
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	49.00	54.75	2.25 +
Herdillia Chemicals	27.00	20.50	26.00	0.75 –
Hindustan Aluminium	51.00	44.00	49.40	1.10 +
Hindustan Cocoa	60.00	21.00	57.50	2.50 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	46.00	51.00	0.25 –
Hindustan Motors	48.00	40.40	41.40	0.88 +
Indian Aluminium	26.40	19.00	26.40	0.90 +
Indian Explosives	33.10	25.00	33.10	3.90 +
Indian Organic	51.00	31.00	50.50	7.25 +
Indian Oxygen	44.50	33.00	43.50	6.90 +
Indian Rayon	75.50	54.50	68.00	5.00 +
J.K. Synthetics	52.80	29.00	51.30	2.00 +
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	50.50	8.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	156.00	113.00	135.00	5.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	560.00	407.50	515.00	25.00 +
Kothari	27.00	20.60	20.60	1.65 –
Larsen & Toubro	80.00	65.00	71.50	4.50 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	74.75	45.00	48.50	0.50 –
Modi Rubber	30.31	19.50	19.50	2.00 –
National Organic	243.00	176.50	237.50	17.50 +
Nirlon	39.00	32.00	37.25	0.25 +
Oswal Agro	95.00	51.75	57.87	1.62 +
Otis Elevator	87.00	54.00	87.00	11.50 +
Premier Automobiles	317.00	246.00	316.00	15.00 +
Ranbaxy	55.00	44.00	49.00	3.00 +
Raymond Woollen	69.50	53.00	57.50	3.00 +
Reliance Textiles	144.00	110.00	124.00	6.00 –
Shriram Fibres	38.75	30.37	37.87	0.87 +
Siemens	47.50	41.00	42.25	0.75 –
SPIC	40.85	28.06	40.85	2.73 +
Straw Products	57.00	42.20	45.30	2.05 +
Tata Chemicals	71.00	53.00	64.25	1.25 +
Tata Steel	355.50	244.50	355.50	18.00 +
Telco	433.00	385.00	420.50	14.50 +
Texmaco	69.80	49.80	62.10	3.30 –
Union Carbide	30.25	18.80	19.30	9.80 –
Unit Trust	14.35	12.60	13.85	0.20 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	10.3521	10.2127
Austria	Schilling	100	57.0588	56.2500
Bahrain	Dinar	1	31.8721	31.8255
Bangladesh	Taka	100	46.7920	45.6815
Canada	Dollar	1	9.3901	9.2753
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1180	1.1031
Egypt	Pound	1	13.2640	13.2001
France	Franc	1	1.3200	1.2900
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5822	1.5636
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1009	1.0921
Iran	Rial	100	12.8311	12.8001
Italy	Lira	100	0.6493	0.6479
Japan	Yen	100	5.0046	4.9426
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7891	0.7877
Kuwait	Dinar	1	39.4311	39.2210
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1358	5.0686
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.7921	0.7909
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6920	0.6918
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5418	3.4985
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7881	0.7870
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6991	5.6271
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0725	0.0701
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4519	0.4509
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3995	1.3802
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.8107	4.7816
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6822	0.6803
Thailand	Baht	100	44.7000	44.9921
UK	Pound	1	14.5500	14.4000
USA	Dollar	1	12.4500	12.2500
UAE	Dirham	1	3.2021	3.1709
USSR	Rouble	1	13.8721	13.6920
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.1000	3.9500

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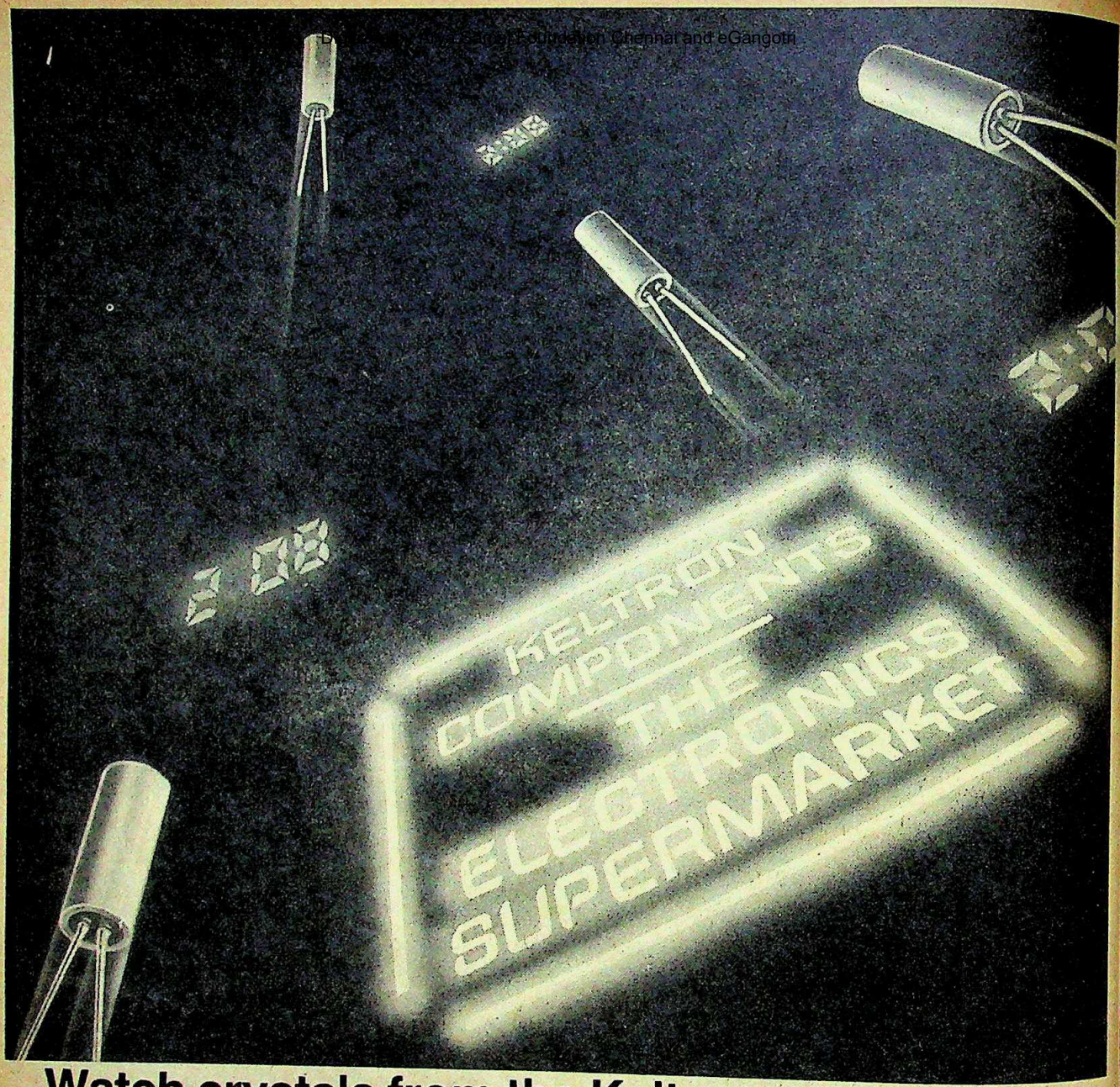

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MBA ENTRANCE

To the MBA Aspirant

Like all movements in art, literature or religion, professionalism in Management started essentially as a movement of revolt, at the end of world war II, first in the United States and then in the whole of the western world. Peter Drucker regards it as a pivotal event in history. When the change came it came in such a flood sweeping everything before it and vitally affecting every aspect of life. What was before the exclusive preserve of a coterie became the concern of everybody. It created an intense awareness of the importance of management, its functions, its role and all this will remain permanently, long after its momentum has lessened and the euphoria has died down.

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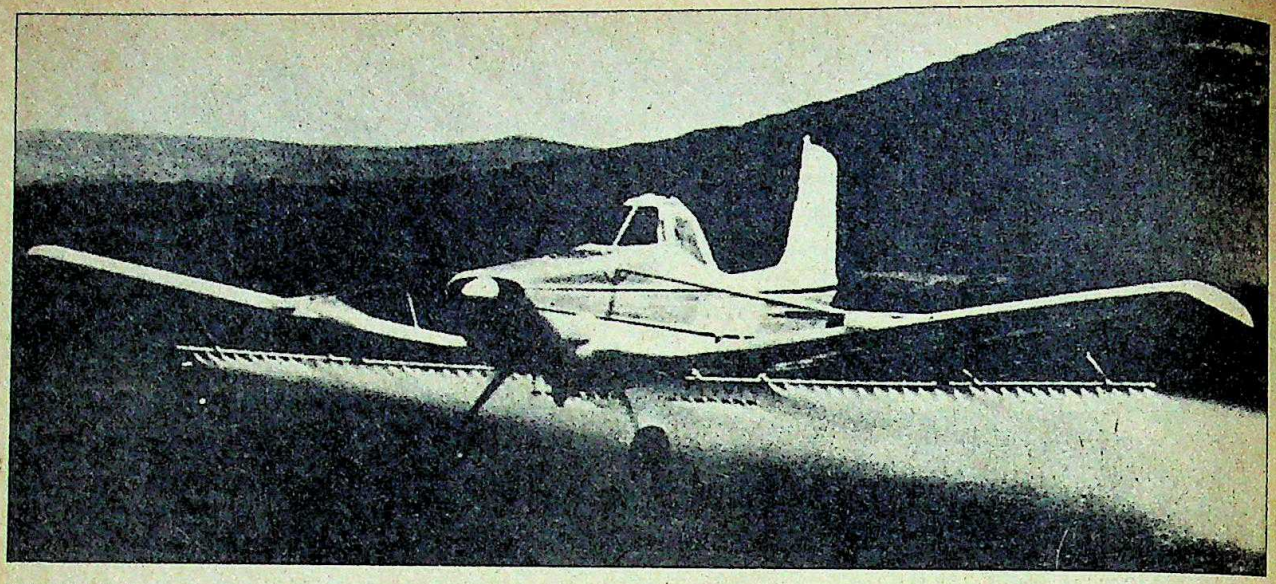


HINDUSTAN CIBA-GEIGY

An aircraft spraying pesticides: a grave question of ethics

Dangerous Exposures

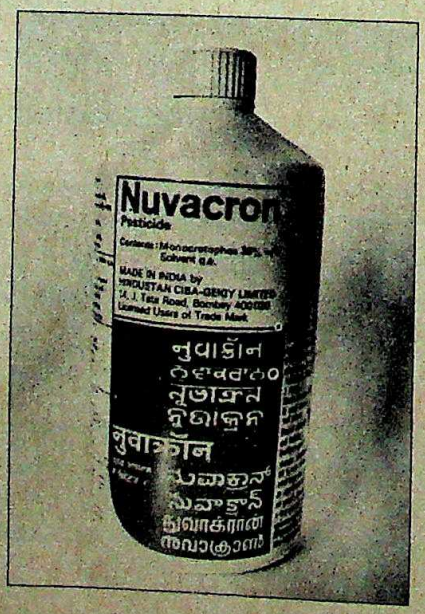
WHILE QUESTIONS are being asked as to whether Union Carbide India was using Indians as guinea-pigs at its research and development centre in Madhya Pradesh, there is at least one case on record of a multinational company doing in India what it would not dare to do in its parent country: use humans as guinea-pigs to test the safety of a pesticide. The company: Hindustan Ciba-Geigy Ltd, which makes drugs, cosmetics and three brands of pesticides, and which had a turnover in 1982 of Rs 102.2 crore.

In June and October 1975, the company tested the safety of its Nuvacron pesticide, based on organophosphorous compounds, on more than 40 Indian volunteers (including children) aged between 13 and 57. All of them stood around while an aircraft loaded with the pesticide solution sprayed them with it over a period of four days. A year later, in 1976, its associate company in Egypt sprayed six young Egyptian children with Galecron, a powerful pesticide that had immediate and disastrous effect on the children's health.

Horrifying as this use of human beings as guinea-pigs may sound, the tests were supervised by government officials, were reportedly approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and are claimed to have the sanction of the Insecticides Act of 1968, which requires that aerial spraying measurements be done under practical conditions to show that living beings are safe even under a shower of the stuff. But a spokesman of the public sector Hindustan Insecticides Ltd said: "Such tests are unheard of. We would never do it, and I doubt that Ciba-Geigy would have done these tests in either Europe or the United States." And with Bhopal's black December having removed any doubts that pesticides can kill, the ethics of conducting such tests become even more important.

The results of the tests in India were gratifying. R.R. Rao, M.R. Marathe and S.D. Gangoli of the Toxicology and Pathology Department of the Ciba-Geigy research centre ended their exhaustive account of the tests in an issue of *Ecotoxicology and Environmental Safety* by forthrightly saying: "Aerial application of Nuvacron on crops at a dose of 400-500 ml per acre did not induce any toxic effect in farm workers of either sex when they were directly exposed daily to the spray of the pesticide."

A bottle of Nuvacron: testing time



That is as it may be but few questions appear to have been raised about the ethics of such a practice. Not, of course, that Ciba-Geigy is not touchy about reports of its tests being made public. After stories of the field experiments spread, years after they were made, Dr P. Brenneisen and Dr H. Aebi of Ciba-Geigy, Basel, Switzerland, sought to clarify matters in a letter to *The New Scientist* last year. The letter stated: "The purpose of these measurements was to ascertain through conscientious planning and medical surveillance that inadvertent exposure during spraying does not create any hazard to a rural population." According to them the tests "establish safety without endangering the subjects, and thus should not be considered unethical".

Perhaps the Nuvacron tests did not endanger the subjects, but the Egyptian tests certainly did. Six Egyptian children aged between 10 and 18 were paid the equivalent of £10 (Rs 160) each to stand around in a cotton field while an aircraft sprayed them with Galecron, a powerful pesticide with a suspected carcinogen, Chlorodimeform, as its base. Within 24

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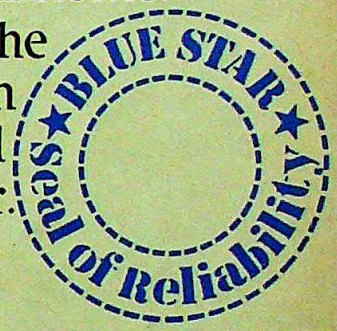

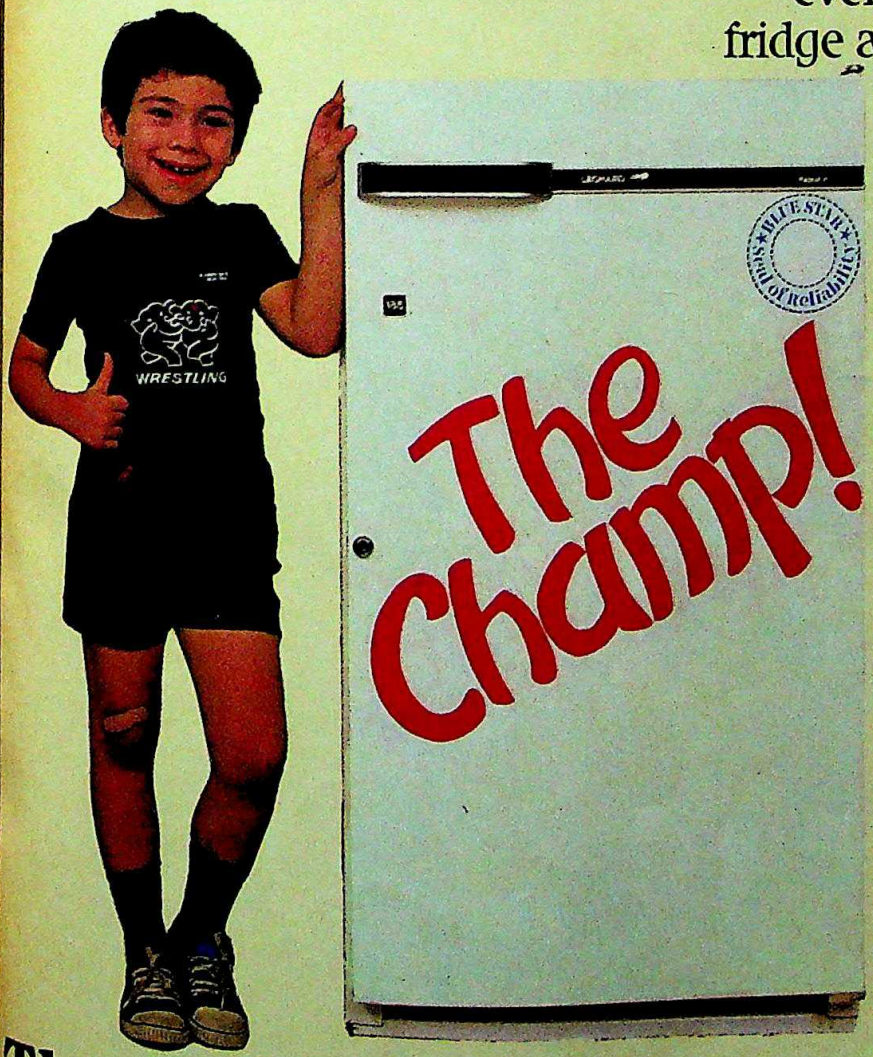

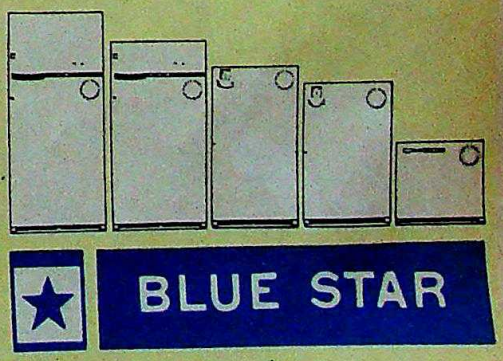

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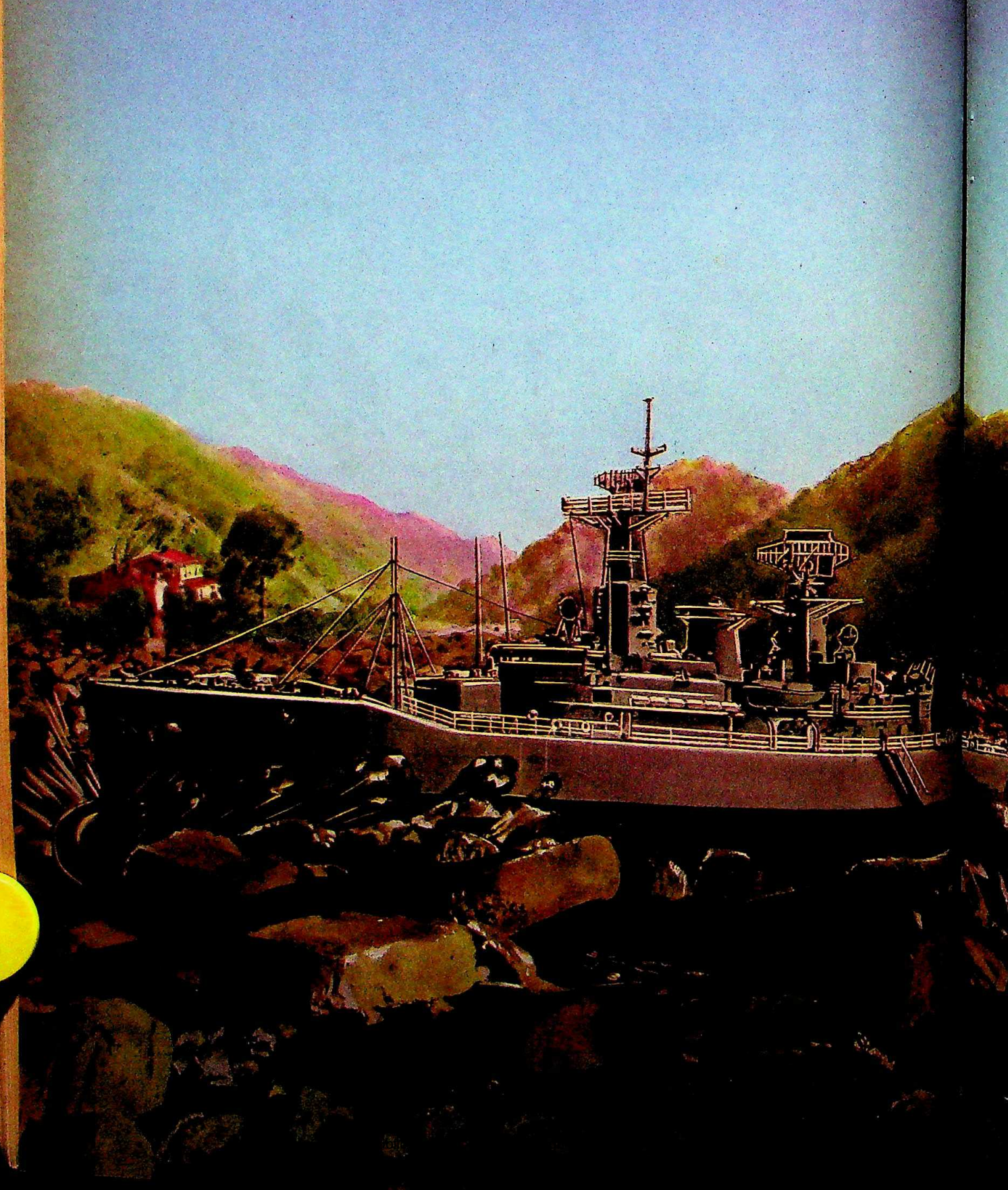

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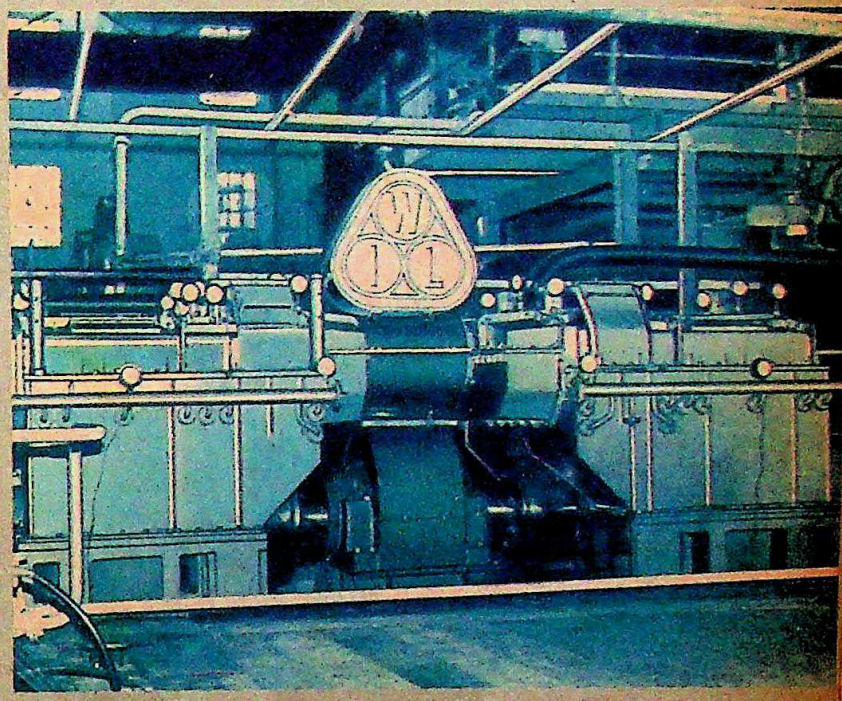

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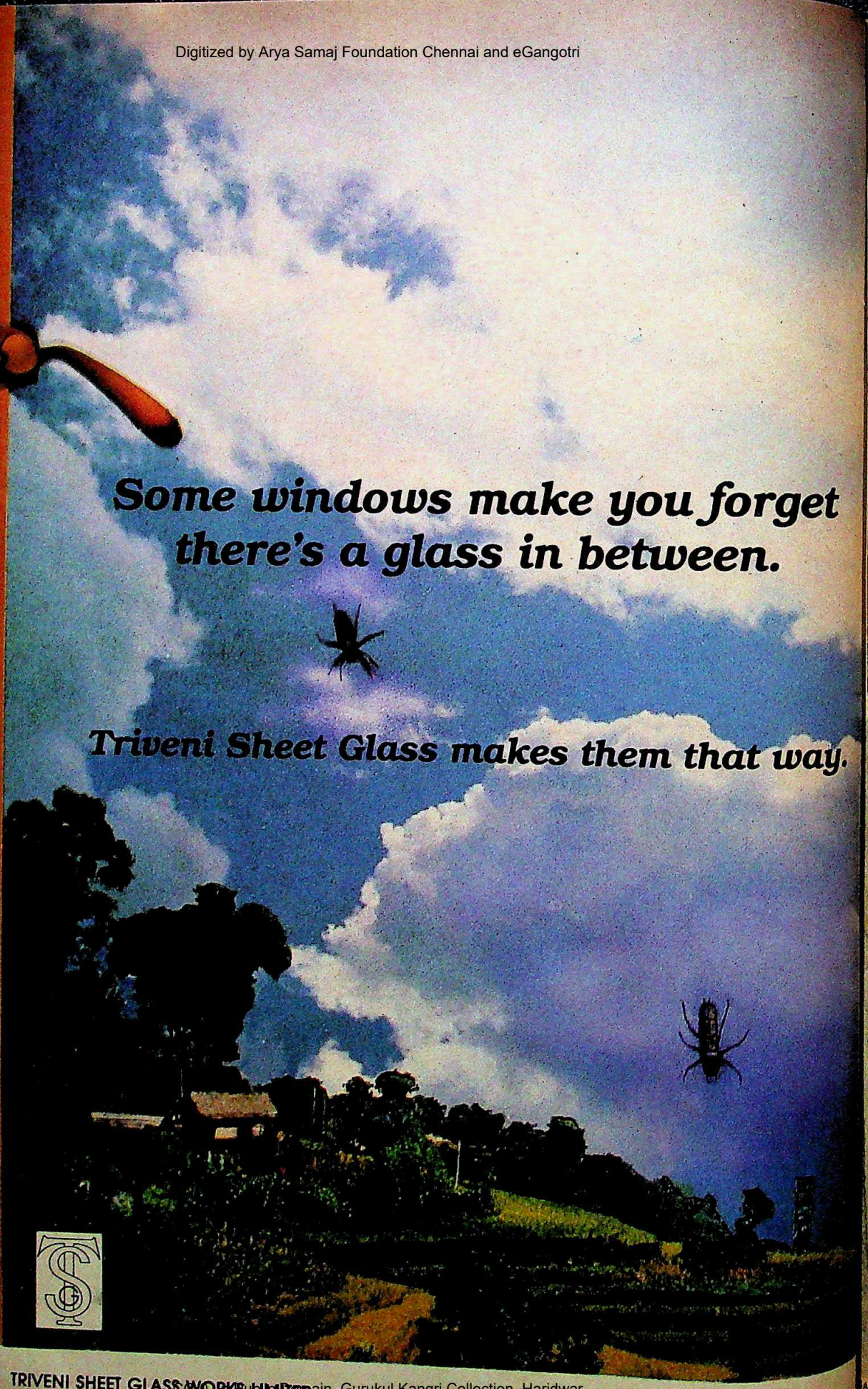

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hours all six came down with organochlorine poisoning, rashes, vomiting, headaches and soaring levels of the chemical in their urine. The Egyptian Government, which had asked for the tests in the first place, banned the pesticide.

Brenneisen and Aebi came up with a letter. They said that the pesticide had been removed from the market in 1976 and reintroduced in 1978 with a "number of safety and precautionary measures in connection with the product's use". They also said that the tests were carried out "under realistic field conditions" and only when "the results of thorough prior toxicological tests have shown conclusively that no harm will come to the people who act as subjects". In Egypt, according to Brenneisen and Aebi, "young people were involved...because they are and always have been welcome and intensive helpers in the fields".

It is unlikely that "realistic field conditions" mean that a group of children stand passively while they are drenched with a poison. In fact the company was probably taking a calculated risk, because its report on Galecron in 1976 had said that "there appeared toxicological effects which we considered to be grave". The product was back in the market in 1978 but curiously about half the annual production was exported to Latin American countries—where its unsecured handling could be the most lethal—as the safety-conscious European market did not take to it.

A COMPANY spokesman in Bombay said that all tests of the kind which have drawn so much flak have been stopped. But Ciba-Geigy was in the thick of another squabble with western consumer organisations, particularly the Swedish Human Action International. The company issued a press release last fortnight which after giving the background to the dispute, concluded: "Although the exposure study did not pose any hazard to the health of the children"—not entirely true —"Ciba-Geigy regrets the involvement of children in the study. Since that time no children have been involved in any such study nor will they ever be again."

It is surprising how a company as obsessed with safety as Ciba-Geigy—the effluent treatment plant at its Rs 20-crore Goa factory has cost Rs 2 crore—could have allowed itself to carry out such obviously dangerous experiments. Even more surprising is the role of the WHO in the matter. WHO lays down the guidelines for such exposure tests and after the hullabaloo over the Egypt experiment, it gave what amounted to a clean chit to Ciba-Geigy, affirming its satisfaction at the way in which the tests were carried out and even calling them "highly ethical". Last fortnight, however, that clean chit was conspicuously absent from Ciba-Geigy's case for the defence.

While the company would clearly like to forget the whole affair, it has raised some disturbing questions: Is it right for a company to sell a product—that the well-informed West refuses to accept—to countries where the chances of its misuse are much greater? Are exposure tests really necessary and if they are, should the experimenters be allowed to interpret "realistic field conditions" in their own way? Finally, what is the secret behind WHO's earlier fulsome praise and current silence? Unfortunately the all-important answers will be a long time coming.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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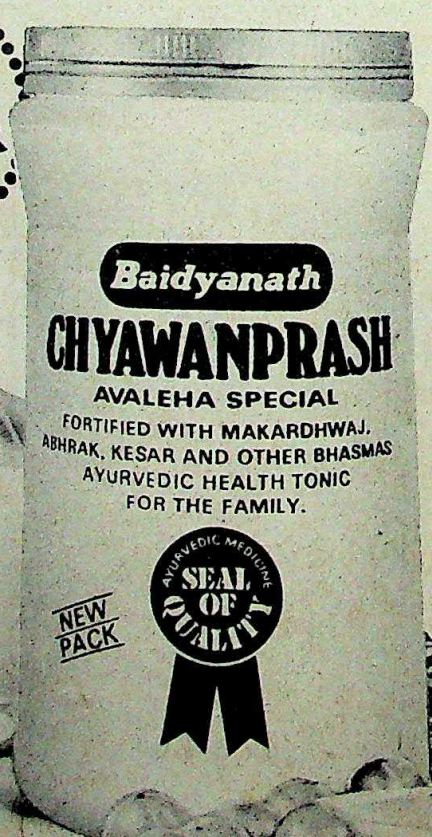

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CRICKET

Superstar Wars

FOR WELL over a decade now, two stars have dominated the Indian cricket scene like few others before them. Sunil Gavaskar, the dimunitive dynamo, holder of the world record for the most Test centuries and one of the greatest batsmen the cricketing world has been privileged to witness. The other is, of course, Kapil Dev, the one-man demolition squad who is acknowledged universally as one of the best all-rounders in the game today.

Last fortnight, however, they were dominating the cricket scene in quite a different context, at the fulcrum of a stormy controversy that led finally, and irrevocably, to the sensational sacking of Kapil from the Indian team for the remaining bouts in the current series against England. It also threw up into full public view the serious nature of the growing friction between the two superstars of Indian cricket; friction which was finally stretched to breaking point in the second Test match in New Delhi which left the Indian team in embarrassing disgrace.

The immediate provocation for giving Kapil the chop was ostensibly the reckless and irresponsible manner in which he tossed away his wicket at a crucial stage in the match when discretion rather than abandoned aggression was the sole requirement. But the storm that erupted in its wake succeeded in revealing the broader—and baser—contours of the clash.

Though there were outraged cries of 'not quite cricket' from supporters of the Haryana all-rounder, in the purely cricketing sense, the Indian selection committee was perfectly justified in its decision to drop Kapil and the hard-hitting middle-order batsman Sandip Patil as a "disciplinary measure". The five selectors are all prominent ex-cricketers and the fact that they had little hesitation in axing Kapil and Patil after the Indian batsmen handed England the Delhi Test on a steaming platter, is adequate indication that they, like the Indian captain, felt that enough was enough. As if to confirm the correctness of their action, former English cricket captain Tony Lewis categorically stated: "They (England) would not have won without Sandip Patil and Kapil Dev throwing away their wickets."

But what really soured the pitch was the dubious role played by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) President, N.K.P. Salve, who interrupted his hectic election campaigning on behalf of Home Minister Narasimha Rao from his residence in Nagpur to launch yet another 'Operation Salvage', a knee-jerk reconciliation move to get the two feuding stars to bury the hatchet. That the move was promptly renamed 'Operation Salve' by the media was enough indication that Salve's sole intention was to get Kapil back into the Indian side by hook or by crook. That it was more of the latter was made abundantly clear very soon.

While Kapil played his own games by announcing that he was joining the Congress (I) and would campaign for the party's candidates, Salve summoned the two protagonists to Nagpur for a closed-door meeting. Gavaskar at first declined the invitation on the grounds that he was playing in a Ranji Trophy match. Salve then dispatched BCCI trouble-shooter, K. Kanmadikar to get Gavaskar to participate in the meeting. According to board sources, Gavaskar only agreed on the condition that his passage be paid and arrangements made for him to reach Cuttack in time for the one-day international against England. Gavaskar had good reason for his reluctance. Though Salve triumphantly announced after the meet that "all the misunderstanding had been cleared", the truth was quite different. Salve's pro-Kapil slant("he is so nationalistic that he would never do anything which would go against team spirit") was made obvious in his interviews to INDIA TODAY (*see box*), as was his bias against Gavaskar("Sunil is near the end of his career").

That attitude was further buttressed when he prevailed upon the tour committee to recommend that 15 players instead of the usual 14 be selected to represent the Test side. Nobody was left in any doubt that the 15th player was to be Kapil. But the clumsy ploy soon backfired. Prominent former cricketers immediately issued a statement asking the selectors not to bow to pressure, a warning they valiantly heeded. At a marathon selection meeting, Salve's 'advice' was pointedly ignored and Kapil's name unceremoniously left out from the list of those selected.

According to reliable sources, Gavaskar along with two of the five selectors threatened to resign if Kapil was included. The selectors, however, were finally convinced by their own assessment of the situation which indicated that Kapil's attitude towards Gavaskar would be detrimental to the team as a whole. Their assessment is based on solid ground. All five were witness to the fact that Kapil was using every opportunity to needle Gavaskar during the Delhi Test. When spinner Sivaramakrishnan was given the ball, Gavaskar set the field for him. Kapil, standing in the slips, rearranged the field even though he was not even the vice-captain.

Gavaskar and Kapil: not quite cricket

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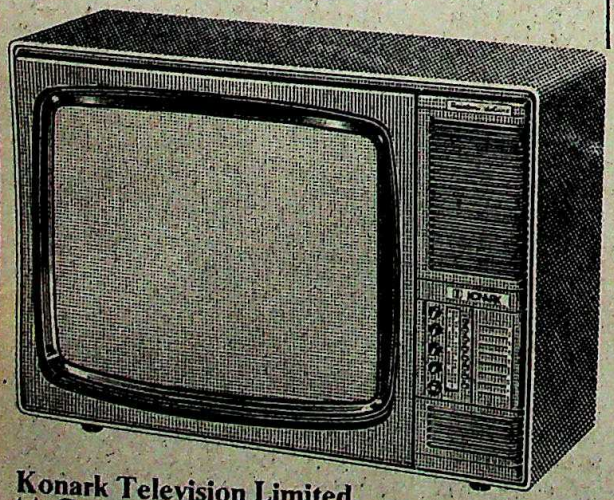

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Gavaskar had to ask him to desist.

Kapil had earlier tried to instigate a revolt against Gavaskar over a prize-money tournament in Varanasi by claiming that Gavaskar had taken more money than the rest. The fact was that Gavaskar had organised the match and was fully entitled to keep a larger share as long as the others got what he had promised them, which they had. There were other similar build-ups but the crunch came during the Delhi Test when Kapil made some disparaging remarks in the dressing-room, during the Indian second innings, against Gavaskar and the team's chances. Then, when he went out to bat, Gavaskar told him to keep his cool, advice which Kapil scornfully ignored. The altercation between the two when he returned having gifted away his wicket and sealed defeat for India was witnessed by at least two selectors and had a direct bearing on their decision to axe the all-rounder.

Regrettable as it may seem in the context of the absence of a player of his undoubted ability, the decision is widely seen as a positive step. For one, it has introduced accountability in the ranks of the senior players, a factor that was long overdue. For another, it has indicated that the cricket selectors are not prepared to buckle under political pressure of the Salve type. And, above all, it has made it clear that the kind of immaturity displayed by Kapil has no place on the cricket field. —DILIP BOBB with bureau reports

N.K.P. SALVE

Off Side

THE SETTING for 'Operation Salve' could not have been more ironically appropriate. The residence of BCCI *President N.K.P. Salve was a beehive of electioneering activity on the day of his crucial meeting with Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev. Against the backdrop of Congress (I) posters, khadi-clad party workers were holding heated discussions on election strategy. Salve spoke to* INDIA TODAY *in two separate exclusive interviews on the current controversy before and after the closed-door meeting with Gavaskar and Kapil, which is an indication of the political contours the controversy has acquired. Excerpts:*

Salve: politics

Q. ***What are your views on the supposed altercation between Gavaskar and Kapil Dev and the subsequent controversy about Kapil being dropped from the team?***

A. It is most unforeseen and unfortunate. I just cannot imagine Kapil and Sunil fighting between themselves. They have been such good friends. Both are persons who are normally well-behaved and firm nationalists.

Q. ***But reports clearly suggest that the two had an altercation which was witnessed by a member of the board.***

A. The reports do suggest what you say but I still cannot believe it could have happened. Kapil I know is so nationalistic that he would never do anything whichcan go against team spirit. I know that whenthe Indian cricketers did not do well in a particular match, Kapil used to be terribly upset. He could not have behaved like that.

Q. ***Judging by the reports, it is obvious that Kapil was dropped because of the indiscreet shot he played and the way he behaved with the Indian captain after his dismissal.If this is true, could you clarify as to whether Kapil was removed from the team as a disciplinary measure?***

A. I came to know about the sacking only a few hours ago and I am still to ascertain the facts from the board observers and members who were present at Delhi. All I can say is that the entire incident is most unfortunate. I have called a meeting of the tour committee to take stock of the situation and try and find a solution. The two cannot be allowed to go on warring paths.

Q. ***But you still have not answered the question as to whether you will intervene to see that Kapil is reinstated in the side.***

A. First, I will ascertain from the selectors as to why Kapil was dropped. If he was dropped on grounds of discipline, the selection committee has erred because it has no right to take disciplinary action. But if he has been dropped for being off form then I cannot interfere in the matter. The selection committee is an autonomous body and can take its own decision on the merits of cricketers.

Q. ***Do you think there is any chance of the selection committee reconsidering its decision and including Kapil for the Calcutta Test?***

A. That decision is for the selectors to take and I would not interfere in it.

Q. ***Do you agree that the dropping of an all-rounder of Kapil's stature is not good for Indian cricket if it was only for the reckless shot he played?***

A. Kapil is one of the pillars of Indian cricket. He is the greatest all-rounder and we can ill-afford to lose him. He has served the cause of Indian cricket quite long and has a lot of cricket to play unlike Sunil who is nearing his end.

Q. ***But then don't you believe that disciplinary action should be taken against erring cricketers and if so, will you recommend any strict action against Kapil?***

A. Whatever the board does will be in the interests of cricket, the country and discipline. But I still cannot believe that Kapil could behave in the way he is supposed to have.

Excerpts from the interview after Salve's meeting with the two cricketers:

Q. ***What was the outcome of the meeting with Gavaskar and Kapil?***

A. Both have confirmed that nothing happened between them. The reports are baseless.

Q. ***Then why was Kapil dropped?***

A. The tour committee and the chief selector have confirmed that he was dropped because he was not in form.

Q. ***But there was a member of the board who witnessed the altercation and now you want everybody to believe that nothing happened.***

A. I have inquired into the matter. At the Delhi match, the only board member present was Mr Kanmadikar and he too has denied witnessing any altercation.

Q. ***It hardly sounds convincing that nothing happened and Kapil was dropped for merely being out of form. Something must have transpired.***

A. The two are so cordial with each other that I cannot believe that they had an altercation.

Q. ***The tour committee has been asked to select 15 players instead of the normal 14. Is this a way of getting Kapil back into the side?***

A. The tour committee has recommended that 15 players be selected for a Test match because it gives greater scope for selection. As for Kapil's inclusion, it is for the selectors to decide.

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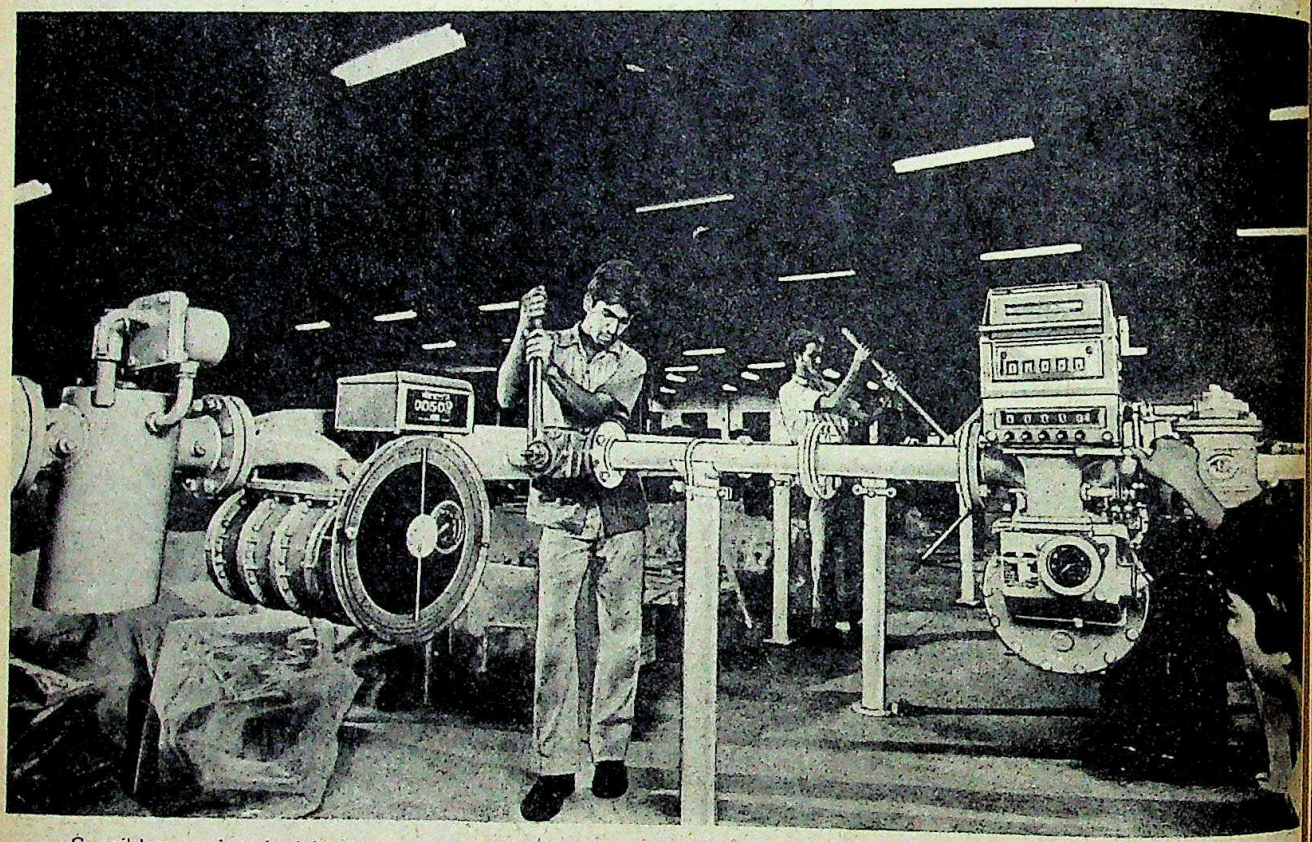

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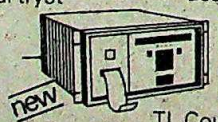

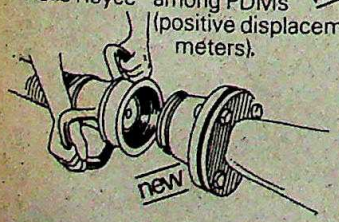

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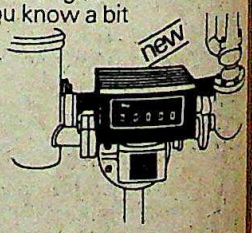

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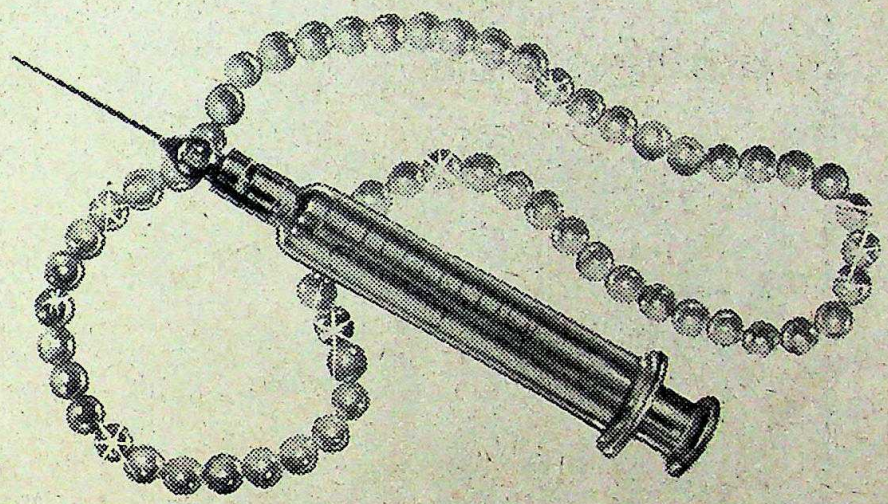

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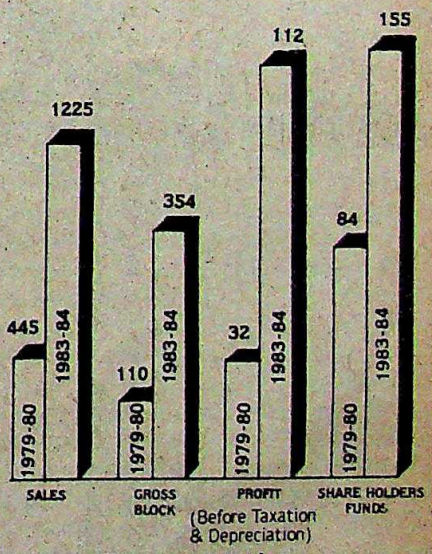

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A Superior Statement

MUKHAMUKHAM
DIRECTED BY: *Adoor Gopalakrishnan*
PRODUCED BY: *K. Ravindran Nair*
STARRING: *P. Ganga, Karamanna and Ponnamma*

GOOD cinema in 1984 bore abundantly the signs of the times—youthful, yet conventional; dazzling but not brilliant; sceptical, not probing. Luckily however, the year did not close with low budget wonders (*Ardh Satya, Saraansh*) and that delightful pastiche (*Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*). Already showing in Kerala, and awaiting screening in the Indian Panorama section of the Film Festival in Delhi this month, Malayalee film maker Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Mukhamukham* (Face to Face) does much more than spiking stale beer. It forces critics to discard the yardstick meant for competent cinema and summon the one meant for superior works. It is by far the most serious statement made on celluloid in India this year, and the sincerity of its concerns surpasses that of its contemporaries not by miles but by light-years.

Yet, like Adoor's 1982 film, *Elipattayam* (The Rat Trap), the 'statement' in *Mukhamukham* is as elusive as the contours of a dream. It defies literal summing up the way cinema, at its best, always does. But it relentlessly leads the viewer to a territory totally unexplored in Indian cinema—the inside of a revolutionary hero. It is sheer coincidence that Adoor's dialectic of the man and his image is set against the backdrop of Kerala where Marxism has both flowered and soured in a span of 25 years. The story encompasses about 15 years in the state's chequered political history when the communists had woven in and out of power, the party had split, and the idealism of the times had suffered as much erosion as the image of Adoor's revolutionary hero, Sreedharan, a dedicated worker of the Communist Party.

The first section of the film re-creates the 'image' with documentary fervour, making use of television-style interviews, voice-over narratives, wall-writings, slogans, and even short spells of editing that are unfailingly reminescent of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. There is even a sequence of police brutality where a pair of spectacles fallen to the ground is intercut with the stomping of boots. Adoor captures with a strong mimetic zeal the right language to portray the hero who can touch the hearts of his followers, lead his men to a strike in a factory, and, in the process, acquire an image which is larger than life.

This section climaxes with an attack on Sreedharan, a coolly reported counter-attack on the owner of the factory in which he dies, the framing of a wounded Sreedharan in the murder charge, and his eventual escape to the underground. The script leaps across the eddies of history at this stage. Without answering where Sreedharan had been all these years, it reopens at the home of his mistress, their 10-year-old son and the woman's father. Sreedharan returns to this home a changed man.

A scene from *Mukhamukham*; and (inset) Gopalakrishnan: sincere concern

He is an enigma to Sudhakaran, his disciple, who has been through the rough and tumble of the split and is probably poised for a split within the split. His son too is just as hard pressed to match the image of his father with that of the confused alcoholic who has just arrived in their house. And what adds to Sreedharan's confusion is the mounting expectation of his ex-comrades from him. He is still a hero who has survived the split, but many of those who want him back in their folds have gone in for the soft option.

Sreedharan's only gesture of defiance is to lapse into a Rip Van Winkle-slumber. Soon afterwards, he is clubbed to death by one of the rival groups. The 'image' is then ceremonially recalled, and the funeral procession somberly snakes along the village roads to the strains of the *Internationale*.

Actor P. Ganga's rough-hewn face, and the inscrutable gestures that flit across it, slowly build up the hero-like presence of Sreedharan. But Adoor keeps on pricking the balloon even as he blows it, and it is the woman, Savitri, who comes to know his secrets—the stomach-ache which is an excuse for drinking, the repressed lust which often camouflages itself as coyness, the weariness, the self-doubt.

The image-building and deflation come with a detachment that seems clinical. The screen is splashed with titles that often quote Lenin to say that the tree lives on while the leaves fall off, thus singing a requiem for Sreedharan in the manner of the chorus in Greek tragedy. And it is not altogether a negative view of communism that Adoor presents because the flame of idealism somehow manages to survive in Sudhakaran.

Adoor resents the film being called political. "I don't know why the papers are constantly calling it so," he says. But the fact remains that no Indian film has ever attempted to portray life within a communist party with so much of authenticity. And this life is worth a portrayal not only because the communist party movement is an integral part of Indian politics but because it shows humanity in a unique state of existence.

Mukhamukham's significance lies not only in its being a pathbreaker but in the subtle evocation of the now-forgotten language of agitprop cinema, in its uninhibited transition from the documentary style to the dramatic, and, finally, in the detached dignity with which the film chronicles personal as well as political history. Despite Adoor's unexplained objections, it is a superb political film though it aims at interpreting the world without offering or trying to change it.

—SUMIT MITRA

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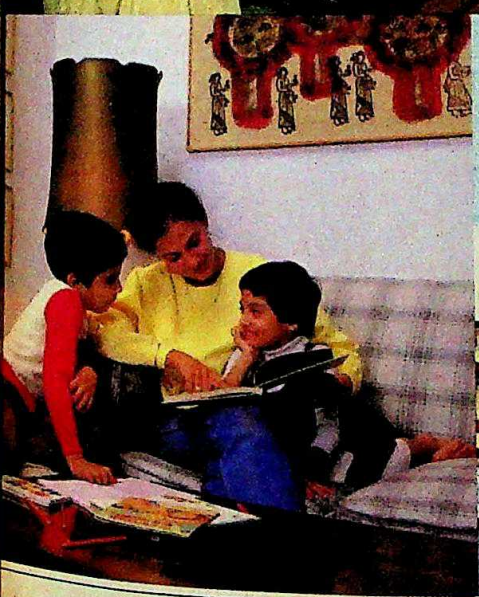

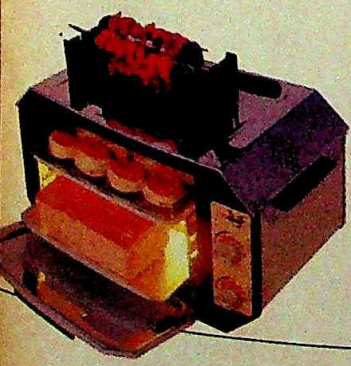

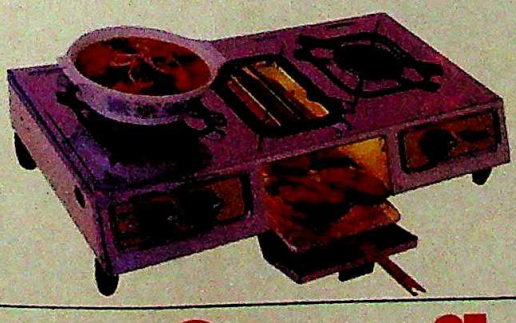

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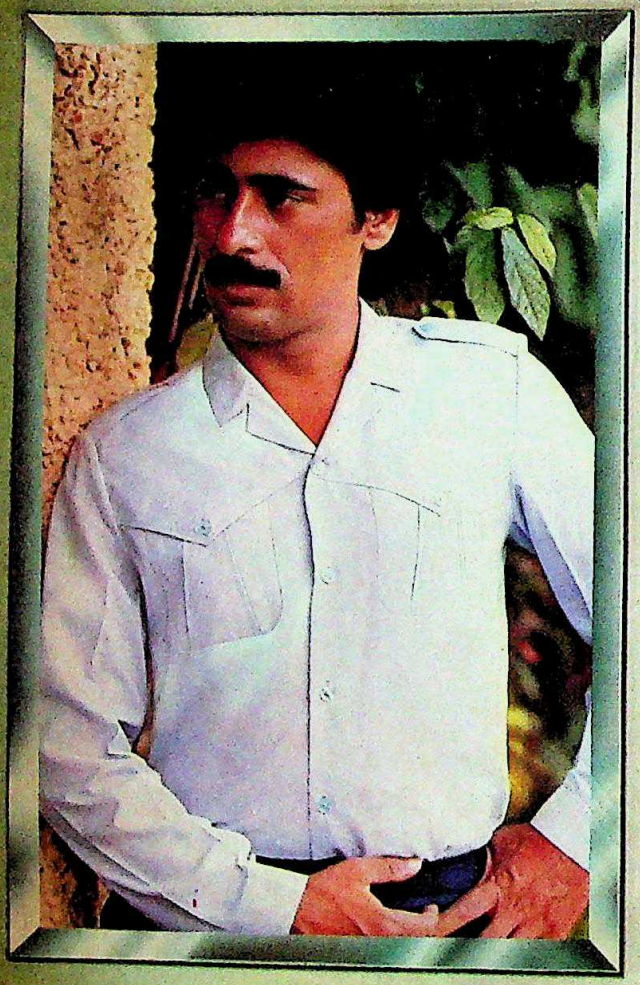

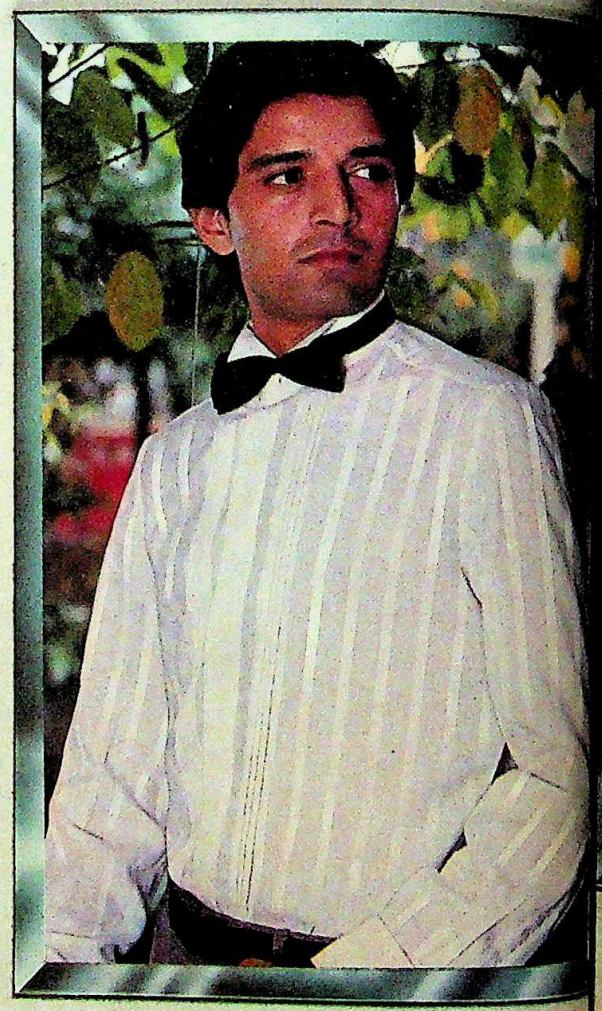

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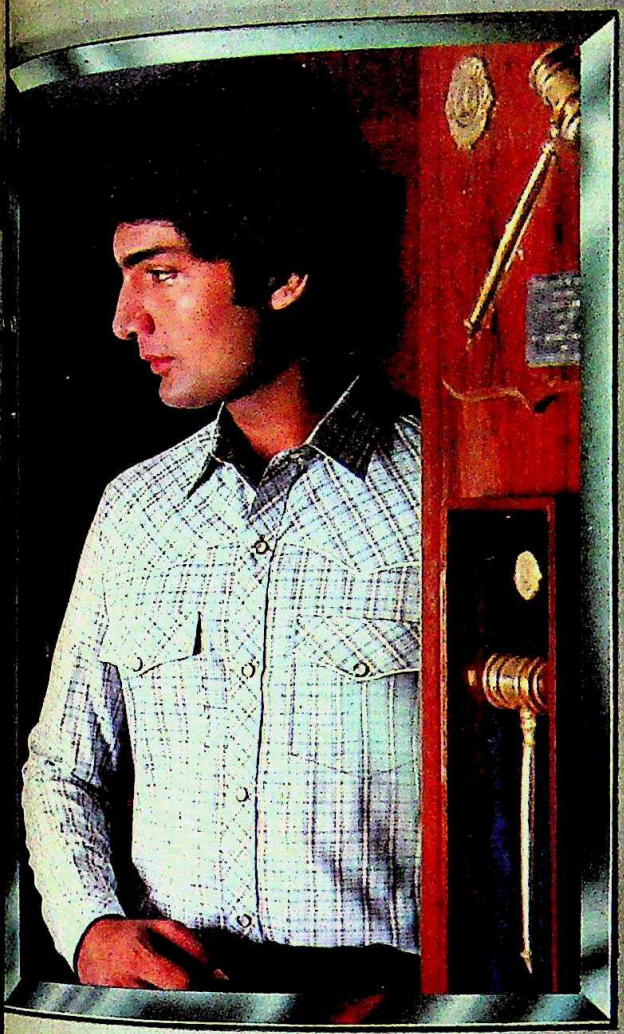

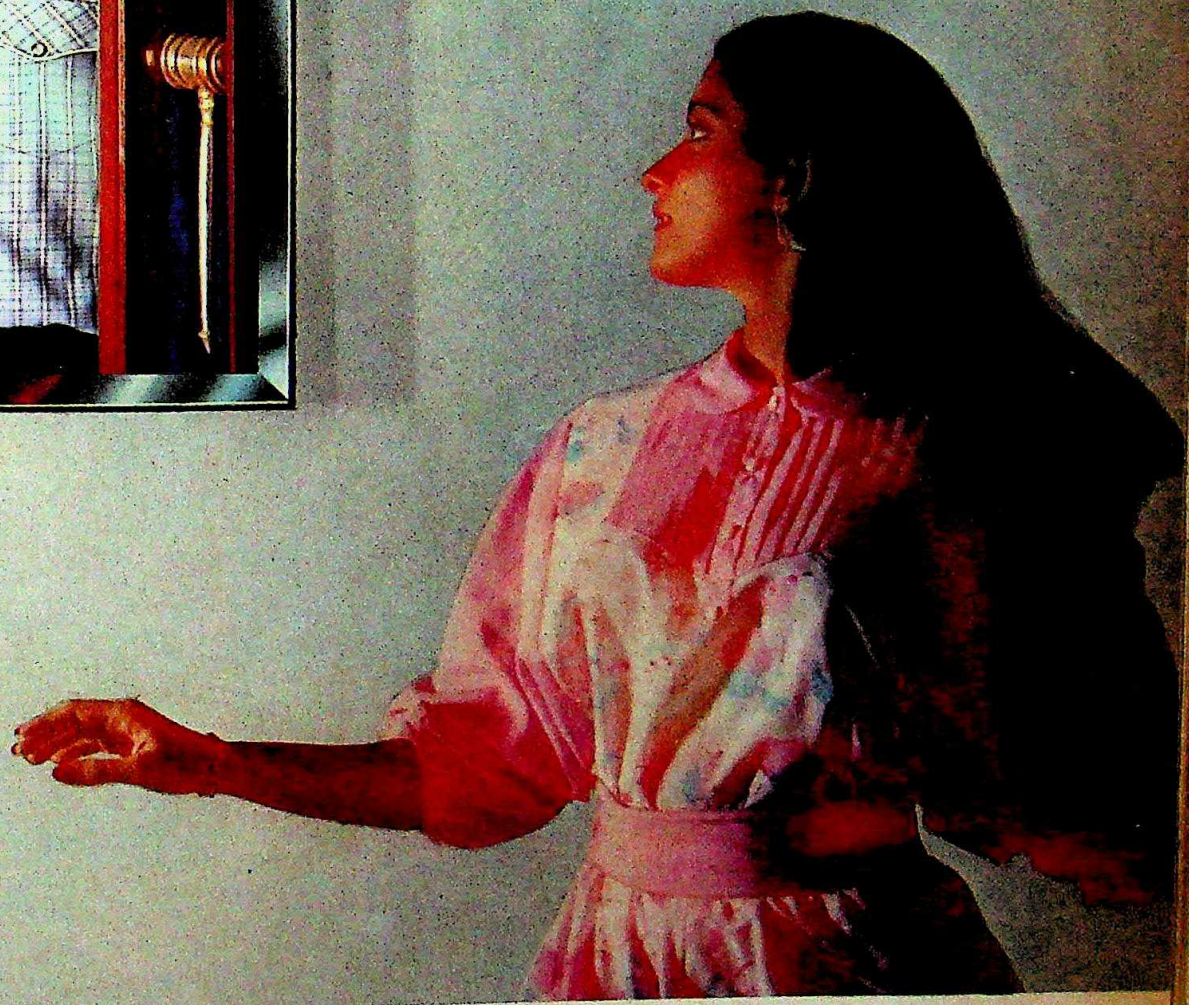

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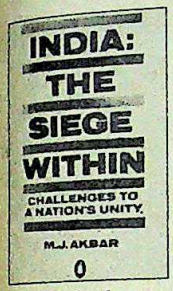
Racy History

INDIA: THE SIEGE WITHIN
BY M.J. AKBAR
Penguin Books
Price: £2.95



THE NUMBER of Indians who have been published by Penguins can be counted on one's finger-tips. To have one's first work bear the imprint of this prestigious firm of publishers which specialise in low-priced books designed for mass circulation should indeed be a matter of enormous gratification for one as young as Akbar. His qualifications for pronouncing on contemporary Indian history are impeccable. After training with *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and a short but not very distinguished stint as editor of *Onlooker* he found his niche in the Anand Bazar group of papers editing a weekly, *Sunday*, and a daily, *The Telegraph*—all before he was 30.

The book is divided in three parts. The first deals with the birth of Pakistan and its dismemberment; the second with Akali politics, the Anandpur Resolution, Bhindranwale, 'Operation Blue Star', the assassination of Mrs Gandhi and the anti-Sikh riots that followed; the third with Kashmir, its emergence as a semi-autonomous Indian state under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah, the Sheikh's disputes with the Central Government, the succession of Dr Farooq Abdullah and his downfall. In a country where one crisis follows another and whose yesterdays pass into the limbo of history of yesteryears, it is difficult to write anything which does not get outdated in a very short time. Akbar has brought his narrative right down to the events of November 1984.

Most keen followers of Indian affairs will be familiar with much that Akbar has to say about the background and political developments in the subcontinent. For them his narration will provide a refresher course in the history of recent times enlivened by pithy anecdotes, apt quotations and reminiscences of people he met. He also has an uncanny way of summing up history in a few sentences. To wit: "Pakistan was carved in the thirties, launched in the forties, distorted in the fifties, choked in the sixties and decimated in the seventies. With yet another gun-and-moustache man (General Zia-ul-Haq) at the helm in the eighties, the future looks as tenuous as the past." His summary of Sikhism is equally perceptive: "In 1499 Guru Nanak had proclaimed his mission: in 1699 Guru Govind gave the Sikh the Khalsa identity; in 1799 the first independent Sikh kingdom was set up; and within precisely fifty years, by 1848, the one-generation empire had dissipated in waste of spirit. The Sikhs had survived their terrible battle against Muslim arms. Could they survive the war with the Hindu mind?"

Akbar's answer to the question is in the negative based entirely on the fact there are not enough of them. The Sikh struggle to keep their identity distinct ultimately forced their leaders to resort to hostility against Hindus and patronage of men like Bhindranwale. Akbar met Bhindranwale ("a gun in his hand a sermon on his lips"); it did not take him very long to realise that his "intellectual qualities were a trifle limited; when he was not sounding foolish, he sounded ludicrous." He puts the blame for patronising Bhindranwale's entry into Sikh politics squarely on Giani Zail Singh and Mrs Gandhi's Congress party. He asserts correctly that the Sikh masses "did not respond to Bhindranwale's efforts to create anti-Hindu riots—a large majority of Sikhs were simply not interested in breaking India's unity."

Akbar does not mince his words pronouncing on the succession of confrontations between Abdullah and Nehru who were "the best of personal friends and the worst of political enemies." If Kashmir is a part of India, it is more due to Sheikh Abdullah than to Pandit Nehru. And if Kashmir is in a mess today it is more the making of Mrs Gandhi than that of Farooq Abdullah. The sordid way he was removed from office is lucidly spelt out. Once it was decided to oust Farooq from power, B.K. Nehru who refused to be party to questionable tactics was transferred to Gujarat to be replaced as governor by Jagmohan, a man "with a very lax attitude towards truth".

Any book of such dimensions attempting to compress the political history of a continent of teeming millions in 300-odd pages is bound to be controversial. But no one will question Akbar's erudition, objectivity and commitment to his craft. His racy style of writing makes reading a sheer pleasure.

—KHUSHWANT SINGH

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RUDOLF NUREYEV

A Legend Comes to Town

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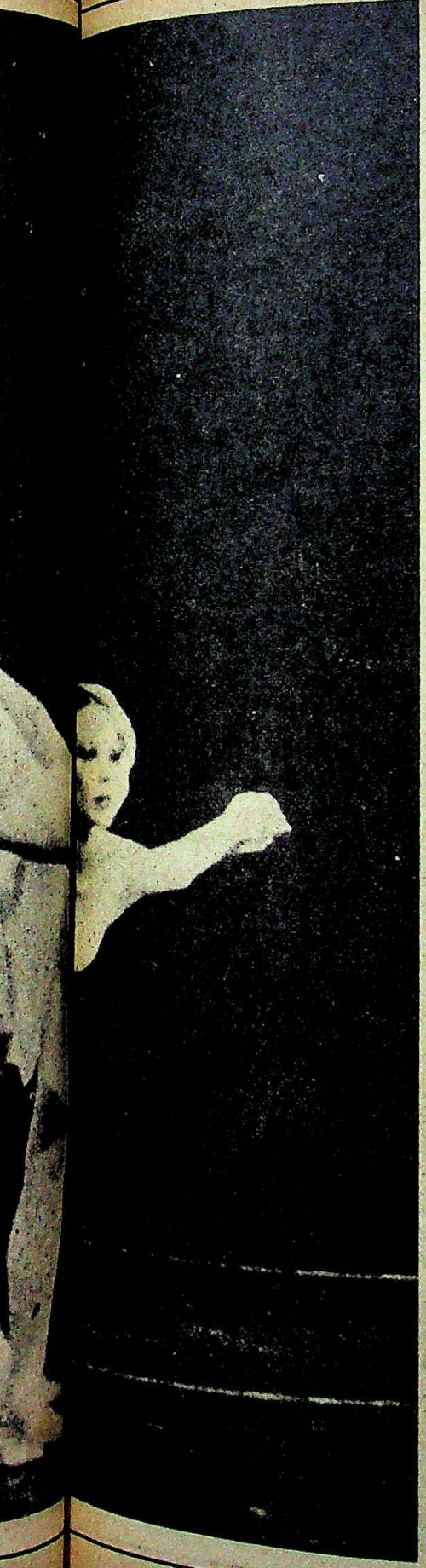
HENRY BOURCHEIX



ONE FROSTY day in March 1938, a little chestnut-haired boy was born in a train rattling along towards Vladivostok on the east coast of the USSR. No cornets or drums heralded the event. But just 23 years later, the entire world of western dance would acknowledge that in Rudolf Hametovich Nureyev, a star had indeed been born. And nothing would characterise his forceful and brilliant foray into ballet better than the impetuosity with which he entered the world. Today Nureyev, 46, is still the stuff of which legends are made: the rage of balletomanes, sex symbol to hysterical groupies and above all, classical dancer *non pareil*. "He is not just one more dancer of first-class talent," says critic Alexander Bland. "He is one of those strange, haunted artists that ballet throws up from time to time, dancers through whom some intense, urgent message seems to be passing."

This fortnight the legendary Nureyev will dance before Indian audiences for the first time. He says he is looking forward to visiting a country with such a rich dance tradition of its own. In his performances in Delhi and Bombay he will be accompanied by dancers from the Paris Opera Ballet, of which he is the artistic director. The company, which is considered to be among the three best along with the USSR's Kirov and Bolshoi ballets, will be the second to appear this season—the Bolshoi was here just last month. For Nureyev, who says "what is my country? My country is dance", India will be another of the worlds he loves to conquer.

At an age when most male dancers have retired into obscurity, Nureyev is out there in the glare of spotlights; dancing, choreographing, even acting in films. But even he is mortal, it seems. The effects of age on his still tautly-muscled, feline body are becoming visible on stage despite his heroic efforts to compensate for them. Critics have been predictably quick to notice that the sensuous young faun is now middle aged. *Commonweal* magazine commented on a 1981 performance: "The quality of his performance is clearly less on a purely technical basis that it once was. His dancing now possesses an obvious athletic quality that used to be hidden in his characterisation..." Critic Tobi Tobias was more caustic: "His groupies refuse to believe it, but Nureyev really can't dance any more."

It's not just his groupies who remain unconvinced by the critics' sharp attacks. Nureyev's immaculately artistic and technically perfect performances have won him the enduring admiration of connoisseurs like Jackie Kennedy Onassis. "The critics?" she laughs. "It's like the bull ring—they push you to extend yourself, and when you do, they knock you for going on so long." How long will he continue to dance? "As long as it pleases me," he says firmly. And when he does take his last bow as a dancer, his recent appointment as the artistic director of the prestigious Paris Opera Ballet will ensure him an equally productive post-performance career involved with dance.

But for the moment, Nureyev continues to be a man "eaten up by dance". It is his utter dedication to his calling—so strong it could be called an obsession—that has won for him his coveted place as one of the greatest male dancers of all time along with Nijinsky. For Nureyev, the superstar, the media god, is also a dancer of high intelligence and a formidable knowledge of dance and dance history. He himself has never taken anything for granted. "Every step must be sprayed with your blood," Nureyev has said, sincerely, if somewhat theatrically. Dame Margot Fonteyn, the principal guest artiste of England's Royal Ballet with whom the young Nureyev shared a long and magical partnership made the surprising discovery very early on: "The young boy everyone thought so wild and spontaneous in his dancing cared desperately about his technique."

That is why, some 20 years later, critics are still forced to acknowledge his greatness. Barbara Newman says: "As resolute as ever about perfecting his technique, he has become less reckless executing it." She marvels: "Although he neither has the technique, nor the strength or stamina he once had, he still corrects his body instant by instant...it's like watching Isaac Stern tune and string his Stradivarius while playing cadenzas on it." Small wonder, then, that his career has been so prodigious. He has appeared with over 30 of the world's major dance companies, mounted, and partly choreographed as many as 25 productions including *The Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake, Raymonda, Don Quixote, The Nutcracker* and Act IV of *La Bayadere*. As a young dancer in Russia, Nureyev had already appeared in all the classical ballets with the famous Kirov and Bolshoi companies.

After his defection to the West—on a tour of France with the Kirov Ballet, he jumped over the railing of Le Bourget Airport in Paris to elude Russian security-men accompanying the dancers—Nureyev broadened his artistic vision, in-

Nureyev: magnetism and brilliance

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cluding modern dance as well in his repertoire. He particularly admired the work of the American choreographer Martha Graham whose work he danced with Margot Fonteyn in *Lucifer*, 10 years ago. His continuous search for choreographers who would add one more dimension to his already formidable arsenal of dance took him to the work of Maurice Bejart (*Songs of a Wayfarer*), Glen Tetley (*Tristan*), Murray Louis (*Moments*), George Balanchine (*Apollon Musagete*), Paul Taylor (*Aureole*), and more recently, Martha Graham (*Phaedra's Dream*).

The dancer, whom US critic John Martin disdainfully called a "gigolo", ironically enough acted as a powerful corrective to the prevalent trend of downplaying the male dancer's role in the ballet. Where once the male dancer was merely a counterpoint to the ballerina, Nureyev put the glamorous male star back on centre-stage. He says, a trifle chauvinistically: "I consider men to have a better organised brain and better able to separate themselves from nature and their own nature ... men are better at everything. They have the higher level of sensibility and sensitivity. And so it has to be." He however adds: "But in my ballets, I leave everything that is of value for a woman and I add material for the man just to restore the equilibrium."

When he dances, the effect is positively masculine. Says Alexander Blanc: "The effect he makes can be double edged, with sexual magnetism which is discernible to both men and women. Th

INTERVIEW

"I shall always be dancing"

AT FORTY-SIX, most male ballet dancers have their careers irrevocably behind them. Not the legendary Rudolf Nureyev, the acknowledged "phenomenon of dance" who just last year took over as the artistic director of the prestigious Paris Opera Ballet. The Russian-born star, whose visit to India will be his first exposure to the country, was interviewed by dance critic SUNIL KOTHARI *on behalf of* INDIA TODAY *in Paris last month. Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *It is almost 25 years since your dramatic defection to the West in Paris. And now in the same city you are the director of the Paris Opera Ballet. How do you look at your growth during the period?*

A. Whatever has happened is on account of my hard and persistent work. I did go through a strenuous period of apprenticeship and made it to the top. And when I decided to go to the West, I did not stop growing. The artistic growth has been natural. Therefore when I find myself as the artistic director of the Paris Opera Ballet, I find it quite logical.

Q. *How do you propose to give a company as big and long established as this one a new sense of purpose?*

A. I would like to show it off in the best possible manner by highlighting its strong points, propelling its best dancers, projecting them in a manner which brings out the best in them. For instance, I choreographed the new and yet not unfamiliar *Raymonda* for their repertory which was not with them. At the same time, I sent off a contingent of more than 150 dancers to perform their own classic *Coppelia* at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees. I had young dancers making their debuts in the leading roles, for example Yannick Stephant with Olivier Patey. I succeeded in having the most celebrated ballerina of France, Yvette Chauvire, dance for the company after her retirement.

Q. *But has there been some resistance to this? How did the established stars respond?*

A. Of course, there has been some resistance. Any artistic director would face that in the beginning. It is, to give an example, like eating strange and exotic food. For instance, when I was in Japan, I visited a Japanese restaurant and there they ate raw fish. In the beginning it was difficult to eat, but I developed a taste for it. Similarly, the dancers did find it difficult to adjust to the demands I made on them. But the initial teething trouble was over when they saw that the purpose was to give the company the best projection.

Q. *In Russia, both at the Bolshoi and the Kirov schools, there is a great concern for preserving ballet tradition. In your experience in the West, do you get the impression the traditions have been weakened there?*

A. I respect tradition and my concerns have been to keep the spirit. But I do not think the traditions are weakened. They took deeper root in, say, England, in France. What interests me is how to reconstruct the steps, not exactly like Petipa did, but to present them as he would have in the present time. I am talking of the 19th century works of classic, romantic ballets.

Q. *Would you like to teach as your guru Pushkin taught?*

A. I would like the student to expand his repertoire. The care and concern will be like my guru but I would like the young dancers to flower into dancers on their own individual strong points.

Q. *How do you see your role, say after 10 years?*

A. I shall always be dancing, even after 10 years. Of course I would be choreographing, and I do not see myself as completely retiring from the stage. There is so much to do.

Q. *Like films—after your experience in* Valentino *and* Exposed?

A. Let us see. I like to forget about *Exposed*. I would like to choreograph modern things, but prefer to dance classical.

Q. *Who do you think are the talented young male dancers who can hold out on their own?*

A. Many. Patrick Dupond, Charles Jude, Jean Guizerix, Bujones Ferdinand, Anthony Dowell. A brilliant young Russian dancer, Farouk Rouzimatov. Mikhail Baryshnikov—but he should concentrate more on dancing than acting. But really, I should not be saying so because I too like to act.

Q. *Will your Indian programme be a pot-pourri or is there a chance of seeing a complete ballet?*

A. I'm afraid it will be a mixed bag as you do not have big enough stages to mount the full ballet, and it is so expensive to bring the full complement of ballet with a live orchestra and the full company. Maybe in the future when there is sufficient time and all the facilities exist in India, we will bring a full ballet.

Q. *What do you look forward to seeing in India?*

A. You have a great dance tradition. I would, of course, love to see dances. And also like to find old costumes, real antiques. I love to collect them.

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uality is backed by a presence of almost ypnotic force...some inner dynamo eems to make him glow with invisible in- andescence." Whether Nureyev himself ecognised this or not, his fans certainly d—teenage girls would crowd around e stage door after a performance, anting: "We want Rudi in the nudi."

Nureyev has partnered practically very ballerina of note in the world. Vhile in the Kirov, he danced with the amous Natalia Dudinskaya, and then Natalia Makarova. But his partnership ith Margot Fonteyn was the most amous—after a spectacular erformance with her in Vienna, he took 89 curtain alls, making it to the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

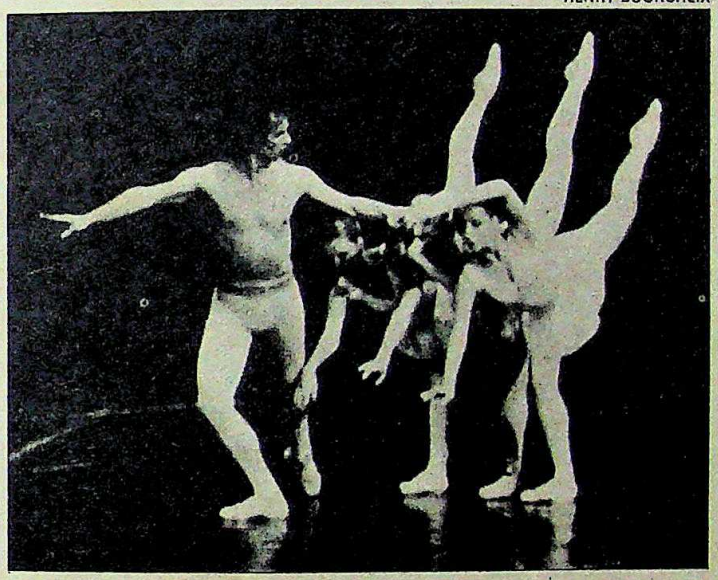
Apart from dance, he has cted in films like *Valentino* based on the life of the 1920s Hollywood idol Rudolf Valentino) and *Exposed*, which e jocularly says he'd like to orget all about. His ballet novies include *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Evening with the Royal Ballet*. He has also cted in films for the small creen— Roland Petit's *Le eune Homme et la Mort*, *Petrushka* , Paul Taylor's *Big Bertha* segment on the Burt Bacharach special on CBS, Birgit Gulberg's *Adam and Eve* and Julie Andrew's *Invitation to the Dance*, also for BS. He has a yearly *Nureyev and Friends* rogramme, and has also appeared in the ndearing *Muppet Show* and with compariot and fellow dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov in Paul Taylor's *From Sea to Shining Sea*.

The dancer's immense contribution o his art has been acknowledged officially several times over: in 1980, the Philadelphia College of the Performing Arts awarded him an honorary doctorate. The Mayor of Paris has presented Nureyev with the city's prestigious Grande Medaille de Vermeil, and he received the Dance Magazine Award in 1980 from the amous dancer Eric Bruhn.

Ironically, Nureyev began late—too ate to mould his body to the rigorous demands of classical dance, as a result of which he developed a calcium spur on his ight heel which cuts into his flesh, making dancing very painful. But Nureyev, born of Tartar parents in Russia, is a stoic soldier of dance, and his late beginning only made him more determined to succeed.

When Nureyev was finally accepted into the Kirov Ballet School at 17, a disgruntled teacher predicted sourly: "You will either be a failure or a star. Probably the former." But the young Tartar completed his training in just three years, receiving training as a soloist from his revered teacher Alexander Pushkin. Soon he was partnering Kirov's prima ballerina Natalia Dudinskaya in the ballet *Laurentia*. But the stubbornly individualistic Nureyev was not popular with either his fellow dancers or the authorities. He never participated in group activities, showing "an abnormal taste for solitude", refused to join the Komsomol, the Communist Youth League and criticised the artistic policies of the company as being too static. Yet his unquestionable ability made him important to the Kirov. When in 1961, the company planned its tour of France and England, the authorities decided to leave Kirov's principal male dancer Konstantin Sergeyev behind, as he might be too old to appeal to western audiences. Enter Rudolf Nureyev. Paris loved the small, slender, well-proportioned young dancer. His slanting smokey blue-grey eyes, his high cheekbones, those "artistic" nostrils and sensual lips made the dancer an instant star.

HENRY BOURCHEIX



In a Paris Opera ballet production

On June 17, 1961, the dancers of the Kirov Ballet assembled at Le Bourget Airport in Paris, waiting to board a flight to UK. Nureyev was not given a ticket for the flight. Instead, the astounded young dancer—he was just 23 then—heard he was to be sent back to Russia for his "insubordination, non-assimilation and dangerous individualism". He jumped over the railings into the arms of the French *flics*, seeking sanctuary.

He left his own Kirov company in Paris and joined the Ballets Marquis de Cuevas for one year and toured Europe causing a sensation wherever he performed. It was during the lessons that he was taking from Vera Volkova, the only teacher who taught at the Copenhagen ballet along the same lines as in Russia, that he received an invitation from Dame Margot Fonteyn to appear in a gala in London. And from then on there was no looking back. The legendary partnership between him and Margot Fonteyn started from 1962 and a regular association with Britain's Royal Ballet that gave his repertoire an extraordinary range. The special quality of the partnership spurred Margot Fonteyn to surpass her past achievements in a new blossoming of her gifts as were exemplified in the ballet *Giselle*. Whereas the first ballet was created to use Nureyev's talents, *Marquerite and Armand* mirrored in Frederick Ashton's choreography the romantic quality and passionate drama of the greatest dance partnership of their time.

After a long association with the Royal Ballet as its permanent guest artiste Nureyev left to seek newer pastures. Everywhere he went, he was followed by stories. Ballet purists abhor his wild life-style and popstar image. But his friends sense his seriousness of purpose and his sense of loneliness. Fonteyn recalls: "He always walked off into the night, a lonely figure diminishing down a desolate street. There was something tragic in his departing step after the uproar of laughter and gaiety over dinner." He also has a sense of humour—he calls the calcium spur that troubles his right foot an "omelette", and makes a complicated bandage for it which he calls a "sandwich". He describes his parents as being "volatile, passionate and sensuous, with a curious mixture of tenderness and brutality", a description that could fit him easily.

Nureyev is half-serious when he says: "I think I'll just go on forover. I've always felt like the Chosen One." John Lombaride commented in the *New York Times* Magazine: "He embodies a dream that, somehow, the generation that came of age in the '60s wants to believe in: youth is a matter of will, you don't have to grow old." Even if Nureyev the dancer fades into Nureyev the choreographer, Nureyev the legend will never grow old.

—SUNIL KOTHARI in Paris

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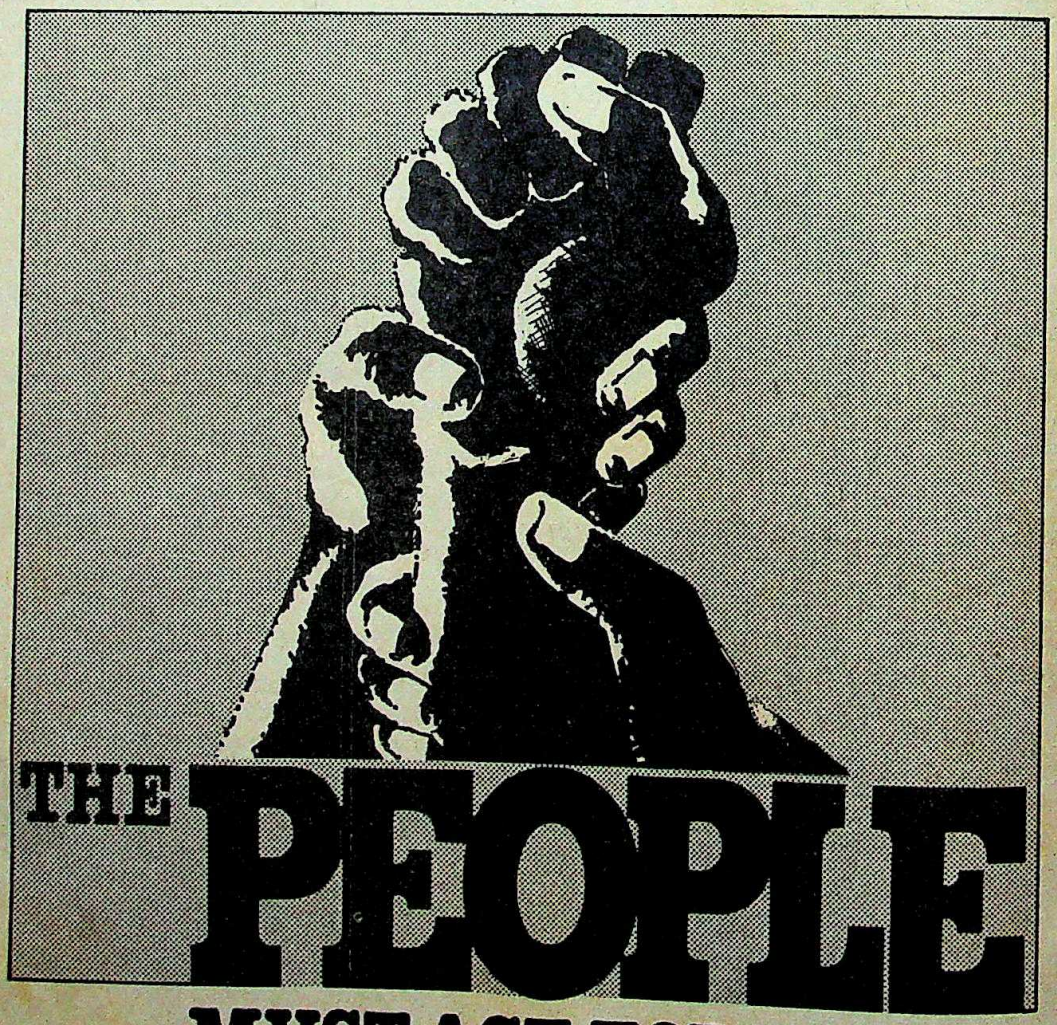
"Religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind them."

Mahatma Gandhi

"All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India."

Jawaharlal Nehru



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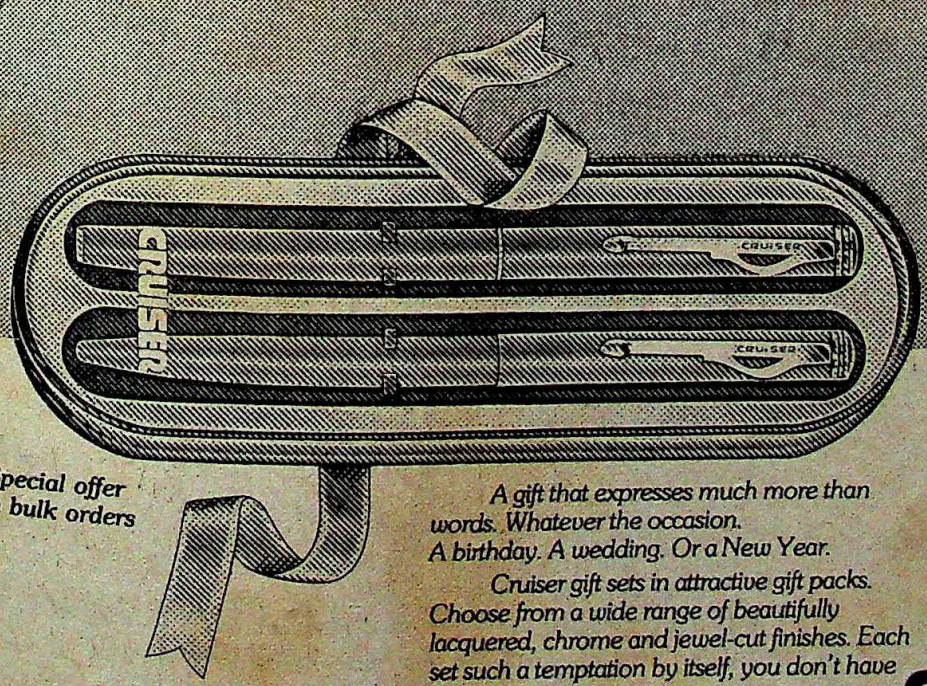

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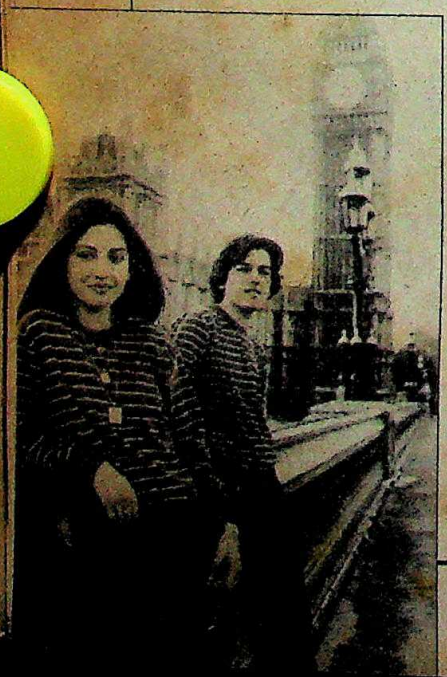
◆ Heroes don't just fade away. They can always pose for after-shaves or stand in for suiting-shirting ads. Of course, if they are Amitabh Bachchan or **Sunil Gavaskar** they can also become comic book legends. Nircon, a branch of Nirlon, the firm where India's ace cricketer is employed, has also decided to put their hero up for sale. *Sunny the Super Sleuth* comic books will zoom into the market some time in January with a series of on and off the field adventures in full colour that should—for four rupees—send children wild over the batsman. Said publisher C. Vasudeo: "Naturally the comics will have a lot of cricket action too."

◆ It's show time: Scheduled to be on the air mid-January are our very own disco diwanas Nazia and **Zoheb Hassan** who came some years ago, sung a highly provacative *Aao na pyar karen* and then disappeared into thin air—presumably to finish their studies. Now, older and wiser, the brother and sister are back and have charmed CBS into releasing their fresh new album *Young Tarang*—estimated to do at least a double platinum. And CBS, on its part, is planning a release that is going to change everything in Indian showbiz. While the album is put on the market, a very special video series—Michael Jackson's *Thriller* style and shot partly here and partly in England—is going to start on Doordarshan showing Nazia and Zoheb dramatising their songs. "It's a new musical wave that will hit listeners," CBS chief Ravi Burman declared in an interview. That's all Indian television needs now—a dash of disco.

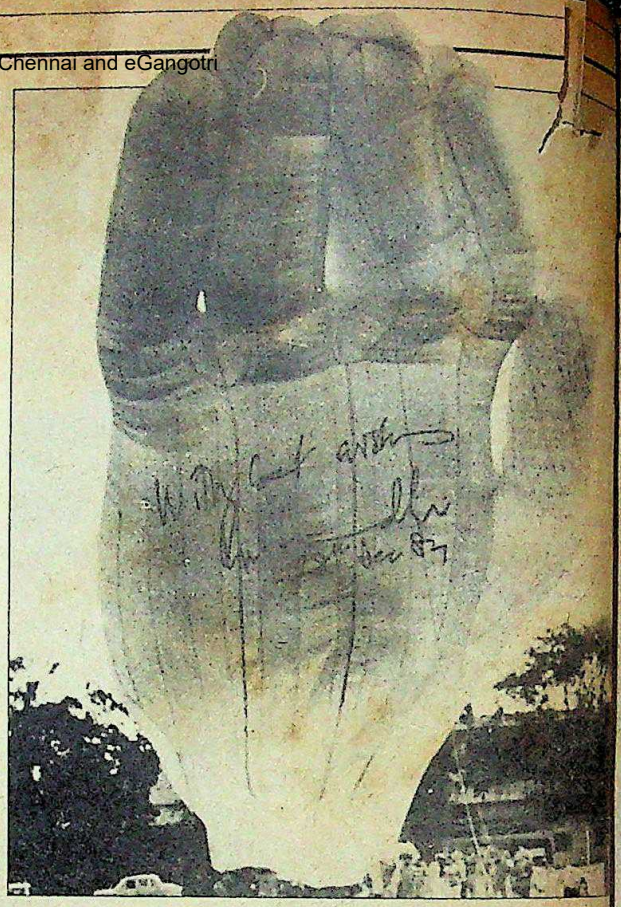
Nazia and Zoheb: comeback



◆ It could have been—it should have been—the biggest film bash of the year. It's not everyday that the children of two film titans marry each other. But as **Kumar Gaurav** walked his coy bride **Namrata** seven times round the sacred flame, it was obvious that papas Sunil Dutt and Rajendra Kumar had other things on their mind. With the massive election campaign that had Dutt pitted against formidable BJP rival Ram Jethmalani just round the corner, the wedding turned out to be a somewhat modest affair. Neither of Gaurav's old flames, Rima Kapoor or Vijayeta Pandit turned up. Still, there was merrymaking a-plenty and two nice surprises: a group of spastics who came to congratulate their favourite uncle Sunil—and Jethmalani's son Mahesh who graciously admitted: "Decency demanded I make an appearance."

Kumar Gaurav & Namrata: filmi alliance

◆ As the election results ticked in and the winds began blowing—nay, raging—in favour of the ruling party, the enterprising Rajya Sabha MP Vishwa Bandhu Gupta invited Rajiv Gandhi to a semi-deserted airstrip for a little surprise. The little surprise, it turned out, was a balloon shaped like the Congress(I) hand, which when inflated rose to a prodigious height of 80-odd feet, dwarfing the excited prime minister and the entire royal clan present. "What is it made of?" inquired the former pilot, quite heady with the compliment. Well, 1,200 metres of pure white taffeta silk, six months of hard work and if those lines on the palm tell right, a nice cushy future ahead.



The Congress(I) hot air balloon: flying high

◆ After a long and trying courtship, it seems that Kamla the slave girl is finally going to be able to tell her story on screen. After many months of battling a copyright and defamation suit launched by the *Indian Express*, **Jagmohan Mundhra** the harassed producer-director of the controversial film *Kamla* finally got the go-ahead from the hig court to go ahead and relea his film based on the pl based on the *Express's* rep on the existence of flesh tra ing in modern India. "It is major victory and a big relie said Mundhra who has be asked to make only two vo minor changes in the film.

Still from *Kamla*: freed for release

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGA

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FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT

Out in the Wilderness

Trounced in the December election, the opposition parties went through some soul searching. But it seemed business as usual in the run-up to the Assembly polls in March, while the country examined the implications of an enfeebled opposition.

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Rajiv Gets Going

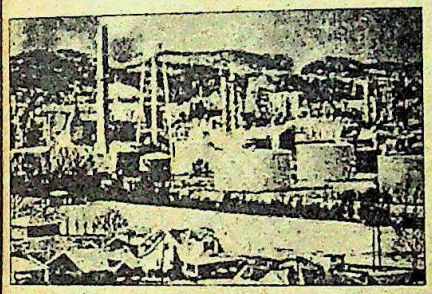
Contrary to his earlier image of a fumbling amateur, Rajiv Gandhi moved with startling decisiveness to tackle the monumental tasks that lie before him. From reorganising the government departments to the dropping of old loyalists, Rajiv is taking charge.

SPECIAL REPORT 18

Warning Signals

The results of last month's elections spelt bad news for the Left Front in West Bengal. Apart from the negative vote against the non-functioning of the state Government, it clearly signified a growing disillusionment among the youth and the urban electorate.

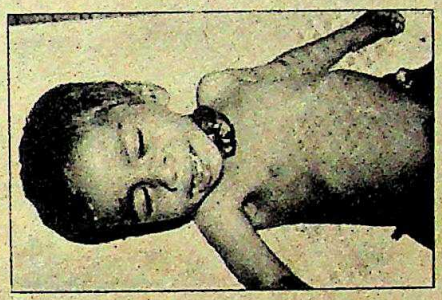
SPECIAL FEATURE 42



Exporting Hazards

The Bhopal tragedy has highlighted the dangers of exporting hazardous chemical plants from the industrialised nations to the Third World. In the US, documentation shows increasing export of plants manufacturing products ranging from asbestos to mercury.

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON 100



Scars of Suffering

Hundreds of children in Saurashtra are branded every year in the belief that it cures them from ailments or from an evil curse. Many have died in the process. Ignorance and superstitious beliefs have helped in keeping the branders safe from prosecution.

HEALTH 130

An Indifferent Effort

The 10th International Film Festival which opened in Delhi last fortnight witnessed some indifferent cinematic fare on display. What saved the situation was the newly introduced Indian Panorama section which featured some innovative Indian directors.

CINEMA 146

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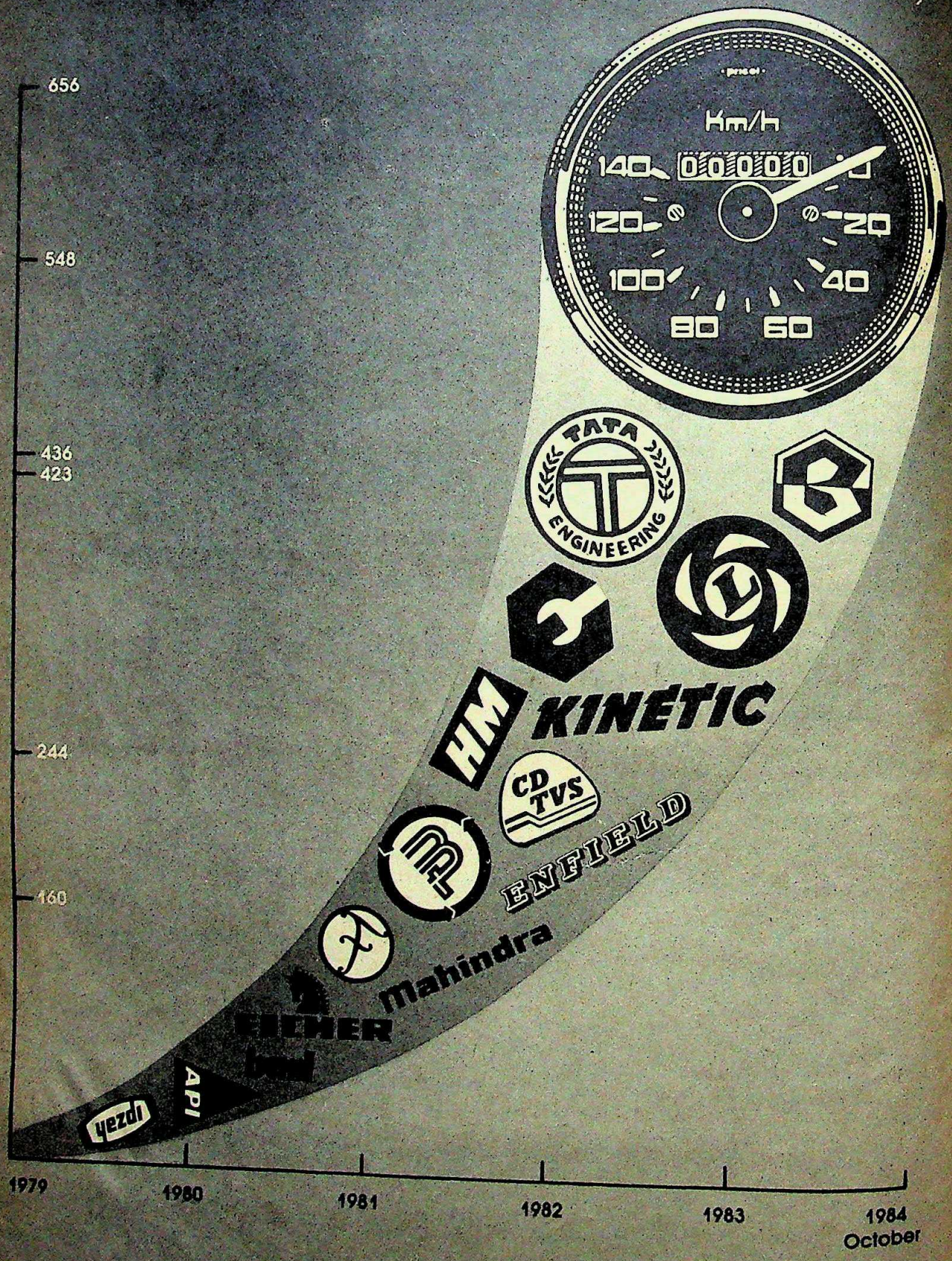

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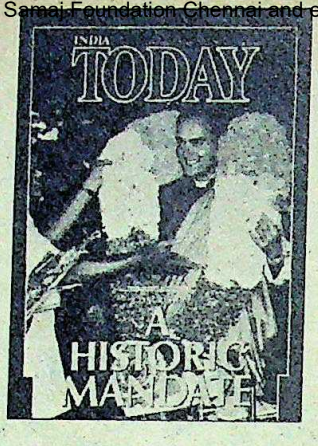

CONGRESS(I) SWEEP

The landslide victory of the Congress(I) ("A Historic Mandate", January 15) in almost all the states and Union territories has once again established the fact that it is only the national party which can save the country at this present juncture. The Opposition should learn a lesson from the election results: that criticism of the ruling party does not always pay dividends.

Patna MAJOR BALBIR SINGH

■ The overwhelming victory of the Congress(I) is simply because Rajiv Gandhi appears to be a clean young man who has been thrust upon the national scene with a promise to usher in an honest government, fight corruption and take the nation forward. Rajiv has a few plus points to his advantage—he is young, has no hang-ups about being a 'freedom fighter' which we are all fed up of hearing, has no axe to grind and above all he is progressive and modern. Being an ex-pilot one expects that he would be trained to take logical decisions and not buckle under in a crisis.

Vrindaban DR K.R. BHATT

■ Your timely warning to the ruling party about the dangers of arrogance (Comment, January 15) was much appreciated. It is a well-known fact that power can easily breed arrogance, and more so when the mandate is so massive.

The present majority of the Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha will not prove to be for the betterment of democracy. Democracy demands a solid opposition to run wheels smoothly. But where is the Opposition today in the Parliament? The prime minister will have to assert himself and shun the sycophants and flatterers around him, take the opinion of experts in the field where he lacks knowledge and experience, fight corruption and widespread favouritism, or he will not be in a position to satisfy the electorate.

Indore PRABHAKAR S. HARSOLE

■ With the massive mandate given to Rajiv Gandhi, the people expect him to set a new tone and style in managing the affairs of the vast country. It was not for the want of talent or lack of resources that our progress has been so tardy. It is for the want of vision and lack of commitment to the nation's good beyond personal or party consideration.

New Delhi V.C. VISWANATHAN

■ The 'sympathy wave' in favour of the Congress(I) is dangerous and its implications would be felt only after some time. As massive a mandate as this for any democracy could prove harmful to the country's interests. Democracy in India is as it is on the verge of vanishing. Our real trouble lies not in the democratic institutions themselves but in the people who man them.

The new prime minister will have to be extra cautious about every move that he makes considering he has inherited a party not known for selfless service, ability and adherence to norms and rules in the recent years.

Gandhinagar, Orissa ABHIR PADHY

■ The unprecedented victory of the Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha elections will surely go down in history as one of the greatest events of Indian democracy. The people have given the Congress(I) under Rajiv Gandhi an overwhelming vote of confidence, which is a vote for both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv. The effectiveness with which Rajiv ruled the country during the turbulent period immediately after Mrs Gandhi's assassination must have impressed on the voter the extraordinary leadership qualities of the young Gandhi. It has also successfully gathered the votes of Hindus which is explained by the rout of the BJP, the traditional vote-catcher of the conservative Hindus.

The people are fully aware of every step the Government takes—the Emergency of 1975-77 led to the stunning defeat of the Congress(I), the expulsion of Mrs Gandhi from Parliament during the Janata regime lead to the landslide victory of the Congress(I) in 1980—so Rajiv should be careful. The four-fifth majority of the Congress(I) indicates that the people have voted for a change and have trusted Rajiv to bring it about. He should be aware of it and the fact that people have high expectations from the party.

Kathmandu SANJAY UPADHYA

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■ Kudos to the Indian electorate. Who said that the majority of the electorate is illiterate and hence lacks rational judgement. They have given the most fitting reply that they possibly could to the Opposition by voting for the Congress(I) practically en masse.

Mercara, Coorg — K.T.M. MOHANAN

■ In the cover story you have said that "there was an unbalanced geographical character in the Cabinet". But I think it is a very welcome change to have ministers chosen on the basis of their merit instead of their racial or geographical background.

Ludhiana — PUNEET MOHINDRA

■ A fantastic issue, but a bad cover. Could you not get anything different? This particular picture was flashed over the Doordarshan a number of times and is the kind of picture every other magazine would carry.

Jaipur — OMPRAKASH PUSHKARNA

■ The nation has made the right choice in electing Rajiv Gandhi to head the Government, and it was truly a "historic mandate". But for the Congress(I) to employ such low-stooping tactics as to put up posters depicting our late prime minister in her death throes, (Elections '84, January 15) is to my mind, unspeakable. And if I were Rajiv Gandhi, I would certainly never allow likenesses of my mother in agony, her lifeblood pouring out of her, to be pasted on walls all over the country: it is merely capitalising on the "sympathy factor" to its extremes. It is one thing for Hollywood to use this "gross-out" technique to advertise movies like *Friday The 13th*, and another altogether for the Congress(I) to do the same thing.

Madras — DHIRAJ MANI

■ The resounding victories of the parties led by Rajiv Gandhi and N.T. Rama Rao point out that the electorate intensely dislikes squabbling professional politicians. Given a chance they would prefer the non-career politicians who are able to convince the electorate that they will form a unified government if elected to power.

In the interest of a healthy democracy it may be prudent to form a new party of prominent professionals in various fields and allocate portfolios beforehand to be able to convince the people that they would not face yet another disunited government.

Houston, Texas — R.M. RAO

BHOPAL TRAGEDY

Your cover story, the "City of Death" (December 31) was a very comprehensive account of the Bhopal tragedy. The photographs were excellent, especially the one showing a hand trying to close the unseeing eyes of a child being buried. The accident is most regrettable since multinationals are reputed to be well managed. And what happens to the state Government which bears the responsibility for allowing the setting up of this dangerous plant? Inquiry commissions will be set up, the tragedy will be intensively researched, every fact will be gone through. It will take years and then the findings consigned to history.

Bombay — S.E. MEERZA

■ I disagree with the move made by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Arjun Singh to arrest the Union Carbide Chairman Warren Anderson. One must appreciate the fact that he came down in person as soon as he got the news, when he could easily have sent a team of experts for a survey if he so desired and kept out of the hassle himself.

Pune — ANIL PANJABI

MISSING PROGRAMME

In the various election manifestos of the leading political parties (December 31) the family planning programme seems to have been omitted. Today, more than anything else, we need a concrete and result-oriented population controlling programme on a war footing. However, it seems as though no party was willing to take a risk and burn its fingers —by raising this otherwise hot issue, considering it cost Mrs Gandhi the 1977 election.

Vapi — K.K. SOLANKI

ACCURATE FORECAST

Your pre-election issue (December 31) was superb. Now that the results are out, one can really appreciate the accuracy of your forecasts. The statistics are very well presented and the articles are not only informative, but eminently readable as well.

Bombay — URMILA DONGRE

■ The election forecast was good advertisement copy for the Congress(I). I have no doubt that your forecast has swayed the urban middle class vote in favour of the Congress(I).

Pune — G.P. JOSHI

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Send your entries for the fourth annual award of Rs 20,000 for the most outstanding investigative report on human rights in India.

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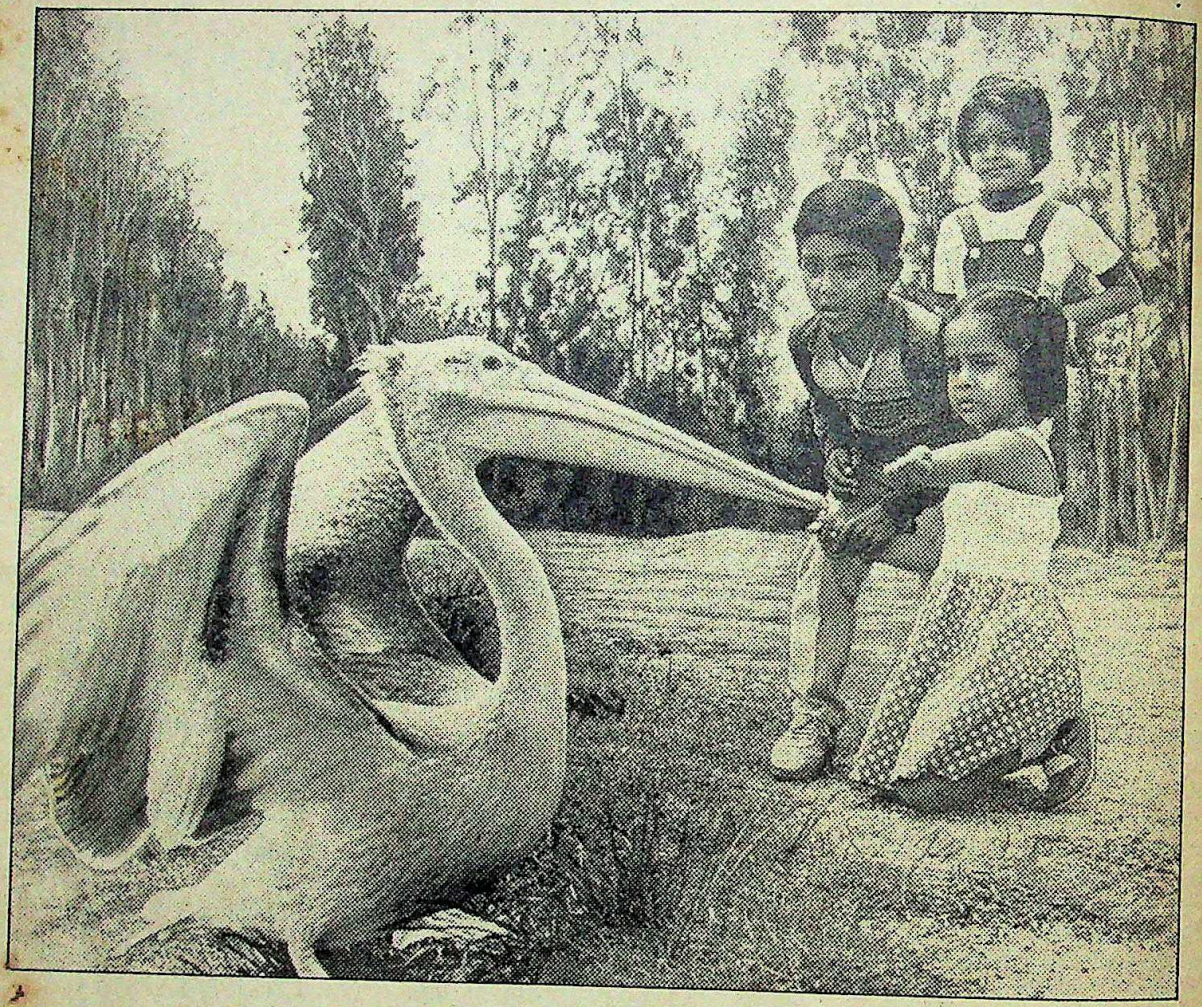
"Will it bite?"



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In black and white.

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Keep the pictures in the family album.

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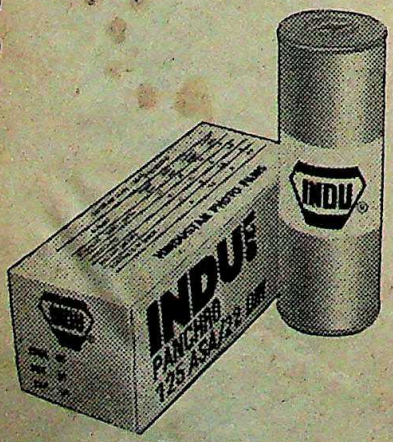

Capture the moment

INDU

Indu Roll Film and Bromides

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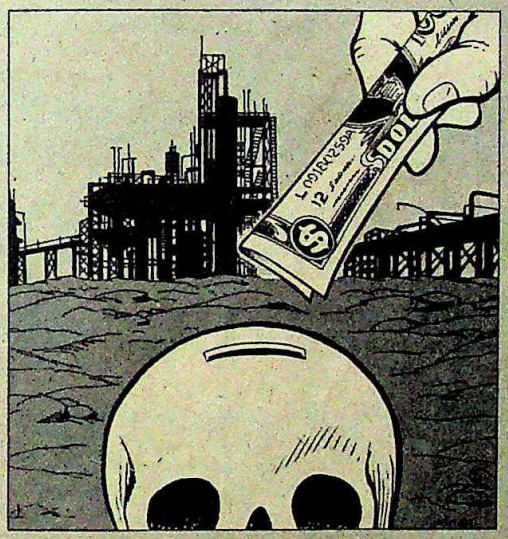
Beyond Bhopal

MORE than six weeks after the Bhopal disaster, the issue of how and how much the thousands of victims of the gas leakage are to be compensated still remains to be sorted out, as does the downstream question of what lessons must be learnt from the tragedy. The headline-hitting law suits in the United States, claiming damages from Union Carbide that total a staggering $180 billion do not automatically settle the compensation question. The large sums that have been claimed might prove a complete mirage since there is as yet no certainty that US courts will hear the cases. In any case, the law suits will take years to run their course (American courts do not always dispense justice as speedily as is popularly imagined), and much of the money will be pocketed by American lawyers who took powers of attorney from innocent Bhopal victims and flew back without leaving even their addresses behind. While Union Carbide should be made to pay, it is far from certain that the best way to do this is to leave the matter to American lawyers. The responsibility for taking a proper initiative lies with the Central and state governments.



These have moved unconscionably slowly so far. The attorney general decided to visit the US more than five weeks after the Bhopal incident, in order to assess the legal situation. And after some initial speculation in the newspapers about the Madhya Pradesh Government sueing Union Carbide, nothing has been heard on the subject. The Government simply must move with a greater sense of urgency if the Bhopal victims are to get compensation, and get it quickly. The sums handed out as relief payments have been niggardly, some of the victims have received no payments at all, and many of the victims now show an understandable anger at the dilly-dallying. A proper assessment has to be made quickly about the likelihood of getting quick justice and proper compensation in American courts, the option of setting up a special court in India considered, and the advantages of going in for a negotiated settlement carefully weighed. Union Carbide itself has been pressing for arbitration, and for avoiding the courts, but whether this is self-serving advice or a suggestion made with the victims in mind needs to be considered. Even a negotiated settlement must include punitive damages that Union Carbide must pay up so that it serves as a lesson to all other companies in the country.

Looking beyond Bhopal, much of the debate on the implications of the worst industrial accident in history has focused on multinational corporations and on whether they employ different standards of safety in their home countries and in the Third World. While this is a legitimate and important concern, it is also in a sense side-tracking the main issue about safety consciousness in India. In the weeks after Bhopal, there have been a number of other incidents of gas leakages and explosions, plus a major Cochin refinery explosion earlier in 1984. These concerned Indian companies, some owned by the Government. And there is mounting evidence to show that there are deficiencies in the law (the absence of a specific law on the manufacture, storage and transport of hazardous substances, for instance), and still greater deficiencies in the implementation of existing laws. Factory inspectors are too few in number, badly paid, easily bribed, and too often incapable of properly assessing safety.

The Government itself is often clueless about the dangers brought in by substances licensed for manufacture. Insurance company assessments show a depressing lack of proper safety facilities in everyday factories across the country, and the public is inured to the everyday reality of workers losing their limbs in industrial situations, of domestic gas cylinders leaking as a matter of course, of pesticide accretions in food substances going well beyond the specified safety limits, and much more. The two conclusions that flow from these are all too obvious: Indian life is cheap, and the country has yet to properly acquire an industrial culture, the software that goes with the hardware of machinery. Finally, some of the righteous indignation over multinational corporations shifting pollution-causing factories from their home territories to Third World locations must be re-directed at the Third World Governments that permit such relocation.

There is some evidence now (outlined elsewhere in this issue) of the Government waking up, taking stock of the gaps in the law and its implementation, and drawing up new guidelines for handling dangerous industries. This is welcome, but the Government must make sure that the new laws required are quickly legislated, and the existing laws implemented more faithfully than has been the case in the past. Safety and inspection staff need to be strengthened, industrial location policy given another look, and fresh laws passed to make company directors personally responsible for damage caused by industrial accidents that could have been prevented by foresight and greater safety consciousness. If all this is done quickly, the thousands who have lost their lives or been otherwise affected in Bhopal will not have suffered in vain. If not, Bhopal will stand as a permanent question mark over the value of human life in India.

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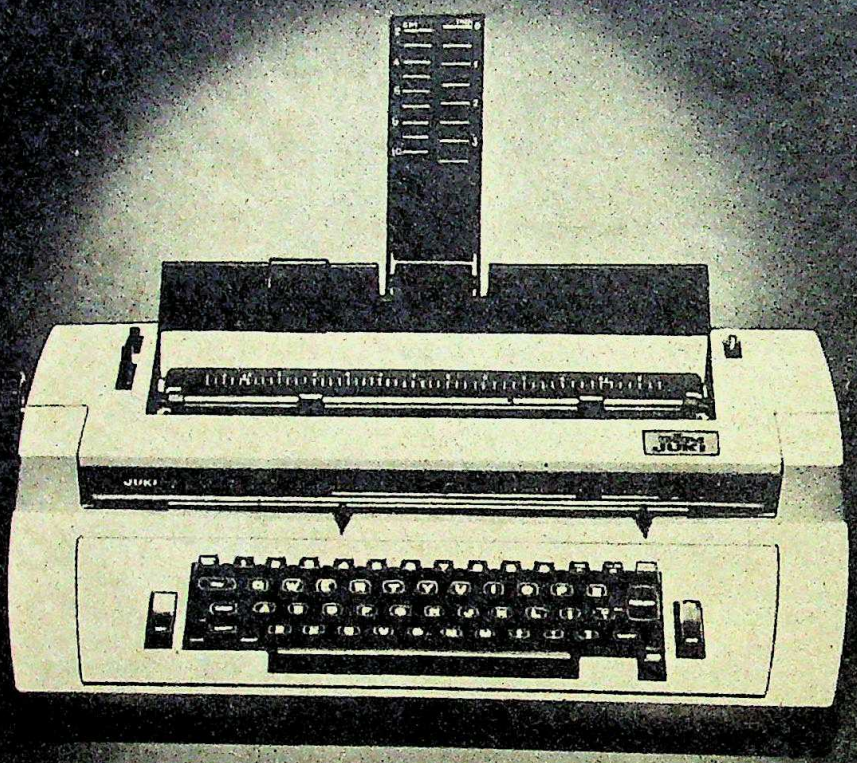
The amazing low cost *electric typewriter* that's challenging the best in the West.



Between the two extremes of manual typewriter technology with its tedious time-consuming operation, and its electronic counterpart with its exorbitant cost and maintenance, stands the Gem Juki Professional 3500. The ideal compromise which offers economy, speed, convenience, ease of operation and maintenance typically suited to the Indian environment.

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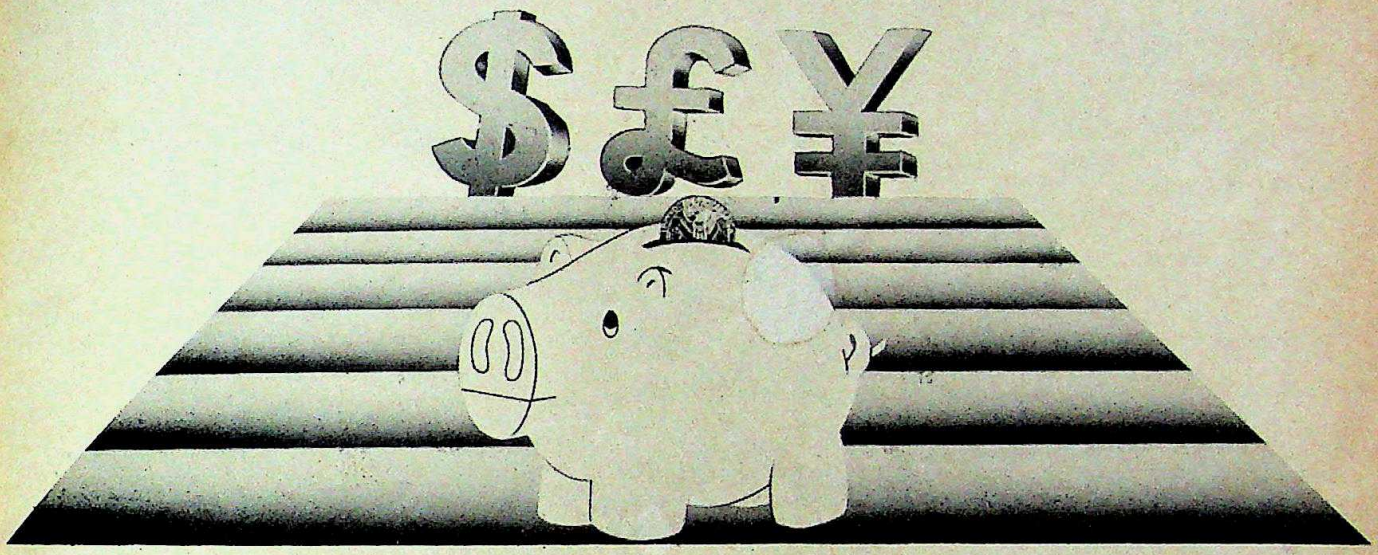

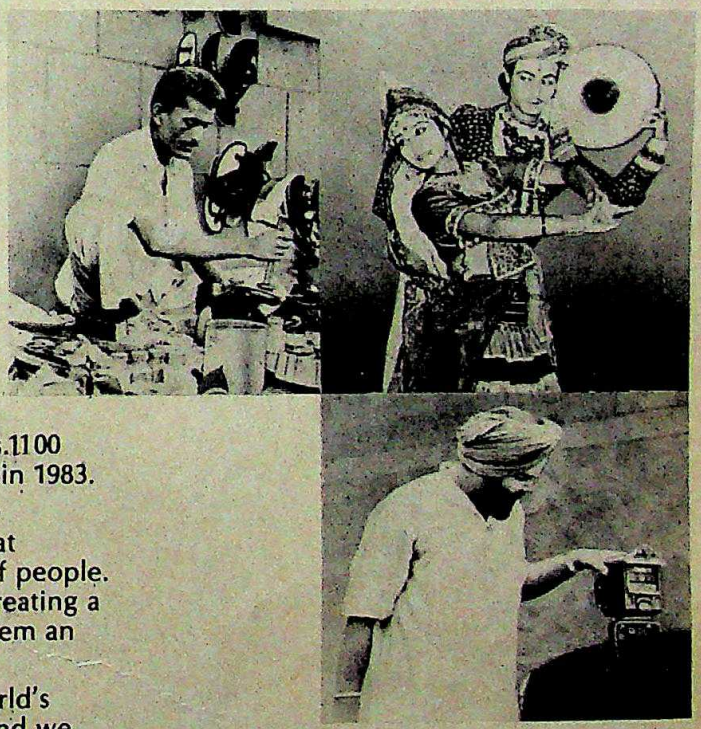

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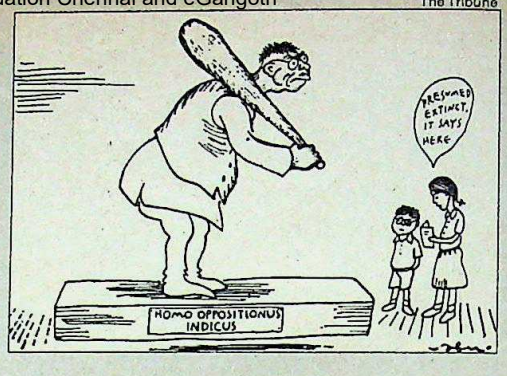
The Tribune



● *Nobody, not even my wife can read my mind.*

■ A.N. BANERJEE, governor of Karnataka

● *The Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha today is like an elephant and the Opposition...a mouse... together they look as grotesque as Ganesha and his rodent mount.*

■ QUARK *in The Times of India*

● *A whole segment of Indian society after Independence has withdrawn from political action, and this has created a vacuum. I joined politics because I felt I had no moral authority to criticise our political culture unless I did something about it in a practical way.*

■ NATWAR SINGH in the *Statesman*

● *We want an opposition. But it is not our job to develop them. They are all over 21... We were monitoring these chaps (opposition leaders) and we are going to show that they are 'paper tigers'.*

■ ARUN NEHRU in *Blitz*

● *For a non-politician, Amitabh Bachchan has a remarkably accurate set of priorities. Perhaps what we need in Parliament are more non-politicians...I think Amitabh Bachchan, MP, is going to be a super-hit.*

■ TAVLEEN SINGH in *The Telegraph*

● *The press is responsible for painting a horrible picture of the state (Bihar). I am not saying that Biharis are paragons of virtue. Nor is Bihar an ideal state...I am willing to concede that southern states are better.*

■ JAGANNATH MISHRA in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *Rajiv Gandhi's aides are the same. If the speeches he made are the measure then he's hopeless. And I don't think he's all that clean.*

■ MORARJI DESAI in *Celebrity*

● *Unless the three old men, Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram and Charan Singh completely retire from politics there is no hope for the country.*

■ RAM JETHMALANI to the press in Bombay

● *I have made it clear that I would like to retire. My friends, however, insist that there is no question of my retiring from active public life.*

■ CHARAN SINGH in *Frontline*

● *When Sanjay Gandhi's buddies took to the streets in 1978, and began to adopt strong-arm tactics, they turned their backs on everything they had learnt at Doon. To win elections, it helped to be a "goonda".*

■ AMRITA SHAH in *Imprint*

● *It was Rajiv's election, Rajiv was the campaigner, Rajiv the candidate, and Rajiv was elected.*

■ V.P. SINGH to newsmen in New Delhi

—Compiled by ANITA KAUL BASU

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a harmony in 'Terene' & Wool

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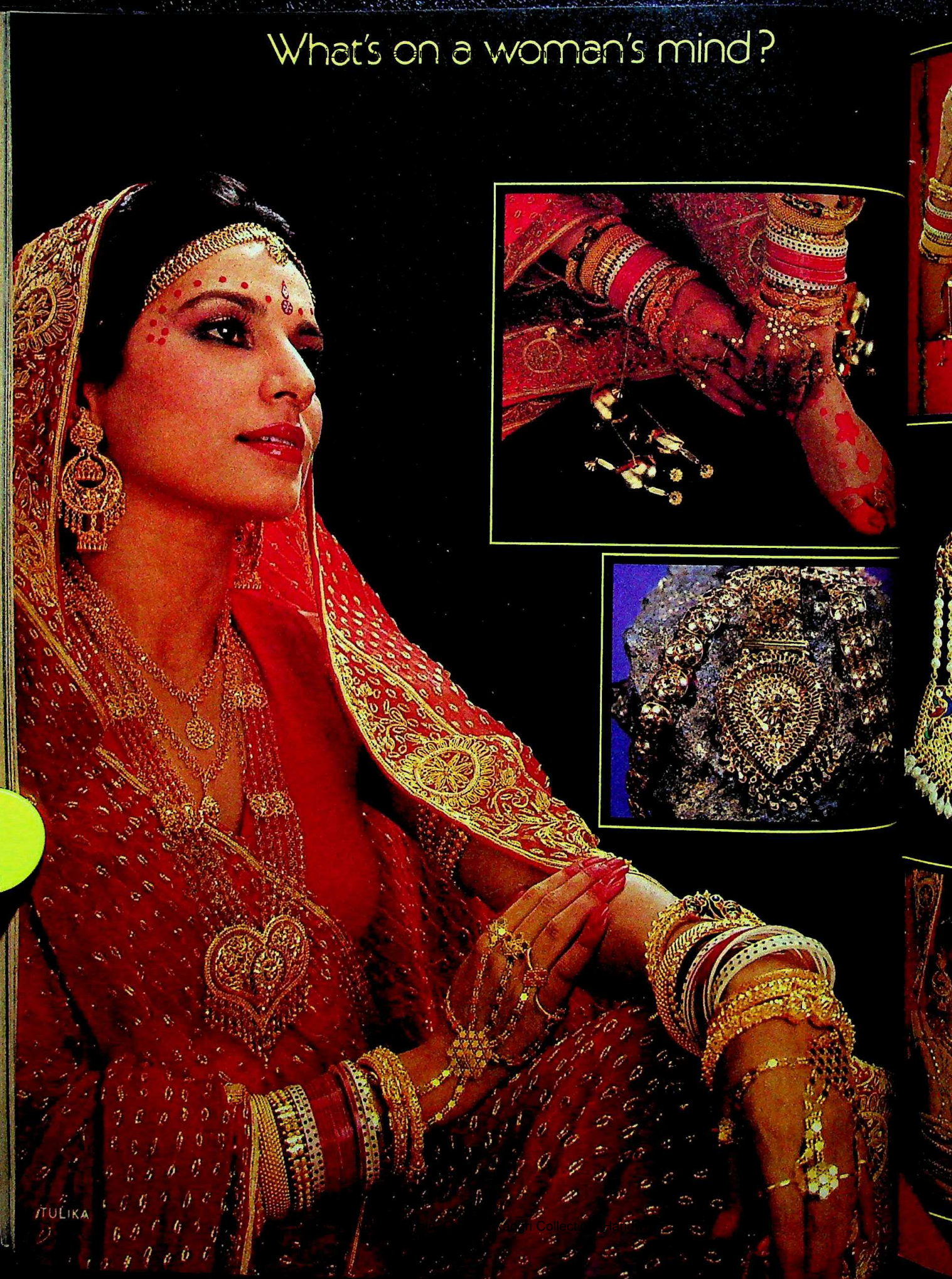
What's on a woman's mind?



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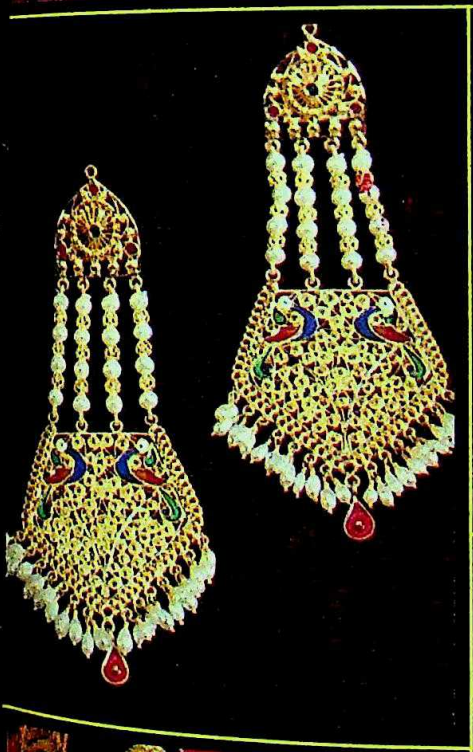

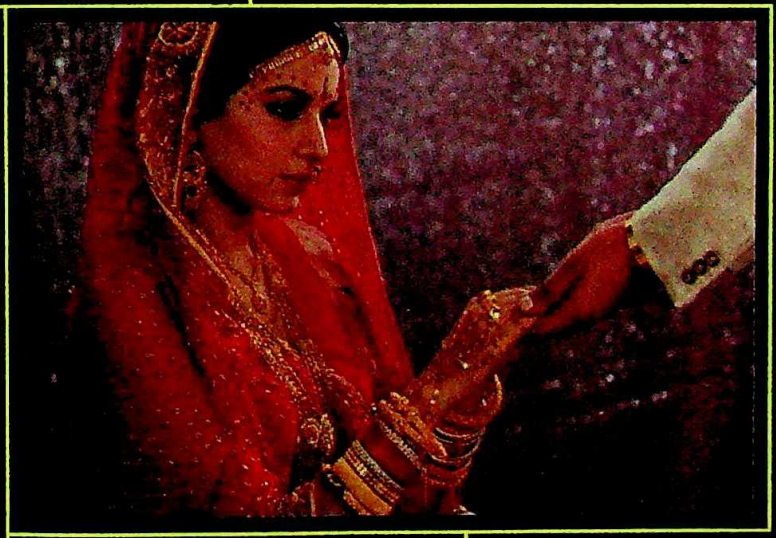

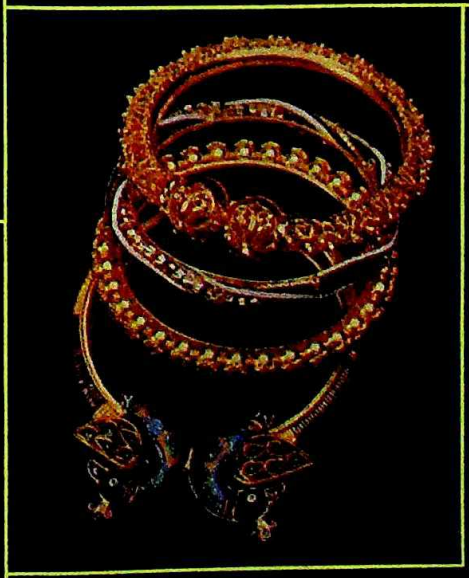

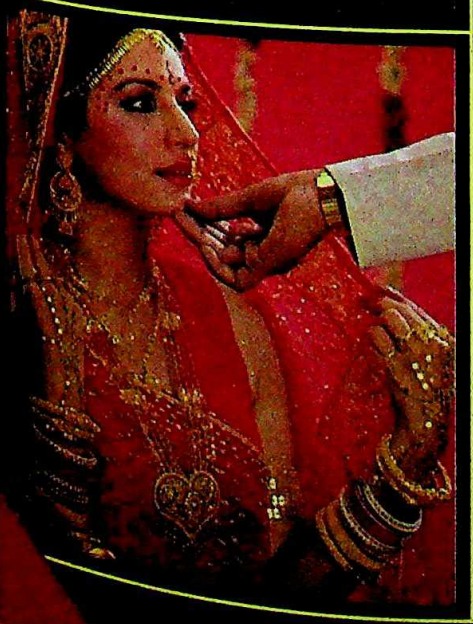

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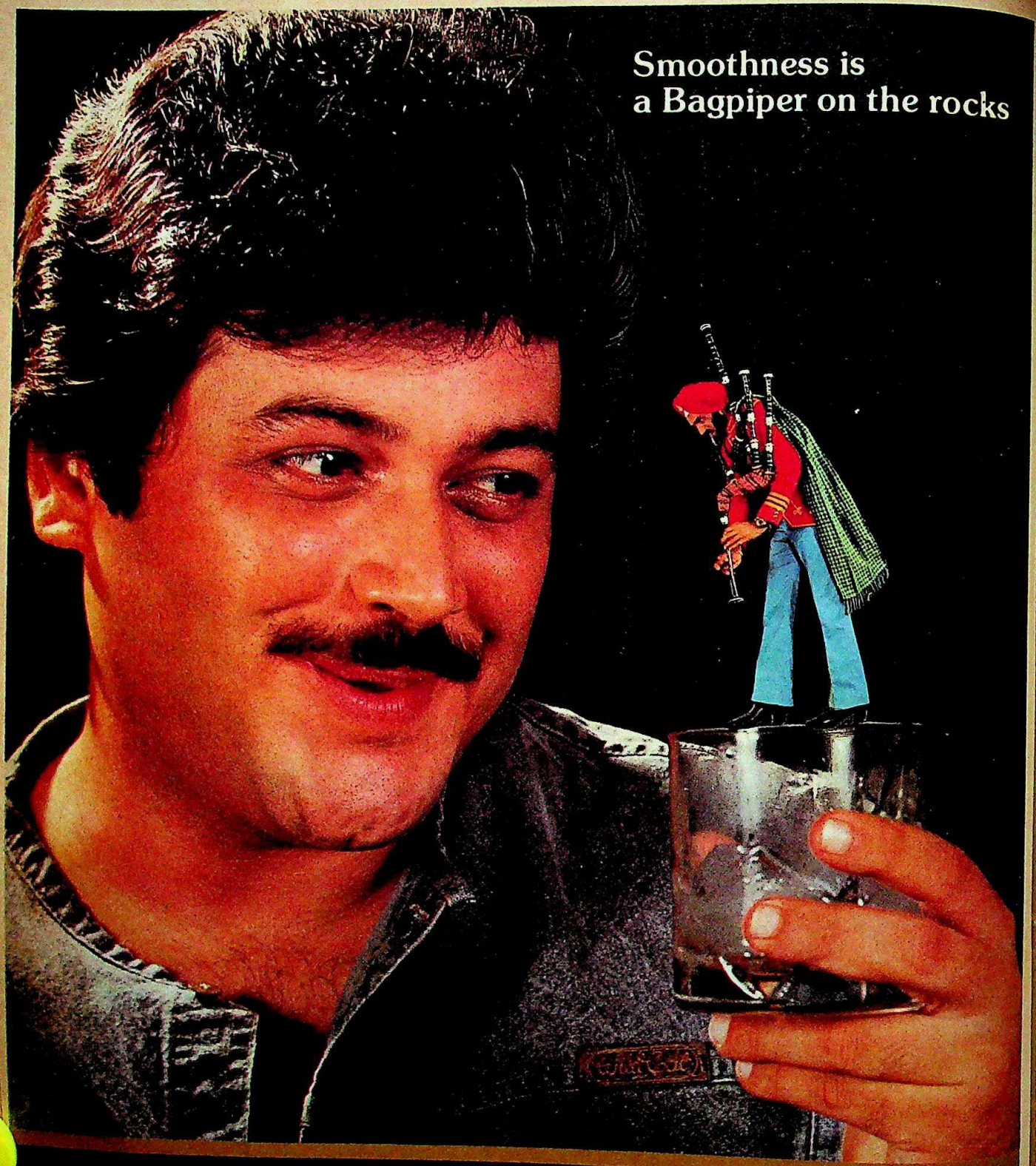

BAGPIPER

All the makings of a great evening

BAGPIPER
Club Soda

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DOUBLE TROUBLE

■ The Bombay-Pune road is one of the busiest arteries in India. There are obstacles to the smooth flow, of course, notably the octroi posts and the police road-blocks presided over by fat-bellied policemen who lose no opportunity to milk the drivers. Last fortnight, at one such post a beat-up old truck rumbled to a halt, its nose pointing towards Pune. Its registration number, for the sake of argument was MMT 3456. The driver then clambered down and sauntered off to get his papers checked.

A few minutes later, another truck, brand new this time, and manifestly owned by the same transport company, rolled up on the other side of the barrier, its nose pointing towards Bombay. Its driver, too, clambered down and sauntered off to the checkposts—did a double take and stopped. He had seen the other driver, who for some reason started sweating profusely.

The policeman on duty groaned to his feet, intrigued by this little drama. He looked at the trucks and did the third double take of the day. The new truck's registration plate proudly proclaimed MMT 3456. The company had been running two trucks on duplicate sets of papers and had been doing so for months. This time, around, obviously logistics had fouled up somewhat.

PEOPLE'S POWER

■ Traffic problems are the price of success in any big city. Calcutta, which appears to follow Murphy's Law with great diligence in everything, is no exception to the lack of rules. As politicians never tire of saying, it is the people who should come together to breathe order into chaos and that is precisely what happened in Calcutta recently.

At a crossing in the city, a couple of thousand cars were locked in combat and the result was that no driver could find an inch of tar to take even if anybody was willing to give him one. The police, it would seem, had decided to take the day off. Finally, an exasperated driver got out of his car, went to the podium and started directing the traffic. Pretty soon he was joined by a Sikh truck-driver, who was considerably more effective, a vegetable seller, a lady driver and two company chauffers. Between them, they managed to get the tangled snarls moving until a more or less even flow was established in either direction. No wonder that the power of the people is evoked by all and sundry whenever they are faced with a problem. It does seem to work.

IDENTITY CRISIS

■ The general elections are a good source of funny stories. One of these concerns a man called Pankaj Sinha, who was the Congress(I) MLA from the Islampur assembly constituency in the Nalanda Lok Sabha constituency from Bihar. Sinha hasn't been to Islampur since the people sent him to the Assembly.

Last month, Sinha was the party candidate for the Lok Sabha seat. In due course of time he arrived in Islampur to ask for votes. He took up the usual pose of a humble leader, dhoti, kurta, namaste and a beatific smile on his lips. The usual speech followed about valuable votes and I have come to serve you and so on and so forth.

All this was happening in bright sunlight. Even so Sinha must have been more than a little surprised to see that quite a few of his audience were carrying torches. At some invisible signal they switched them on and shone them full into his face. The questions they asked were "who is this man, have we seen him before?". Sinha would probably have fled from the scene had not a minister, a wide grin on his face, persuaded the villagers to switch off their torches.

PARKING PERILS

■ Space is at such premium in Bombay, every square inch FSI or no FSI is fought over chipped tooth and broken nail. So it was with considerable anger that a resident of an apartment block in Dadar watched his neighbour, day after frustrating day, park his car neatly on the dividing line between two parking spaces, ensuring that for two whole days, his own car had to hang around unprotected on the road. When he could stand it no longer, he went and spoke politely to the man.

The next day, however, the car was still there. The householder decided on rough stuff. He brought down his son's tricycle and parked it right on the dividing line. The next day he looked out of his window and saw the offending car in status quo. Rushing out, he saw his tricycle under the status quo. He hollered for the neighbour who came down to find he had one friend less in the world. It turned out later that the reason why he was parking his car in the wrong place was that he had thought that another, fainter line in the middle of the next parking square was the correct one.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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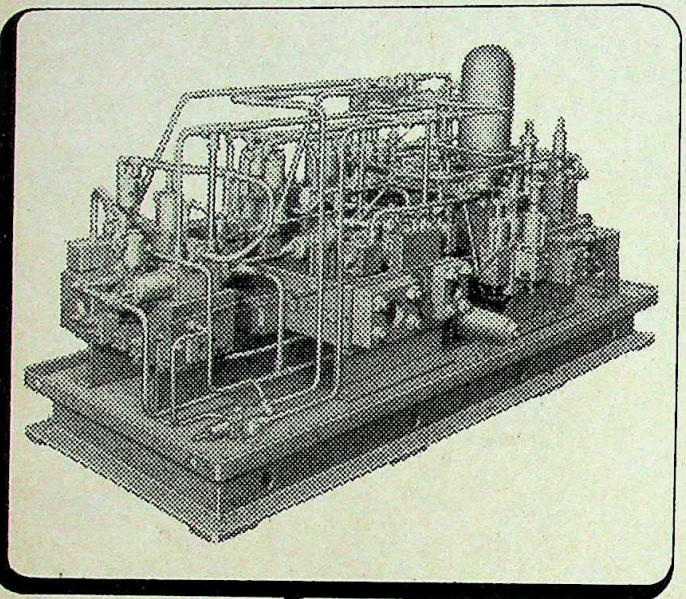

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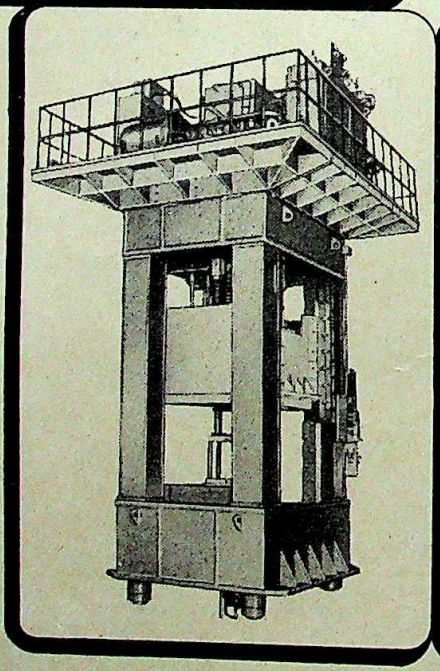

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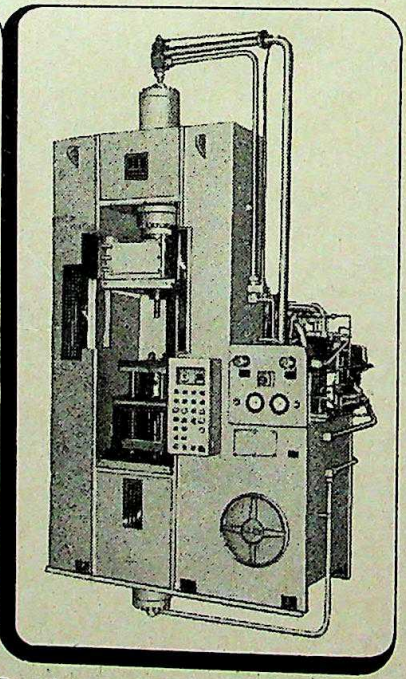

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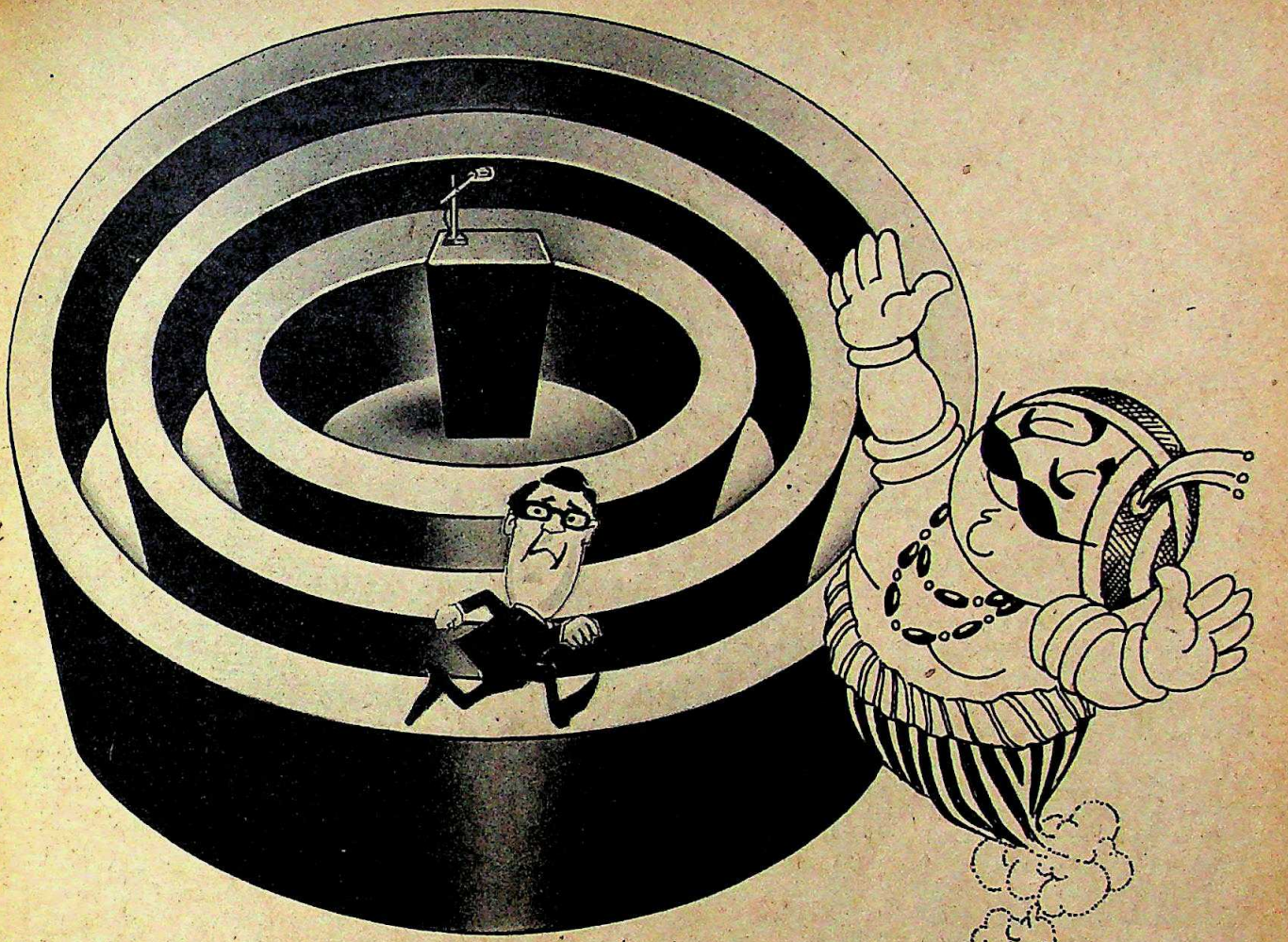

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THE GOVERNMENT

Rajiv Gets Going

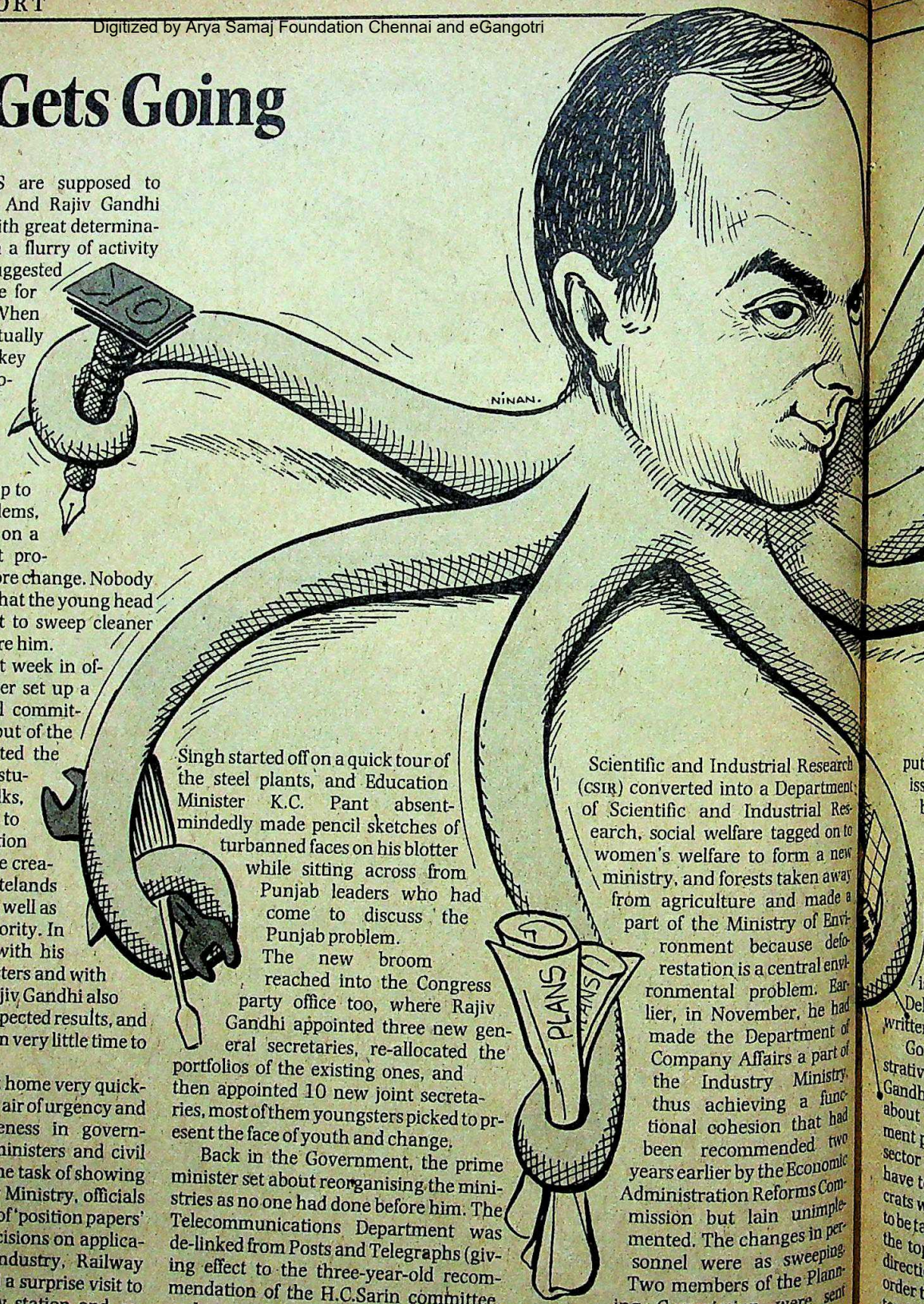
NEW BROOMS are supposed to sweep clean. And Rajiv Gandhi wielded his with great determination last fortnight in a flurry of activity last fortnight that suggested he took his mandate for change seriously. When the dust had eventually settled, a host of key government functionaries had been shifted around, some sent packing, ministries restructured, new committees set up to tackle knotty problems, and directives issued on a host of subjects that promised change, and more change. Nobody was left in any doubt that the young head of government meant to sweep cleaner than anyone had before him.

In an eventful first week in office, the prime minister set up a three-man ministerial committee to suggest a way out of the Punjab impasse, invited the leaders of the Assam student movement for talks, set up an expert panel to suggest a new education policy, and ordered the creation of a National Wastelands Development Board as well as a Central Ganga Authority. In a series of meetings with his newly appointed ministers and with senior bureaucrats, Rajiv Gandhi also made it clear that he expected results, and that he would give them very little time to achieve them.

That message went home very quickly, and there was a new air of urgency and businesslike purposiveness in government offices as both ministers and civil servants got down to the task of showing results. In the Industry Ministry, officials began work on a series of 'position papers' on how to speed up decisions on applications received from industry. Railway Minister Bansi Lal paid a surprise visit to the New Delhi railway station and suspended a lackadaisical enquiry clerk, his minister of state Madhavrao Scindia worked till midnight acquainting himself with his charge before heading for the airport at five the next morning to catch a flight. Minister of State for Steel K. Natwar Singh started off on a quick tour of the steel plants, and Education Minister K.C. Pant absent-mindedly made pencil sketches of turbanned faces on his blotter while sitting across from Punjab leaders who had come to discuss the Punjab problem.

The new broom reached into the Congress party office too, where Rajiv Gandhi appointed three new general secretaries, re-allocated the portfolios of the existing ones, and then appointed 10 new joint secretaries, most of them youngsters picked to present the face of youth and change.

Back in the Government, the prime minister set about reorganising the ministries as no one had done before him. The Telecommunications Department was de-linked from Posts and Telegraphs (giving effect to the three-year-old recommendation of the H.C.Sarin committee, and paving the way for a much greater flow of funds into telecommunications), the Department of Coal was tagged on to the Ministry of Steel and Mines in an effort to bring producer and user closer together, the Energy Ministry was split into four separate outfits, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) converted into a Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, social welfare tagged on to women's welfare to form a new ministry, and forests taken away from agriculture and made a part of the Ministry of Environment because deforestation is a central environmental problem. Earlier, in November, he had made the Department of Company Affairs a part of the Industry Ministry, thus achieving a functional cohesion that had been recommended two years earlier by the Economic Administration Reforms Commission but lain unimplemented. The changes in personnel were as sweeping. Two members of the Planning Commission were sent packing, three others appointed, a new governor of the Reserve Bank named, India's nominees on the executive boards of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund replaced, the special assistant to the prime minister R.K. Dhawan asked to resign and a more self-effacing substitute



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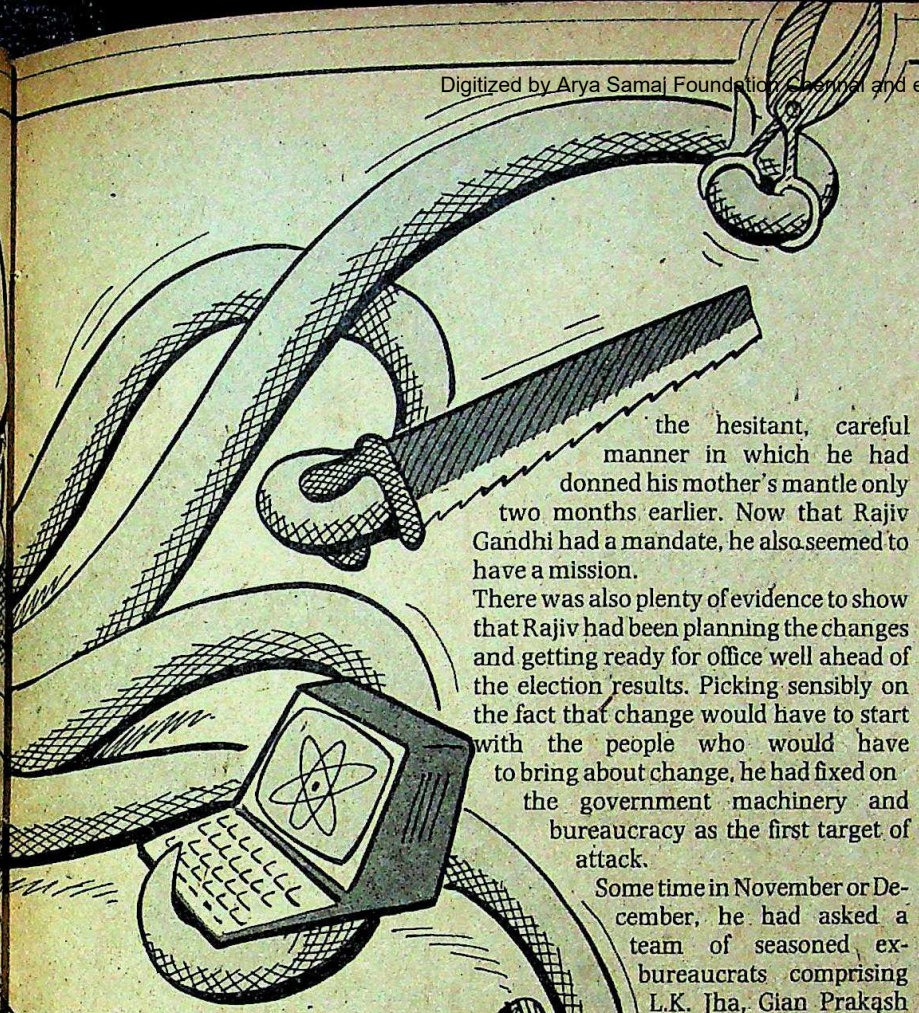

put in his place, and sweeping orders issued to send back to the states all bureaucrats who had spent more than their alloted time in Delhi. Such orders had often been issued in the past, only for a series of exceptions to be made immediately after. But this time, when the Home Ministry sent an additional secretary's file to the prime minister for extending his posting in Delhi, the file came back with 'NO' written in capital letters.

Going beyond the changes in administrative structure and personnel, Rajiv Gandhi gave warning of wanting to bring about substantial changes in government policy in a host of fields. The public sector was served notice that it would have to perform or face the axe, bureaucrats were told that decisions would have to be taken at middle levels so that those at the top had time to think of policy and direction, and decisions taken in short order to visit both Moscow and Washington in the summer.

This wasn't just one broom sweeping clean, but more like a multi-tentacled eager beaver moving on as many fronts as possible, chopping, changing, ordering, pushing forward. And the hectic activity was in sharp contrast to the hesitant, careful manner in which he had donned his mother's mantle only two months earlier. Now that Rajiv Gandhi had a mandate, he also seemed to have a mission.

There was also plenty of evidence to show that Rajiv had been planning the changes and getting ready for office well ahead of the election results. Picking sensibly on the fact that change would have to start with the people who would have to bring about change, he had fixed on the government machinery and bureaucracy as the first target of attack.

Some time in November or December, he had asked a team of seasoned ex-bureaucrats comprising L.K. Jha, Gian Prakash (former comptroller and auditor general) and T.V. Rajeshwar (lt-governor of Arunachal Pradesh and former director of the Intelligence Bureau) to prepare a report for him on the restructuring of government departments. While Rajiv was criss-crossing the country drumming up the votes, these three had sat with G.K. Arora and V.S. Tripathi, two senior officers in the prime minister's secretariat, to review the working of the central ministries. What emerged was a preliminary report that led to the creation of new departments and the shuffling around of others within 24 hours of Rajiv's swearing in. Cabinet Secretary C.R.Krishnaswamy Rao Saheb eventually sent a 34-page official recommendation to President Zail Singh for issuing the necessary orders to get things going.

Some of the mood of action rubbed off on those immediately around. Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh spent 18-hour days wrestling with what seemed a difficult budgetary position, but lost no time in ordering his officials to reopen investigations into a series of bank frauds that had hit the headlines in recent months, or into controversial dealings involving the Central Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Punjab and Sind Bank and Bank of Baroda. Some controversial bank chairmen who came to pay courtesy calls were denied audience, and Singh declared: "We have started identifying the corrupt people occupying strategic positions. The corrupt and inefficient will be weeded out and the honest and efficient ones suitably rewarded." Singh also ordered a wholesale change of the bank directors whose terms were about to end.

Labour minister T. Anjaiah made pronouncements about housing programmes for members of the provident fund organisation, and Housing Minister Abdul Ghafoor turned the spotlight on the corruption-ridden Delhi Development Authority, and among the officials. Krishnaswamy Rao Saheb quickly adjusted to a new era under a prime minister who was also a computernik. He asked the heads of all government departments to visit an exhibition of modern office machines and to familiarise themselves with the workings of computers, word processors and similiar electronic efficiency aids. Rao Saheb himself inaugurated the exhibition. Not one to lag behind, V.P.Singh inaugurated a computerised information system for his ministry a few days later. Said the dapper Madhvrao Scindia, representing the new age by making ordinary khadi look like high fashion: "If we had a leader who trudged along, there would have been little enthusiasm on display as a consequence. But his speedy decisions have electrified us."

It remained to be seen, of course, whether the changes would finally amount to much, whether the broom would very quickly be put away, and whether one new man at the top could shake a government (and later a country) into a new desire for action and change. Mrs Gandhi had herself galvanised the government into quick bursts of activity on a number of occasions (when the emergency was declared in 1975, or in early 1981 when she announced a new 20-point programme and shuffled people around), but none of these had had lasting impact or led to permanent change. In fact, immediately after coming back to power in 1980, Mrs Gandhi had sent a hand-picked team to visit Assam and seek a solution there, but this ended up with the Nellie outrage three years later. The big question now was whether things would be different this time around.

One thing seemed immediately ob-

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vious in the corridors of government in Delhi: the sense of change was more at the top than lower down, where the broom had yet to reach. In the Planning Commission, an official complained that typists still insisted on getting overtime before typing out annual plan documents. In the industry ministry, a senior official talked once again of 'single-window clearance' and 'time-barred clearance of applications'—both hoary chestnuts that offered little new. In the prime minister's secretariat itself, a senior official complained that very few new ideas were coming in from the various ministries, that people were still thinking along traditional lines, serving up old salads with a new dressing. And in a time-honoured tactic by a new minister who does not have too many fresh ideas, Education Minister K.C.Pant served notice that his ministry's entrance doors would close by 10.30, so that late-comers were shut out.

Nevertheless, there was no mistaking the immediate change of style, pace, and to some extent even direction. Law Minister Asoke Sen declared that high court judges would not be shuffled around at will, as his predecessor in Mrs Gandhi's cabinet had done. Social Welfare Minister Mohsina Kidwai announced that all children would be completely immunised in the next five years (against only 55 per cent of children having immunisation cover now). And the squalid squabbling that had gone on between A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and C.K.Jaffer Sharief in Rail Bhavan now gave way to mutual Lucknowi courtesy between Bansi Lal and Madhavrao Scindia: *"Pahle aap, nahin pahle aap"* (you first, no please you first). Bansi Lal in fact seemed mellower than the tyrant of yore, while others with a mellower reputation breathed fire: Minister of State for Commerce P.A. Sangma quietly threatened the mandarins in Udyog Bhavan that if he was dropped from the ministry for non-performance, he would take at least a couple of them down with him. Even as knee-jerk a Nehru/Gandhi-baiter as the octogenarian opposition leader Charan Singh was forced to concede that the new Government had begun well.

The handling of the Opposition marked another departure from the confrontationist postures of the past. Rajiv Gandhi called in opposition leaders individually or in small groups for informal consultations. Many of those consulted saw in this a new welcome trend towards a conciliatory style. However, Mrs Gandhi too had occasionally called in op-

(From left) Arun Singh, Fernandes and Patel with Rajiv: good records

PM'S SECRETARIAT

New Blood

IT WAS both continuity and change in the Prime Minister's Secretariat as well. Last fortnight, when Rajiv Gandhi returned to South Block with an unprecedented electoral victory, he ordered both qualitative and quantitative change in the 200-member Prime Minister's Secretariat. Though he retained over half-a-dozen senior civil servants including his Principal Secretary Dr P.C. Alexander and the controversial advisor Vijay Shankar Tripathi, he gave marching orders to Rajinder Kumar Dhawan, his mother's aide for more than 14 years, and over six junior-level officials. He then replaced his special secretary Dr Arjun Sengupta with another Oxford-educated bureaucrat, Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

But the most significant change in the prime minister's office was the induction of two more parliamentary secretaries—Ahmed Mohamed Patel and Oscar Fernandes, both Congress(I) MP's. Last month Rajiv had already inducted his Doon School pal Arun Singh as parliamentary secretary. Though Rajiv has always given an impression that he is in favour of decentralisation of the decision-making process, the induction of three parliamentary secretaries in the prime minister's office suggests that he is expected to keep a close vigil over the entire government. Manned by a principal secretary and eight officials of the rank of joint secretary and above, the present Prime Minister's Secretariat has now become one of the biggest secretariats since Independence. Rajiv's advisors justify such a top heavy administration on the plea that the prime minister is likely to initiate far-reaching economic and social reforms in the near future, and his secretariat will serve as nodal point for all result-oriented activities of the Government.

Moreover, the prime minister believes that he should not depend entirely on bureaucratic advice only. The presence of political advisors will help in getting reports through the party forums and enable him to cross-check the claims put up by the bureaucracy.

Changes in the secretariat also reflect a significant shift in emphasis in Rajiv's governmental policy and attitude towards the bureaucracy. By inducting three young politicians who carry no ideological baggage, Rajiv has indicated that he himself has an open mind. In addition, by retaining bureaucrats like Alexander, Additional Secretary Gopi Arora, Joint Secretary Arvind Pandey and by appointing Ahluwalia—all of whom have a solid background in economics—he has clearly expressed that his priority is for economic policies.

Even in the retention of people like Tripathi, H.Y. Sharda Prasad and Usha Bhagat, the prime minister has conveyed a clear message: he's not for wholesale axing of incumbents but will continue to take their advice in matters which they are handling.

Though the newcomers are yet to settle in their saddles, INDIA TODAY profiles the fresh entrants to the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

Oscar Fernandes: Karnataka-born Oscar Fernandes, 44, is an aggressive politician. A graduate from Karnataka University, Fernandes concentrated on farming in Udupi where he earned laurels for being a modern farmer. He was awarded a prize by the Government for the highest yield of rice from his farm. But Fernandes shot to political prominence in 1980, when he was chosen by Sanjay Gandhi to contest the Lok Sabha

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seat from Udupi on a Congress(I) ticket. He won the seat by polling over 60 per cent of the total votes.

While maintaining a low profile in New Delhi, Fernandes was active in his home state where he played an important role in the reorganisation of the party. After Sanjay's death, he came in close contact with both Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Nehru, who inducted him as member of the National Council of the Indian Youth Congress(I). Earlier, in 1983, he was involved in planning training camps from the Congress(I)'s frontal organisations like the Congress Sewa Dal, the Mahila Congress, and the National Students Union of India. When Rajiv took over as AICC(I) general secretary, Fernandes was inducted as one of the joint secretaries to assist him in organisational matters.

As Rajiv's aide, Fernandes was responsible for coordinating the activities of the organisations. Though he looked after youth organisations, he kept out of controversy. Working for over 18 hours a day, Fernandes carried out Rajiv's instructions faithfully and monitored the progress of the programmes given to all the organisations. People who have worked closely with him say he is level-headed and never loses his cool even in the most trying circumstances he sometimes has to face.

Ahluwalia: pragmatic approach

Since Fernandes had earlier established direct rapport with Congress(I) MP's, including those who were new, Rajiv assigned him to look after the prime minister's Parliament work. According to sources, all the files relating to parliamentary affairs will be routed through Fernandes instead of Tripathi.

Ahmed Mohamed Patel: For 35-year-old Patel, it has been an impressive journey from village pradhan to parliamentary secretary to the prime minister. Born to a Muslim Congressman of Piraman village in Broach district of Gujarat, Patel has always been shy of publicity. Short and handsome, he began his social activities as a philanthropist in 1975 when he was nominated as trustee of a Muslim educational trust in Ankleshwar. When he was only 28, Sanjay Gandhi chose him as the Congress(I) candidate from Broach parliamentary constituency which he won with a considerably huge margin.

When the Gujarat Congress deserted Mrs Gandhi after the 1978 split, Sanjay inducted Patel as president of the Gujarat State Youth Congress(I), a post which he held till 1980. During the two years of the Janata regime, Patel made his party's presence felt by leading protest marches. In 1980 he was renominated for contesting the Lok Sabha election and came into contact with Rajiv later that year when he, along with other Youth Congress(I) leaders, called on him and pledged their cooperation. In 1982, Rajiv inducted Patel as one of the AICC(I)'s joint secretaries and assigned him to look after publicity and coordination. He was also responsible for coordinating Rajiv's tour programme in the various states.

Soon after Rajiv's appointment as General Secretary, it was Patel who along with other key officials finalised his tours to various states.

It is perhaps Patel's coolheadedness which weighed with Rajiv for inducting Patel as his parliamentary secretary to look after party affairs. Though his role has not been defined fully so far, he will act as an intermediary between the party and the prime minister. While the AICC(I)'s general secretaries will continue to have direct access to the prime minister, most of the organisational decisions will be conveyed through Patel, who is also expected to ensure that the prime minister's directions are carried out smoothly and expeditiously. Says Patel: "Rajiv has reposed confidence in me. My job is to carry out his orders and instructions faithfully to the best of my ability."

V.S. Venkatraman: A Brahmin from Tamil Nadu, Venkatraman, 49, is perhaps the first faceless, low-profile bureaucrat to join the Prime Minister's Secretariat as special assistant to the prime minister. Last fortnight, when he moved into a modestly furnished first floor room in South Block, he presented a contrast to the previous occupants like M.O. Mathai and R.K. Dhawan who between them remained in that office for over 15 years. Though Venkatraman had worked with various ministers including prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri for over 11 years, he was never a subject of media interest.

He began his government service in the early '60s with Lal Bahadur Shastri as one of his personal assistants. Later on he was selected in the central secretariat services competition, and joined the Central Government as a section officer. During the past 18 years, he has worked in various ministries including those of energy, transport, shipping and home affairs. In 1980, he was inducted as private secretary to P. Venkatsubbaiah, Union minister of state for home. Between 1980 and 1983, he came in close touch with the Prime Minister's Secretariat for consultation on various personnel matters. In 1983, he was promoted as joint secretary and posted in the Ministry of Shipping and Transport.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia: Delhi Public School and Oxford educated Ahluwalia, 42, is the first Sikh to join the prime minister's fledgeling secretariat since Independence. Last fortnight, he replaced Dr Arjun Sengupta as economic advisor in the rank of additional secretary to the prime minister. Ahluwalia's induction followed the Rajiv Government's conscious decision to minimise controls over the economy. While Sengupta was assessed as a leftist, Ahluwalia enjoys the reputation of being pragmatic and opposed to unnecessary controls. A soft-spoken man, Ahluwalia is one of a dozen non-IAS officials who occupy senior positions in the Finance Ministry, which he joined during the Janata regime in 1979.

Before joining the Government, Ahluwalia worked first as an economist and later on as chief of the income distribution division of the Development Research Centre of the World Bank in the US. During the past five years at North Block he has been associated with the formulation of fiscal and monetary policies. As economic advisor to the Finance Ministry, Ahluwalia's major responsibility was to assess the implications of various economic policies and suggest alternatives for faster economic growth.

Since Ahluwalia has contributed academic research papers on income distribution in reputed economic periodicals, he is considered an expert on public finance and rural poverty. Unless the prime minister reallocates the work, Ahluwalia will look after the economic ministries and advise the prime minister on economic matters. His induction at the crucial moment when both the budget and the seventh plan are being finalised is viewed as a shift towards a control-free economy. —PRABHU CHAWLA

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position representatives for consultations, but these had not amounted to much. And it remained to be seen what Rajiv Gandhi's exercises would amount to. Nevertheless, the beginning undoubtedly did spell promise.

The question now remained to be answered, as to what the new initiatives would amount to. Good intentions were certainly on display, even in little personal habits like K.C.Pant's: the education minister sat in his large dark office with all the lights switched off. Some fading daylight and the winter chill filtered in through the open windows. "I am a conservationist," Pant explained to curious visitors. Only when dusk approached did he order the lights to be switched on. But what did such personal examples eventually amount to?

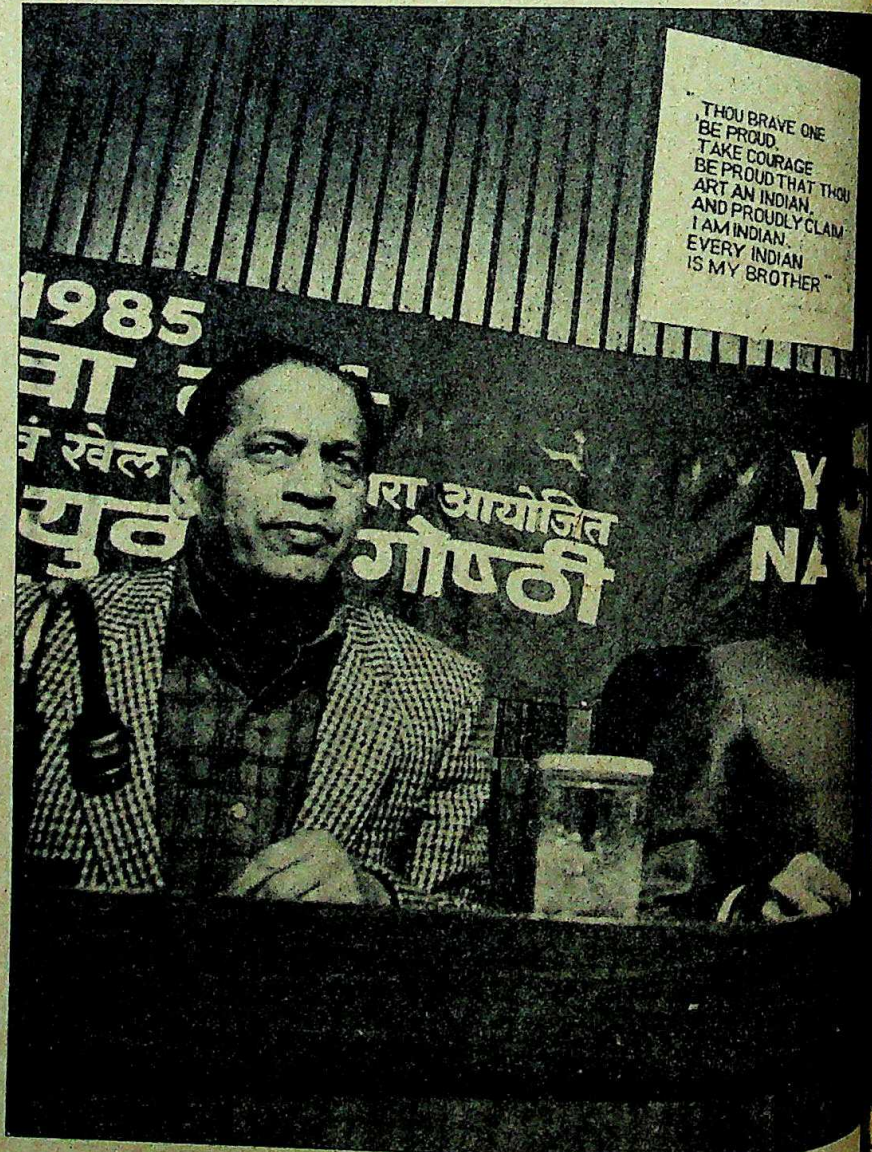
Many bureaucrats, while welcoming the new business-like air, wondered whether the transfers, sackings and appointments would create only surface turbulence, and said changes of greater substance would have to wait for a sharp definition of perspectives and policies. Said political commentator Romesh Thapar: "Political stability is not made by massive mandates. The ruling party may have all the votes in Parliament, but if it does not have the courage and integrity to restructure the system, the system will keep caving in." Thapar then pointed to the fact that those guilty of perpetrating the riots in Delhi had not yet been brought to book: "We are becoming terribly forgetful about justice at the pyramid of power, and the consequences that flow from such forgetfulness."

There was also a sense of disappointment among those who discussed the Punjab problem with members of the three-man committee set up by the prime minister. Said a Congress(I) leader from Punjab: "We are being told the same things once again about linking the future of Fazilka and Abohar with that of Chandigarh, and we are also hearing the same old arguments that brought about the current impasse in the first place." Punjab in fact seemed likely to be a difficult knot to cut through, with a variety of Akali leaders continuing to swear by the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, and laying down a variety of pre-conditions that would have to be met before talks could start. And matters were not simplified by Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal sounding a warning about resistance to any scheme that would deprive the state of both Chandigarh and river waters while getting nothing in return.

Assam, however, presented a more hopeful scenario. The leaders of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) were invited to Delhi for fresh negotiations with the Government, and those who spoke to them reported a more flexible frame of mind than had been in evidence in the past. The AASU leaders might be persuaded to accept the 1971 cut-off date that the Government itself had once offered for determining who was an alien and who wasn't, and also seemed inclined to participate in Assembly elections in the state if they were held in March. While several tricky issues still remained to be sorted out, the picture here was not as difficult as the one in Punjab, and it seemed possible that the new Government would, if it moved dexterously, be able to show a major triumph here in the near future.

On the economic front, the signals

An enormous amount of work needed to be done if genuine changes were to be ushered in by the new government on a wide front. Indeed, the flurry of activity in the government's first week in office only built up expectations of more action...



Rajiv flanked by Sathe and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Joychandra Singh at a forum last week: new broom

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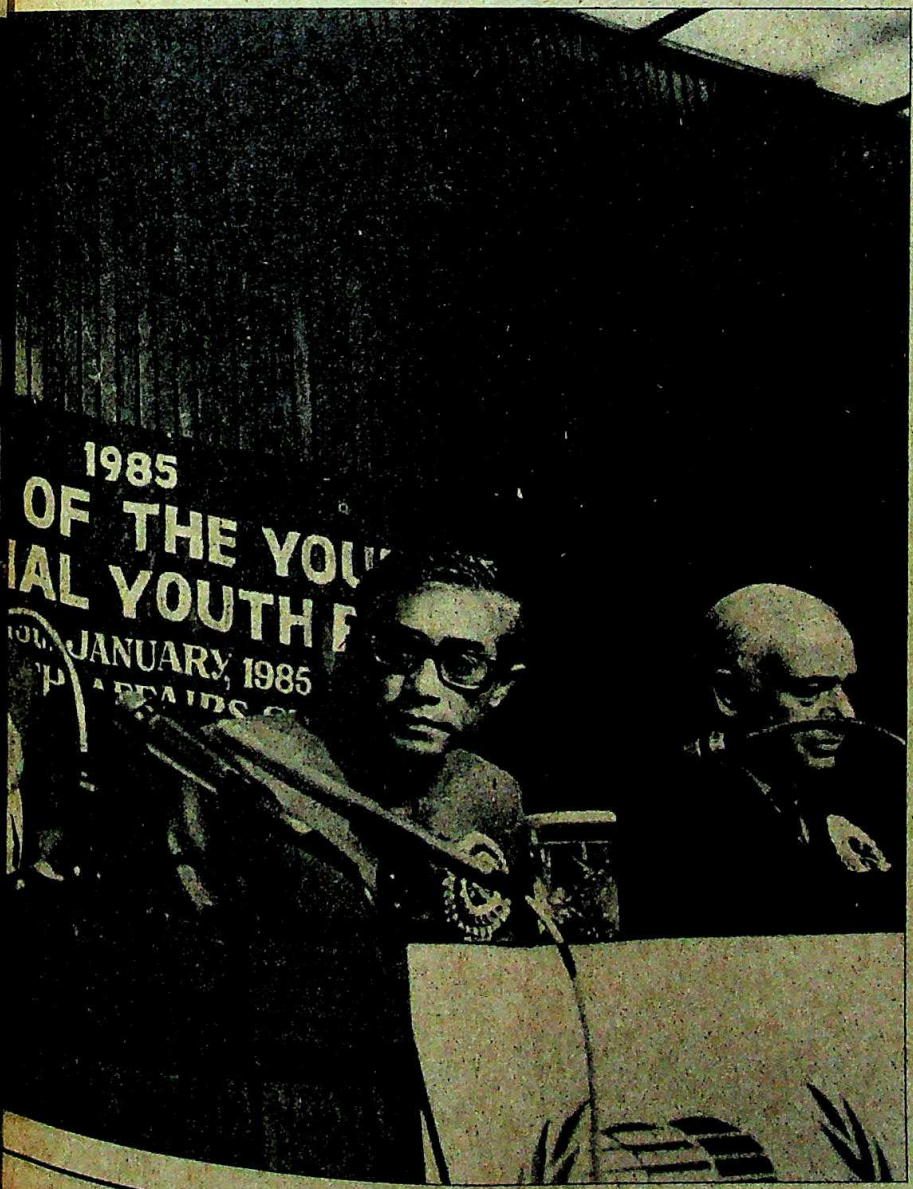
were mixed. On the one hand, there was the impression created that perennially loss-incurring public sector units might be wound up so that good money was not thrown after bad, and reports submitted earlier for winding up eight textile mills under the National Textile Corporation umbrella were dusted off for a fresh look. However, the Government had to beat a hasty retreat over the sacking of a few hundred casual railway employees in Bengal. These had been hired in the first place as a part of the then Railway Minister Ghani Khan Chowdhury's porkbarrel politics, and the employees' services had been dispensed with as soon as the railway minister changed. But an enormous to-do resulted in Calcutta and Malda, where effigies of Rajiv Gandhi were burnt, and the Government backtracked hastily. This only begged the question of how a government that could not dismiss casual workers would be able to get rid of permanent employees in public sector corporations.

ON THE education front too, the instant talk of delinking jobs from degrees seemed more of a slogan than a practical solution to a difficult problem. If the objective was to ease the pressure on universities, it was unlikely to be achieved since there were not enough job opportunities available as an alternative outlet for school-leavers. Also, the background and experience of the experts who were asked to draft a new education policy suggested that the focus would be on university education more than on primary and adult education.

A large question-mark also hung over the government's industrial policy. For while officials talked enthusiastically of 'single window clearance' and of working on new position papers that would define policy options for the new Government, there seemed little chance that radical departures would be attempted immediately. After all, single window clearance still meant getting clearances for the project, the foreign collaboration involved, the capital goods import required, clearance from the viewpoint of the law governing large houses, plus downstream negotiations for land, tax concessions from the state government, money from the government-owned financial institutions, and much else. There was little chance that all this would be gone through in double-quick time, and delays in government offices seemed likely to continue. The option of dispensing with the control apparatus and replacing it with a new one that stipulated what the Government would and would not allow, without the need for case by case clearances, was not yet being considered despite Rajiv Gandhi telling an American interviewer that the Government's objective was to put an end to controls without giving up control.

However, the prime minister's instincts were finely tuned when he told commerce ministry officials that the only way to end corruption was to reduce the need for contact between ministry officials and supplicants who came to them for a variety of approvals and clearances. And while his holding on to both the industry and commerce ministries seemed an undue and impractical concentration of major portfolios in one man's hands, it was also clear that this had been done with the specific purpose of devoting time and attention to initiating change in two vital areas.

Similarly, the delinking of the department of personnel from the Home Mini-



However, it was also clear that no government could meet very high expectations on short order, and that there would inevitably be a let-down as the days and weeks passed. But the message had been imparted that the new boss meant business.

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stry, and placing it under a minister of state whom the prime minister trusted and who would report to the prime minister, seemed designed to initiate substantial changes in the weeks to come. The minister of state concerned, K.P.Singh Deo, tended to speak in cliches ("Rajiv wants civil servants to be more responsive to the needs of modern India"), but it seemed likely that the steps taken would be less cliched.

Several tasks would have to be taken on quickly if a change in the administrative culture was to take place. While Rajiv Gandhi talked of giving public sector managers greater autonomy and then making them accountable, the head of a large public sector company termed the steps initiated so far as '*bakwas*' (nonsense). "I have seen joint secretaries playing hell with the public sector without the faintest idea of what they were about," he said. "The whole culture of ministerial control over the public sector is wrong." A technocrat, meanwhile, pointed out that only two of the 32 economic secretaries to the Government were professional managers, while another six were technical men. The remaining 24 came from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) or other generalist services. "Unless this kind of situation changes, economic management and public sector performance cannot improve," he said.

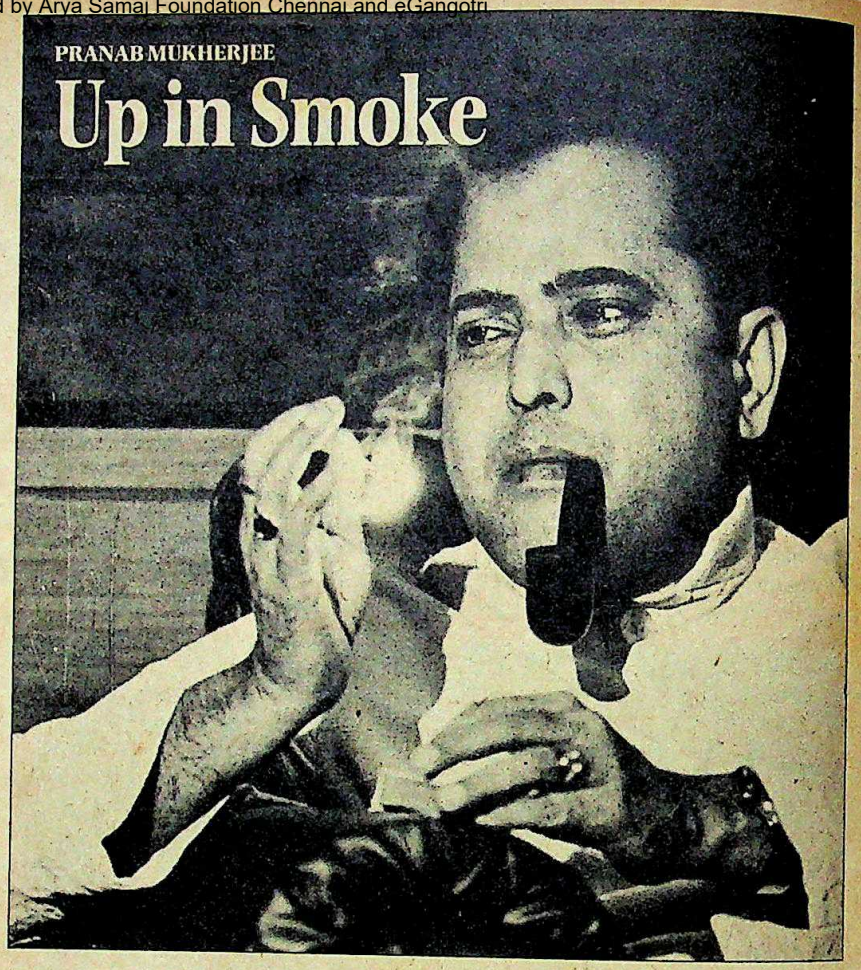
That comment underlined two things: the enormous amount of work that needed to be done if genuine change was to be ushered in by the new Government on a wide front, and the fact that people expected the new Government to make a serious bid for such change. Indeed, the flurry of activity in the government's first week in office only built up expectations of more action.

However, it was also clear that no government could meet very high expectations in short order, and that there would inevitably be a let-down as the days and weeks passed. But what encouraged hope last fortnight was the fact that the Government was setting the stage for changes in policy and direction by setting up think-tanks, ordering a review of existing policies, creating new agencies that would pay attention to urgent problems, and much else. Also, the message had been imparted that the new boss meant business. As the country looked forward to a new quinquennium, the key question was whether these initiatives would result in genuine departures, or whether the new broom would quickly lose its efficacy.

—RAMINDAR SINGH with PRABHU CHAWLA

PRANAB MUKHERJEE

Up in Smoke



HE IS a midget-sized man who cast a long shadow on Mrs Gandhi's government. Last fortnight, when Pranab Mukherjee's three-year-long tenure as finance minister came to an abrupt end, he left a lot more than a whiff of his favourite Erinmore tobacco in the corridors of North Block.

The exact reason behind the axing of the suave but high-flying Mukherjee, 49, as well as that of the all-powerful Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, R.K. Dhawan, may long remain shrouded in mystery with all the concerned parties taking shelter behind the convenient reply: "It's the prime minister's prerogative." But, while Dhawan's ouster was entirely expected (*see box*), what really got eyebrows raised was the manner of Mukherjee's surgical excision, performed with a blunt scalpel and without anaesthesia.

On December 31, shortly before the new cabinet was sworn in, Mukherjee had put up a beaming face standing next to the prime minister before television cameras when the Congress(I) parliamentary party formally chose Rajiv as the leader. Within hours, M.L. Fotedar, the prime minister's aide, was ringing up prospective ministers asking them to get ready for the swearing in at Rashtrapati Bhawan. However, the phone at Mukherjee's spacious bungalow on Jantar Mantar Road never rang. At 5 p.m., barely 15 minutes before the swearing in, he drafted a letter to the Works and Housing Ministry requesting to be shifted to a smaller bungalow, "now that I am no longer a member of the Union Cabinet", and settled before the television set with wife Shubhra to watch the proceedings of the evening.

The axing was deliberately unceremonious. Even A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, the former railway minister and fellow-Bengali whose hostility to Mukherjee is well-known, was called aside by Rajiv before the formation of the ministry and was offered a general secretaryship of the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) in lieu of a place in the Cabinet. But there was not even a by-your-leave in the case of Mukherjee. And, rubbing salt into the wound, the prime minister told newsmen later in the evening that he was considering neither a party posting nor any ambass-

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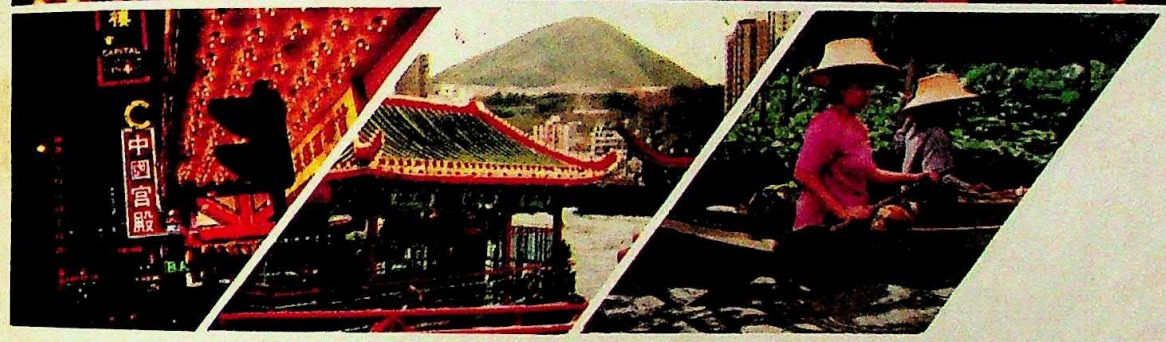

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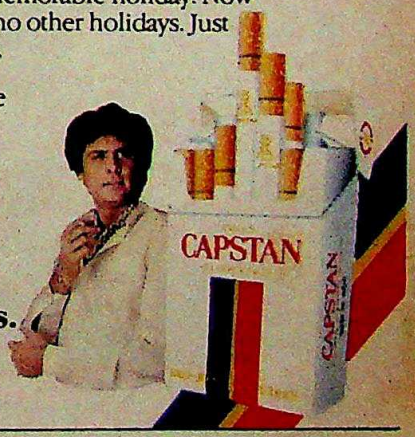

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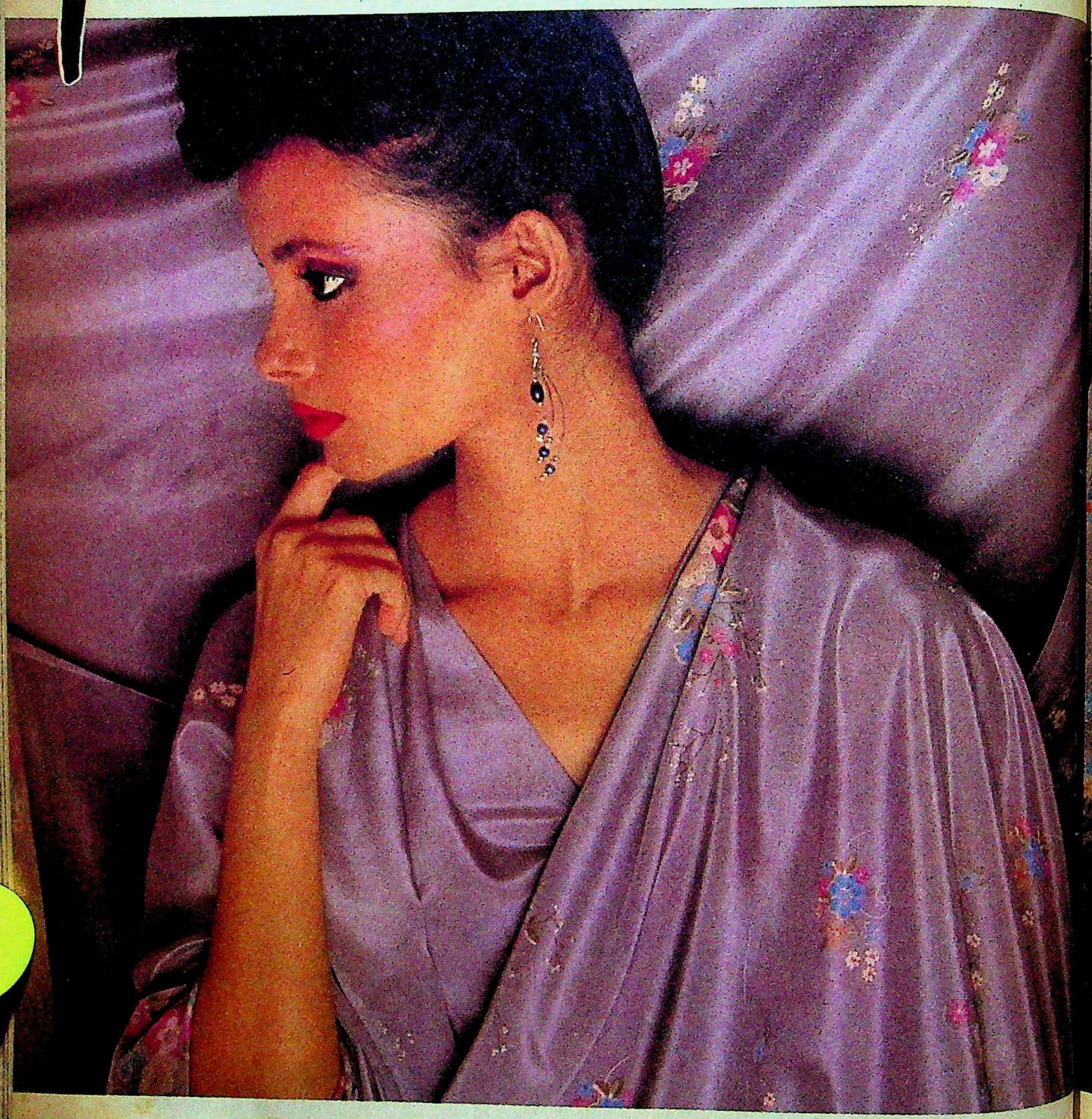

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Chinese royalty wore silks for a few thousand years before their master weavers could present them with the 'Crêpe de Chine'. Since then, crêpes have represented the finest skill and technique of the weaver and his loom.

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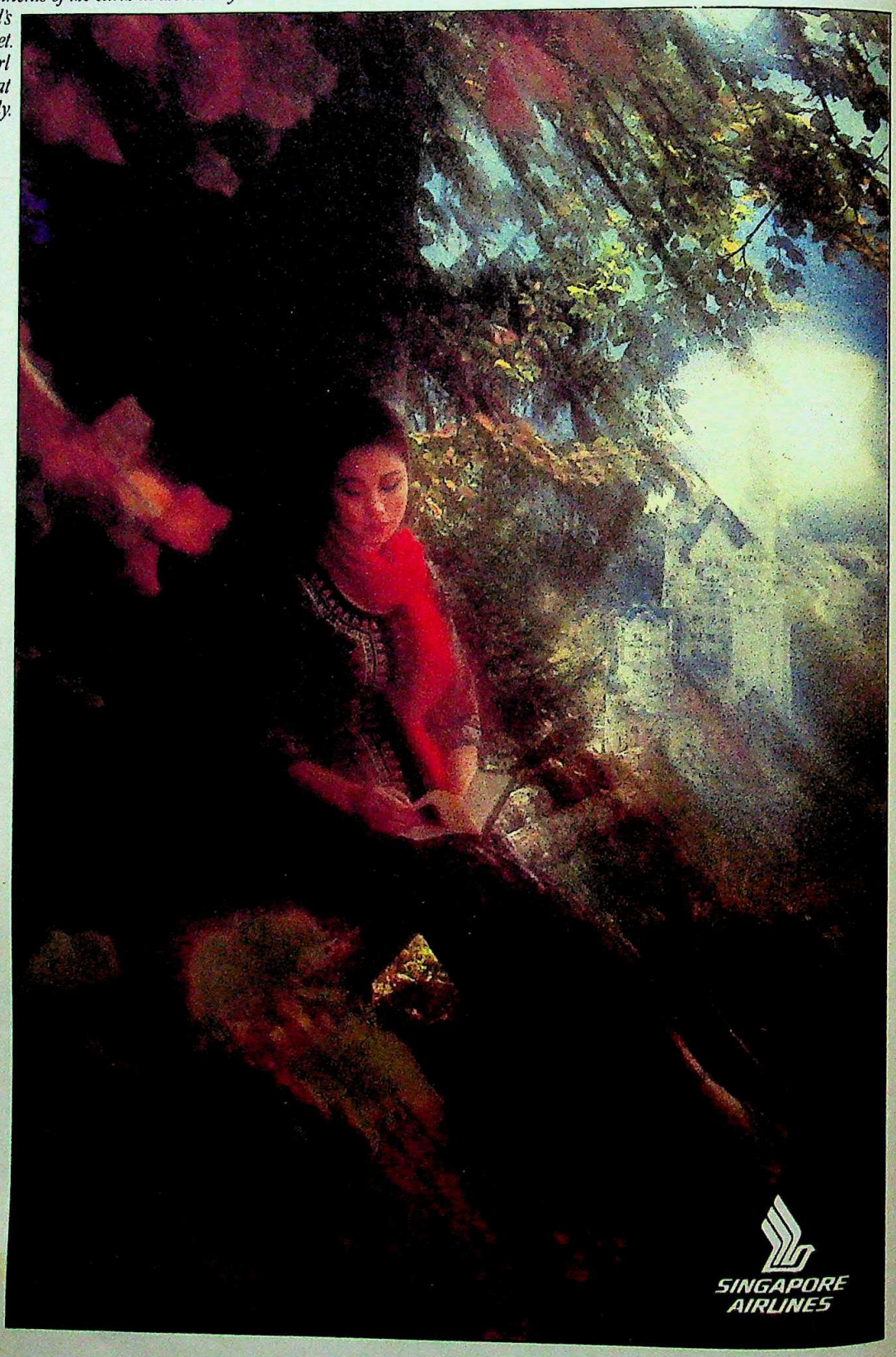
Gentle hostess in your sarong kebaya you care for me as only you know how across four continents of the earth in the luxury of the world's most modern fleet. Singapore Girl you're a great way to fly.



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adorial appointment for Mukherjee.

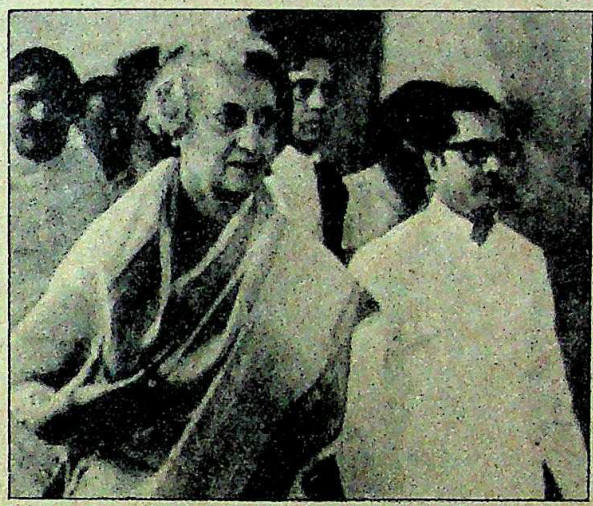
There was still no let-up in the executioner's rituals. Within a week, Mukherjee was removed from his elevated post as leader of the Rajya Sabha. The other two exclusive clubs of the party, the Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC) and the Congress(I) Parliamentary Board (CPB), of which he became a member by virtue of his leadership of the Rajya Sabha, seemed destined to blackball him at the time of their reconstitution, likely soon. "What can I say? The prime minister has dropped me, and that's all. In a parliamentary system it's the prerogative of the prime minister to choose his Cabinet," Mukherjee told INDIA TODAY, putting up a brave front but sounding exhausted. He was packing to leave for a quiet week-end at the guest house of Kurukshetra University in Haryana.

Generally wary of publicity, good or bad, Mukherjee received a raw deal in the hands of his adversaries even after being ejected from office. One such instance was the 'story' planted in the media after Mrs Gandhi's death, that Mukherjee had mentioned in the flight from Calcutta to Delhi before Rajiv on that fateful day that being the seniormost cabinet member he should be sworn in as the acting prime minister on the model of Gulzarilal Nanda in 1964 and 1966. Even Shyamlal Yadav, then deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha, who was also on the flight said that "nothing of that sort ever happened." Apprehensions about Mukherjee in the new power set-up were also fuelled by speculations in the foreign media about his chances of being chosen as Mrs Gandhi's successor vis-a-vis Rajiv for many hours after the assassination. The media cannot be blamed, for they were trying to anticipate the current situation in the light of past conventions.

The removal of Mukherjee created a flutter in the echelons of power because everybody expected him to fade away slowly, not to disappear suddenly from the scene. "It's too sudden to believe," said a senior executive in the Finance Ministry. But he was on a downhill path immediately after Rajiv became the Prime Minister on the day of Mrs Gandhi's assassination, ironically on the strength of the CPB resolution drafted by Mukherjee. The plain fact is that Rajiv could never pull along with Mukherjee.

He rose fast in the Government despite this. Unsuccessful twice over at the hustings (he has never won an election), Mrs Gandhi nevertheless chose him as her commerce and steel minister in 1980, making him the Rajya Sabha leader, and taking him on board virtually every committee of the Cabinet, including the powerful Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA).

He then replaced R. Venkataraman as the finance minister and continued by common consent, to function as the number two minister in 1982. Mrs Gandhi herself put the seal of approval on the pecking order by leaving instructions before her foreign trips to ask Mukherjee to preside over the cabinet meetings in her absence. In fact, Mukherjee's rank was decided as soon as he became the leader of the Rajya Sabha, within a week of his being appointed a cabinet minister. Mukherjee, though only 45 then, and without the experience of having been either a cabinet minister or a chief minister before was taking precedence over veterans like P.V. Narasimha Rao, Kamlapati Tripathi, Vidya Charan Shukla and Venkataraman.



Mukherjee with Mrs Gandhi in 1977: symbol of the past

BUT MUKHERJEE'S great quality lay in the fact that he wore his success lightly, never projecting himself to the outside world and never giving an impression of wielding power independent of Mrs Gandhi. There was so perfect a harmony between him and Mrs Gandhi that partymen soon began to regard his words as the faithful voice reproduction of Mrs Gandhi's. This was repeatedly seen during the convoluted course of the Antulay affair. Mrs Gandhi kept in touch with her aberrant supporter in Bombay almost entirely through Mukherjee. Again, when Jagannath Mishra needed to be politely told to step down, it was Mukherjee who flew down to Patna to deliver the message. Antulay told INDIA TODAY before leaving the Congress(I): "I could never trust men like G.K. Moopanar or Arun Nehru. These people put their own words in Mrs Gandhi's mouth. Pranab Mukherjee is the only person who never does that."

However, insiders recall that immediately below the level of Mrs Gandhi, power was for some time flowing along two channels —one of them being guarded by the Mukherjee-Dhawan axis and their intricate network of 'contacts' among the bureaucracy and the state chief ministers; and the other channel furrowed afresh, being sluiced by Rajiv and his band of aides and friends. Obviously the twain could never meet.

The flashpoint came in 1983 when Mukherjee began backing to the hilt the attempts of Swraj Paul, the London-based corporate raider, to buy substantially into two blue-chip Indian companies, Escorts and (DCM), both with a new generation of leaders who were contemporaries of Rajiv in the elite Doon School. Paul, on the other hand, stood by Mrs Gandhi when she was thrown out of power, and his clout in the bureaucratic and business circles in India always derived its substance from his being close to 1, Safdarjung Road.

Paul's forays into the Escorts and DCM stocks were triggered by a crucial decision in the 1983-84 budget, framed by Mukherjee, which enabled Non-Resident Indians (NRI's) to invest in Indian companies subject to certain conditions. Once the scheme was announced, Paul moved in with lightning speed, his brokers, operating at his behest, cornering shares worth Rs 13 crore from the market in the two companies even before their managements could say Paul.

Mukherjee was initially reluctant to put any limit on NRI holdings in Indian companies. But the 'second' centre of power had woken up by then. Rajiv, participating in the budget debate, mentioned a limit of just 2 per cent. A chastened Mukherjee had to eat his words and announce a 5 per cent limit in Parliament. Some time later, Rajiv set at rest all doubt as to who the real boss

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was when he told a meeting of NRI's in Delhi that the Government "should not be a party" to "internal matters" of companies, such as suggesting which share transfers they should register and which they should not.

That precisely was the thorny point in the debate, arising out of the refusal of the Escorts and DCM managements to register the transfer of shares in favour of Paul's Caparo group of companies. But, instead of seeing the writing on the wall, Mukherjee went further down his chosen road and overruled the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in allowing Paul's companies to buy in India.

In a blatant show of strength, the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and other financial institutions, all creatures of the Finance Ministry, later sought to remove nine of Escorts' 15 directors. Finally, in a historic judgement last November, the Bombay High Court stalled the move and held that Paul's companies had violated the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) in buying the shares without RBI clearance. Though the LIC immediately challenged this in the Supreme Court, to be joined later by the RBI and the Union Government, it was indeed the last straw that broke Mukherjee's back.

"I don't think the NRI policy was authored entirely by me; it was a policy of the Government and the ruling party of which our present prime minister was a general secretary at that time," Mukherjee says now, adding that "I've never tried to draw any distinction between one company and another." Nor does he accept that the Paul fiasco represented "any kind of watershed" in his relationship with Rajiv. Yet why did he fail to click with Rajiv? Mukherjee, without answering the question, merely resorts to the reticent pipe-smoker's subterfuge—that of gently tapping the tobacco.

That he was feeling apprehensive about his future even in Mrs Gandhi's lifetime is evident from the fact that he requested Asoke Sen, law minister, who was just an MP then, to vacate the Calcutta north-west Lok Sabha seat, always a Congress(I) citadel, in his favour in exchange of a place in the Rajya Sabha. Sen wrote back to Mrs Gandhi asking her if that was her real wish. Mrs Gandhi reportedly said it wasn't so.

This alone should have served as an early warning to Mukherjee, because it was in stark contrast to the VIP treatment laid out for him earlier in 1981 when his term in the Rajya Sabha had ended but the Congress(I) in the West Bengal Assembly did not have sufficient strength to re-elect him. Ready to oblige Mukherjee, the Gujarat Chief Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki, then secured a Rajya Sabha seat for him from the state Assembly with a certificate of residence in Ahmedabad made available to him to comply with the election rules.

AFTER Mrs Gandhi's death, events moved too fast for Mukherjee even to make an effort for a comeback. His early request for a ticket from the Howrah constituency in West Bengal, which was later on won by the Congress(I), was summarily rejected. Barring only a few, the claims of all ticket-seekers belonging to his faction in the state's Congress(I) politics were overruled. And, to spite him further, Khan Chowdhury, his anathema for the last five years, was nominated on the CPB by Rajiv. "Pranabda should have realised then and there that his days were numbered," said Subrata Mukherjee, West Bengal Congress(I) MLA and his trusted lieutenant.

However, Mukherjee is undoubtedly among the more competent finance ministers India has had since Independence; Finance Ministry officials put him in the same bracket with C. Subramaniam.

R.K. DHAWAN

Inning's End

RAJENDER Kumar Dhawan, the dapper 47-year-old special assistant (SA) to the prime minister, after having clung to Mrs Gandhi like her shadow for 22 years, when she was both in and out of office, finally paid the price of his proximity to power. It was business as usual for Dhawan, even on December 31, when Rajiv and his cabinet were sworn in at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. He stood near the prime minister, not too close, yet in full glare of the television cameras. But, within hours, the names of members of the reconstituted prime minister's secretariat were on the ticker: Dhawan had been dropped.

There were other changes too in the prime minister's staff: such as the retirement of M.M. Sharma, first personal assistant to the prime minister, the reverting of two assistants, R.K. Sikri and Y.S. Dave, to other government departments; the retirement of K.P. Mathur personal physician to the prime minister, and the termination of service of Nathu Ram, the 68-year-old personal attendant to Mrs Gandhi.

But these were reduced to some insignificant trade-off in personnel compared to the news of the ouster of Dhawan, the man who accompanied Mrs Gandhi literally till she breathed her last. "I don't know why I was dropped. Frankly speaking, it is not my business either to know the reason because my job is coterminous with the prime minister. And, I've no regrets," Dhawan told INDIA TODAY, dressed as always in a well-pressed suit, a cigarette held rakishly between his clenched teeth, and standing in the sunlit lawn of his rented house at Delhi's posh Golf Links.

It is true that Dhawan's word was law to most in the Congress(I), either in the Government or in the party, when Mrs Gandhi was alive. But there is no proof that he had usurped the line of command: even the Shah Commission could not prove that. He was all along Mrs Gandhi's proverbial cat's paw, and the image was so discernible that Rajiv could not but remove him if he wanted to project a new image for himself.

Dhawan's strongest point, as Mrs Gandhi herself told a US National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) network television interviewer during the 1977-80 Janata period, was that he was an "insomniac". He trailed Mrs Gandhi from 8 in the morning, when she appeared for the morning darshan, often till midnight. Except Nathu Ram, no member of Mrs Gandhi's personal staff could claim such long association with her: he was chosen by her when he was only 25 and working as a stenographer in the commerce ministry pool. Mrs Gandhi, then not in Government, needed his help in organising a trade fair in New York. In the 1977 elections, when the Congress(I) was voted out of power, Dhawan quit his government job and joind Mrs Gandhi's personal staff.

Rajiv felt apprehensive about Dhawan because his real powers far exceeded that of an SA who, according to service rules, should fix appointments, arrange tours, sort out mail, and use his discretion to select files and to put them up. But Dhawan had a qualification which very few SA's have: he knew his employer extremely well.

This knowledge of Mrs Gandhi's likes and dislikes, and her changing moods, enabled him to push his favourites and to curb those whom he did not

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finance minister between 1974 and 1977, but say that "Mukherjee had a better political judgement". *Euromoney*, the widely acclaimed money journal published from New York, described Mukherjee as one of the world's five best finance ministers and mentioned as one of his major achievements India's success in attaining a high rate of growth without running into major debt or balance of payments problem.

The economists who worked with him, one and all, pay tribute to him for "resilience of mind" and his "openness to ideas". Unlike during the stewardship of the ministry by Venkataraman, a highly respected finance minister but often slow to react, Mukherjee was able to galvanise the entire ministry into action and to introduce a continuous and two-way dialogue with the experts. As a result, he never flinched from taking an unpleasant decision as long as it made economic sense. For instance, in 1984-85, the poll-eve year, he unhesitatingly took a host of hard decisions, such as raising issue prices of wheat, sugar and rice, and cutting back on both Plan and non-Plan expenditure because money supply was increasing and prices showed a rising trend.

Of course he was favoured by two good monsoons in his three years and his personal achievement, as in the case of all finance ministers, is linked with the achievement of the entire economy. But even the bad year of 1982-83 showed a positive rate of growth while inflation was curbed to 9 per cent. The inflation rate came down later to 6 per cent. The Plan expenditure grew by 25 per cent in each year of Mukherjee's tenure. A process of cleaning up the tax system was started. And India did not have to borrow further from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after drawing US $3.9 billion of the sanctioned US $5 billion.

His acknowledged competence as a financial administrator, however, does not wash away the aberrations that were simultaneously setting in public finance, the Paul episode being just one part of it. There were more such instances:

► the tussle between the RBI and the Finance Ministry in 1983 over permitting the Gulf-based and Pakistani-managed Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) to open its branch in Bombay. Manmohan Singh, erstwhile RBI governor, was of the view that the permission should not be given, but when the Finance Ministry pressed for it and even threatened to take away RBI's licensing power, he wanted to resign. Finally the Finance Ministry prevailed and Singh had to backtrack, issuing the necessary licence to BCCI.

► Two nationalised banks, Syndicate Bank and Central Bank of India, were dragged into scandals that indicated violation of banking norms under political pressure.

► Vast sums were distributed as bank credit to the economically weaker sections—without proper verification—in public relations exercises of the ruling party euphemistically dubbed loan melas.

However, it is neither Mukherjee's proven competence, nor the amoral flexibility of his policies, that seem to have weighed with Rajiv in deciding upon his removal. And his contacts in the party, including among some of the 'dissidents', were increasingly becoming a liability for him instead of being any boon. The loyalists thought him to be a bridge between the old and the new. But the newcomers did not quite trust him.

Cautious and suave, Mukherjee is too much of a *bhadralok* to have posed any real threat to Rajiv, or even to drop a hint ever that he would indeed like to be in the race. He was a symbol of a past that Rajiv wished to get away from. As the order of the round-table ended, he had to slip out of the limelight. —SUMIT MITRA

Dhawan: long day's journey into night

like. In the last five years, Mrs Gandhi introduced a system of checks and balances in her secretariat, such as appointing M.L. Fotedar as her aide on party matters, and assigning to Vijay Shankar Tripathi, an IAS officer, the job of her political advisor. Still Dhawan managed to outsmart others for two reasons: he was greatly trusted by Mrs Gandhi, more than anyone else in the secretariat; and many partymen thought that Dhawan's word gave a true representation of Mrs Gandhi's views. Many state chief ministers, always anxious to know their stocks with the prime minister, dealt directly with Dhawan.

There were always strong lobbies working against Dhawan. His relations with Tripathi, for that matter, were openly hostile. But Mrs Gandhi deftly divided their areas of operation in order to avoid any confrontation. And, she seldom trusted anyone else so deeply on personal matters: it was Dhawan who, at Mrs Gandhi's behest, kept a line of communication open with Menaka even after she had left her mother-in-law's house, regularly enquiring about Pheroze Varun, Sanjay's son, even reaching him the presents sent by his doting grandmother.

Dhawan's utility to Mrs Gandhi stemmed from the characteristic style of her functioning and personality. Her authority was centralised and Dhawan was the only person who guarded access to her—by shifting appointments, by regulating allocations of time, even going to the extent of shutting off visitors not approved by him.

Sanjay too had a strong personal rapport with Dhawan, as a result of which he could make such deep inroads into the day-to-day functioning of the Government during the Emergency. But Dhawan was never a favourite of Rajiv because, after joining poilitics, Rajiv put together his own network of aides.

Dhawan could still retain his job on the strength of his competence, but it is clear his past image—that of a confidante of the late prime minister in the penumbra of power—got in the way of Rajiv showing any mercy to him. For a while after Rajiv assumed power on October 31 last year, Dhawan tried to keep alive the illusion of his closeness to the seat of power. He shadowed the new prime minister just as he'd have done his predecessor and, even when he was not wanted by Rajiv, he would report for duty to P.C. Alexander, principal secretary to the prime minister. But the rules of the game had changed irreversibly by then and it was a matter of time till the axe finally came down on him.

—SUMIT MITRA

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OPPOSITION

Out in the Wilderness

LAMPOONIST Abu Abraham visualised it as a half-erect, early homo-sapien with a wooden club, a creature of Darwinian dimensions preserved in a museum. The label read Homo Oppositinus Indicus while a visitor reading from a catalogue remarked: "Presumed extinct, it says here."

India's national opposition may not yet have reached that extreme stage of antiquation but last fortnight, still shell-shocked from their electoral debacle, having been crushed to bits by the mighty hand of the Congress(I), they seemed pretty close to it. Statistically, their recent and embarrassing consignment to the political wilderness was their most devastating set-back in Indian political history. If it weren't such a serious matter, the humiliation of the national opposition parties, mainly the Janata Party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP), would be laughable. Consider the facts:

► These three parties together put up no fewer than 598 candidates for the 508 constituencies that went to the polls. They won just 15.

► Their share of the national vote plummetted to a mere 21.12 per cent, barely two-fifths of what the Congress(I) cornered.

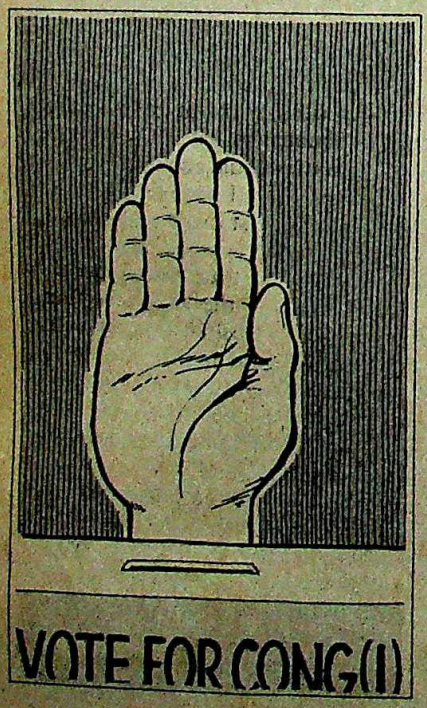
► Together with the two communist parties, the mainline opposition parties managed to get only 29.18 per cent of the national vote compared with a much more respectable 42.8 per cent they cornered in the 1980 poll.

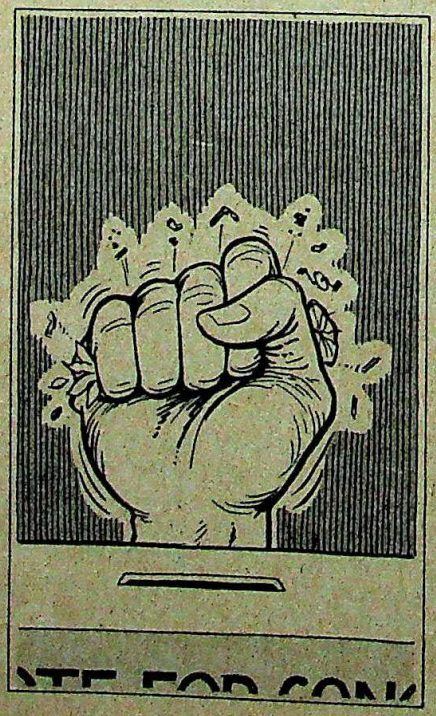
► Worst of all, with the exception of the DMKP's Chowdhary Charan Singh, the electorate roundly rejected the top functionaries of all other national opposition parties, men whom Mrs Indira Gandhi had once derided as just so many prime ministers in waiting.

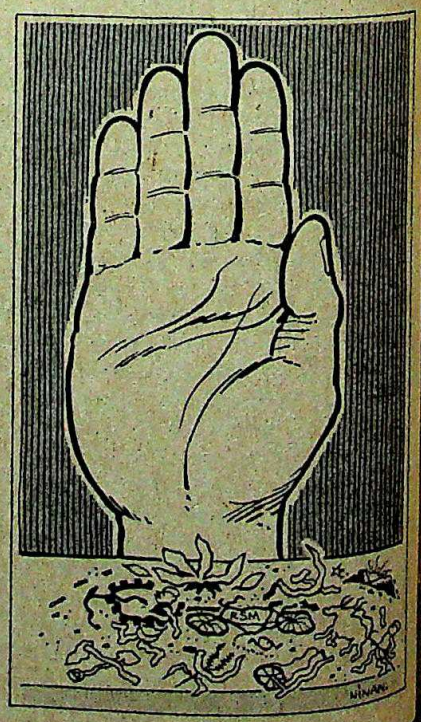
Understandably then, there was subdued despair at party headquarters, a prevailing sense of confusion among the ranks rolling in for hurriedly called huddles to discuss the debacle. Asked BJP MP Jaswant Singh: "Tell me have we seen the worst now or will there be further humiliation for us in the assembly elections?" The opposition parties are now, with the exception of 1977, getting used to a drubbing every five years. But the shock and confusion was all the worse for, in the eyes of the opposition stalwarts, a streak of disbelief was clearly discernible. "Ask press correspondents who accompanied me on my election tours," says an incredulous Charan Singh, making the point that from the voters' response during the campaign he never had any idea of the disaster that lay in wait.

Each passing day, however, brought its own dose of realism, and the fog of incomprehension was last fortnight at last slowly lifting. The waking up process began with a series of stock-taking sessions in Delhi at the highest levels of the opposition parties. The Janata Party was first off the mark with what was quickly dubbed a "mourning session", but it involved only the Central Parliamentary Board. The party took the result with a sense of resignation but, as former MP Syed Shahabuddin said: "We certainly wish to be awakened." General Secretary Surendra Mohan was more circumspect when he argued that it had been an abnormal election in the wake of an assassination, and that there was nothing to panic about.

As party conclaves went, the most serious one was a three-day affair of the BJP in the Parliament Annexe when leaders trooped in from all over to dissect the results. Top level leaders admitted that the delegates' mood was initially pretty glum but a Vajpayee pep-talk set things right somewhat. He said that though the party







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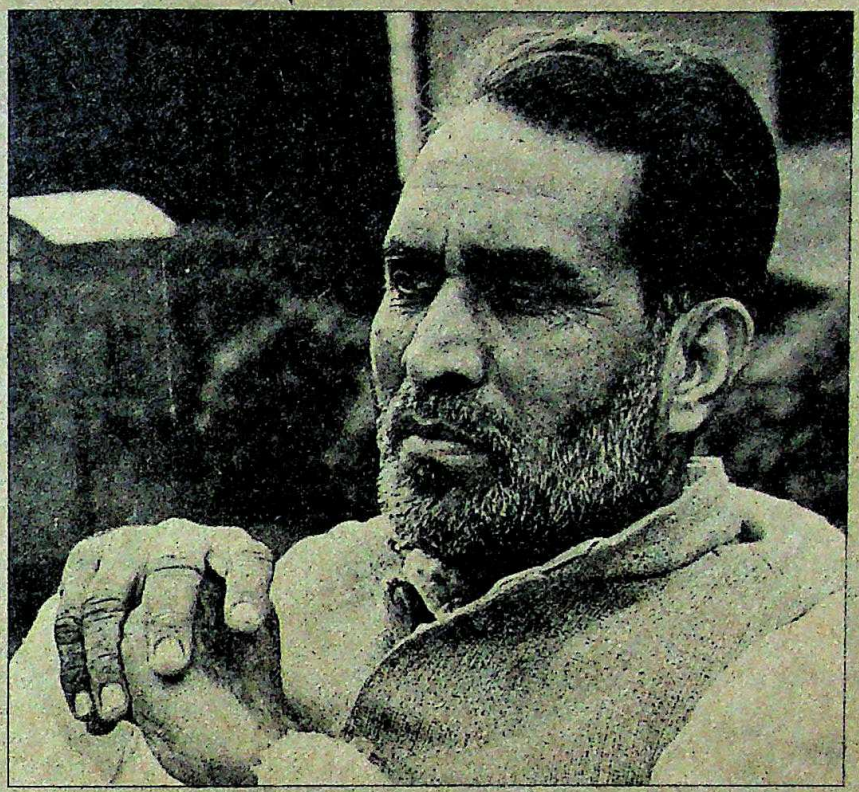
had lost, there was no reason for despair. The party had, after all, come second to the winning candidates in no fewer than 101 constituencies.

Perhaps. But the meetings of the various opposition parties showed that if there had been a groundswell against them in the Lok Sabha election, there was now a matching build-up of feeling against the ageing, traditional leadership of these parties. As the enormity of what had happened sank in, the rank and file of these opposition parties and the CPI(M) added their own voice to the clamour for change, shaking pedestals that have stood firm for decades. In office after office the younger elements, smarting from the defeat, spoke out in bitter defiance of their party elders at stock-taking sessions.

IN NEW DELHI, after the DMKP executive meeting, the young party leader from Haryana, K. M. Hooda, held centre-stage and began his address with a scathing indictment of "these old men". Karpoori Thakur, the dedicated stalwart from Bihar who was trounced in Samastipur, tried to quieten him but the crowd in attendance howled in approval. For 45 minutes—in a speech longer than his chief Charan Singh's—Hooda spat fire, demanding a change of guard, approach, outlook and strategy, in short, a wholesale change of the party's character.

If the DMKP was the scene of such loud protestation, the BJP was stirred by more subtle protest from its usually disciplined cadres. The party's top level leadership came in for veiled criticism from the younger elements in its national executive who made it clear that they were fed up with impractical notions such as politics by coalition. Younger leaders, led by Pramod Mahajan from Maharashtra, made a virulent attack on the tactics of seeking electoral adjustments with other opposition parties and demanded that the BJP carve out a separate, independent place of its own on the country's political map. The senior leadership was hard put to restrain them, and just about managed to persuade the protesters to accept tentative plans for state-level adjustments in the forthcoming assembly elections.

The Janata Party was simultaneously going through its own throes of introspection, though the spasms were somewhat quieter. As the Central Parliamentary Board met in Delhi, a low-key campaign was suddenly launched seeking to replace Chandra Shekhar as party president with a new face like Hegde's. Even though George Fernandes quickly rallied to Chandra Shekhar's support, asserting



Chandra Shekhar

On the Opposition debacle: The Opposition parties have been suffering from confusion. The Opposition is not one homogenous lot. There are many people in the Opposition whose political thinking is more in tune with the Congress(I). But this time it was due to our confusion that we were not able to counter the Congress(I)'s utterly false propaganda on Punjab, like the allegation that we supported the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. People wonder how I lost my own election on this very issue. I say Gandhi lost his life on this very issue. And who am I compared to Gandhi. Also, even when we tried to counter the propaganda we had our limitations. We had no control over the mass media to enable us to air our views freely and give them the right kind of prominence.

On the Hindu wave: Yes, there was a Hindu backlash. But we had all seen it coming. The result of this election was decided by Beant Singh and Satwant Singh. On the very day of the assassination I had told Bapu Kaldate (Janata Party secretary) that the election was lost. But there was no point going around announcing that, for the election had to be fought, anyway. But this will have dangerous consequences. Once you have unleashed communal feelings they could lead to the disintegration of the country. What is so sensational about the minorities talking in extreme terms? Even Annadurai did that(in Tamil Nadu) but was persuaded to be restrained.

On Opposition unity: Our failure to unite also contributed to the defeat. The Congress(I) went around saying that and it was hardly wrong. We, in the Opposition with our image of perpetual squabblers failed to convince people that we could guard the integrity of the nation. I was from the very beginning against the idea of promising a coalition government at the Centre. It is one thing to talk about such an arrangement at the state level but people are obviously not happy with the idea of a coalition in Delhi.

On future unity moves: Hegde is right when he says that empty talk about unity and pointless exercises will only have adverse effects on the Opposition. There should be unity but among like-minded people with common purpose. There is no way we can have fruitful unity except on the basis of issues, and that will result from clear thinking and not muddle-headedness, it is clear.

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that there was neither any possibility nor any need for change in leadership, there was no mistaking the undercurrents.

Even the more tightly run CPI(M) was being buffeted by demands for change. More and more young Marxist workers, particularly in West Bengal (page 42) were accusing the old guard of having lost their "revolutionary spirit" and becoming outdated. The politburo took note of this and as its key members E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Harkrishen Singh Surjeet left for a short visit to Afghanistan, preparations were afoot for a party central committee meeting in Delhi on January 21 which promised to give voice to the aspirations of the younger rank and file.

The message was loud and clear, and the more realistic among the opposition leaders were already beginning to acknowledge it even if grudgingly. "There is no doubt now that we have to offer something fresh to the people, beginning with faces," said BJP President A.B. Vajpayee, still smarting from his Gwalior rout. This newfound desire seemed to cut across party lines. Congress(S) aspirant, Ambika Soni, who lost her deposit in Meerut, felt that the time for transformation has come because "only those opposition leaders who genuinely feel humiliated can bring about change."

While that sort of open-mindedness was still restricted to a few, at least some opposition leaders were finally coming to terms with the reality and moving away from stock allegations of rigging, muscle and money power. They were seeing a little more clearly just what kind of a tornado had swept them off the country's parliamentary map. Not surprisingly, the analysis tended to echo what the more perceptive observers had seen much earlier than the blinkered opposition ranks. There was, of course, the effectiveness of the Congress(I)'s strategy (INDIA TODAY, January 15) and the prime minister's aggressive campaigning which kept the opposition parties off balance, denying his allegations instead of picking holes in the ruling party's own performance, perceptions and promises. But there were other, more basic reasons. Among them:

▶ Mrs Gandhi's assassination had clearly pulled the rug from under the opposition's feet. Far from sharing any ideology or programme, the non-communist national opposition parties had built up their hopes—and their election appeal—on opposing Mrs Gandhi and her style of politics. When she was abruptly removed from the scene, so were the opposition's electoral chances. Admitted Chandra Shekhar, who was convincingly thrashed in Ballia: "The fate of the election was decided by Beant Singh and Satwant Singh. I knew it from the very beginning, but then there was no point talking about it. The election had to be fought anyway."

▶ The assassination had the unexpected effect of slicing sections of some opposition parties and pushing them towards the Congress(I). The BJP and other parties were undoubtedly affected in the Hindi belt by the reaction of Nanaji Deshmukh, a stalwart of the RSS, who in the first flush after the assassination issued a call to the people to support Rajiv Gandhi "in this hour of national crisis". On the other side of the political spectrum, CPI(M) Politburo member B.T Ranadive wrote an article in the party organ, *People's Democracy*, calling the event a "great national calamity" and asked cadres to rally round Rajiv Gandhi. In West Bengal, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu took this seriously enough to order that the paper was not circulated in the state, but the damage was done. It now appears that the CPI(M) would have taken a softer line towards the Congress(I) but for the insistence of the West Bengal unit.

▶ Deprived of a focal point after Mrs Gandhi's slaying, whatever hopes there may have been of opposition unity swiftly evaporated. Said the BJP's Ram Jethmalani, who was humbled in his North-West Bombay constituency: "The main reason

DMKP meeting in Delhi : loud protests

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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for the Congress(I) victory (was) the splintered look of the Opposition. The lack of a uniform party, the failure to project a single agreed leader—we just could not remove the doubts in the voter's mind."

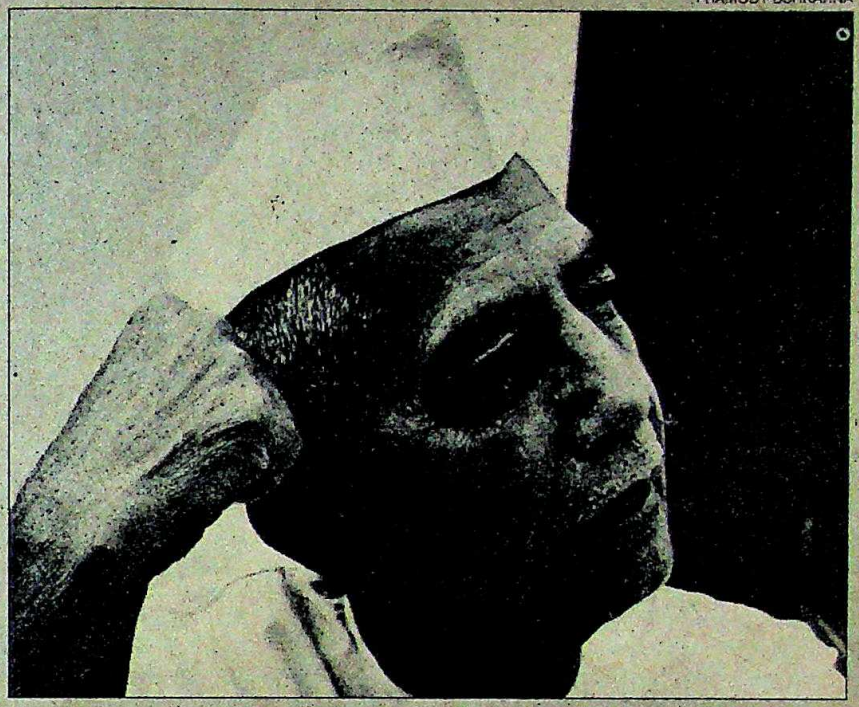
▶ The hope that the electorate would prefer a coalition of opposition parties to the Congress(I) proved to be an illusion. Not only was the memory of the Janata bickering of 1978 and 1979 fresh, there was little reason to doubt the prime minister when he pricked the opposition bubble, asking how could parties that couldn't agree on sharing tickets ever hope to agree on running a government. With the prime minister putting unity and national security at the top of his bill of fare, the electorate concurred that a potentially unstable coalition was no answer to the country's needs.

▶ Perhaps most significantly of all, the opposition parties seemed to be out of tune with the prevailing cry for change—a change of the political culture, a change of atmosphere, a change of generation. The Congress(I) came in waving the flag of youth power. The opposition parties were led by stalwarts in their sixties, seventies and even eighties. Even the most tenacious of them, Charan Singh, was obliged to admit: "I hope a younger leadership will soon take-over the responsibility of running the party." But there were few takers when he went on to add: "I would like to relinquish this (the leadership) at the earliest."

There could hardly be a rout more complete and more widespread across the opposition spectrum, a clean sweep which left only the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh untouched. Yet there was a clamour in opposition ranks that their leaders weren't taking the right lessons. Karnataka Chief Minister R.K. Hegde expressed a widespread feeling when he said: "We don't seem to learn from our own experience. The Opposition should have a deep introspection on why it is incapable of learning any lessons." Lt-General (Retd) S.K. Sinha, the newest entrant to the non-political Hindustan Andolan and an unsuccessful contestant for the Patna Lok Sabha seat, put it more candidly: "If after such a decimation, the Opposition cannot wake up and change, what can we do? All we can say is, let it be decimated even more, then people will wake up."

The BJP, for instance, with its Hindu vote-base eroded, faced a vicious dilemma, whether to try and improve its secular image or beat a retreat in an attempt to retrieve the Hindu vote. On the grounds that the party had gained support from

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Charan Singh

On his rural base: In the states of Hayana, Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh our mass base has remained intact. Some other parties have lost considerably in these states and, obviously, their vote has gone over to the Congress(I) to our disadvantage. The voting figures are no secret. You don't get some 15 million votes in just four states and that too in only about 120 seats if your rural support is lost. The problem is in convincing people that the factors for getting next to no seats are to be sought elsewhere.

On his campaign: At least as far as the DMKP is concerned it probably suffered because its campaign was based on a positive platform. It did not play on caste or communal sentiments and did not confine itself to criticism of the Government. It might have secured better dividends if it had matched the Congress(I)'s negative campaign with an equally negative one by harping on the Bhindranwale connection and some of the other communal stances of the ruling party.

On Opposition unity: A patchwork unity, devoid of ethics and purpose, will not convince people. How a genuine unity of like-minded parties can be brought about is more than I can say. But in an election like this where sentiments clearly got the better of all else, it is difficult to say if anything could have made a great difference. I will not, however, entirely reject the possibility that a united opposition might have performed better.

On future plans: I do not agree that defeat in an election implies loss of prestige or even credibility. I do think that apart from regional parties DMKP is the only mass-based party with a definite philosophy. Its manifesto is the most radical, comprehensive and coherent. The agenda for the future is propagating this philosophy all over India more effectively.

On the new government: They have begun well and with humility. I wish them success and my party will cooperate in any serious effort to preserve and strengthen national unity. My only fear is that a person who constantly talks of taking the party into the 21st century may follow in the footsteps of his mother who followed a megalomaniacal policy based on elitist philosophies.

On the need for younger leaders: It is not the image but the reality which I value. We did have many young candidates, we will have many more. Besides, younger people should take over the party responsibility. However, I wish to add that youth is a state of mind. Gandhiji was 62 when he went on his Dandi march and 73 when he launched the Quit India movement.

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the minorities—a claim that has yet to be proved—Vajpayee fought off the revivalists saying that the "Hindu vote will come back our way on its own."

The three-day meet also ended with a realisation that it would gain no popularity if it went through with its initial threat of filing 220 poll petitions, one for each seat that it lost, and at fortnight's end the party had beaten a tactical retreat, veering round to the view that a few petitions in carefully selected constituencies would make a point without reducing the whole thing to a joke.

The DMKP, on the other hand, appeared to persist in its endeavour to paint the Congress(I) success in terms of the three M's: money, muscle and manipulation, insisting that its power-base had remained intact. Said Charan Singh: "You don't get 15 million votes mainly from four states, and that too in only 120 constituencies, if your rural support base is lost." The DMKP does not believe that it suffered on account of an utterly negative campaign, arguing on the contrary that it should have been much more aggressive in identifying the Congress(I) with Bhindranwale as a counter to the ruling party's attacks on the Opposition.

The only silver lining was the determination of several parties to first concentrate on the morale of their rank and file before attempting to take on the Congress(I) again. With a challenge due in the March assembly polls, there is clearly an urgent need to retrieve lost morale. As Vajpayee said: "The problem first of all is inspiring our men into saying that they will be able to rule a state. At the moment, they are all too dazed, too dumbfounded to even make that claim." The problem is an urgent one, for the lone BJP member in the new Arunachal Assembly had decided to sit as an independent, and the DMKP's Nagina Rai, the unsuccessful candidate from Gopalganj, has defected to the Congress(I).

WHAT bedevils the Opposition's efforts is the absence of a credible long-term strategy. A patchwork of parties fighting their common political foe and one another cannot hope to make any headway. At the same time, there's little doubt that the well-publicised but hopelessly unsuccessful attempts at bringing about unity among the opposition parties has only rebounded on them. Says Hegde: "I have no faith in the kind of exercise being carried out to bring about opposition unity. The endless talks for unity have ruined our credibility." The parties have, therefore, decided that there will be no opposition conclaves. Andhra Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, the architect of the conclaves, himself sounded cautious when he told INDIA TODAY that he had no plans to bring about another conclave. "But a unified opposition is imperative," he added, saying: "I may talk to some leaders while I am in Delhi to attend the swearing-in ceremony of my party MP's." The opposition parties have not, however, reacted enthusiastically to his proposal to rename his party as Bharat Desam in the event of any mergers.

What strategy there is focuses on salvaging some lost prestige in the assembly elections which are important not only in themselves but because without success, there will follow a third failure when the time comes to elect Rajya Sabha members. The approach, as it was being worked out in closed door sessions, was at a practical level being reduced to seat adjustment at the state level, thereby leaving the final decision on allocations to the state units.

The concept was summed up by former MP Jaswant Singh who said: "The Congress(I) won at the national level because it offered a prime minister while we talked of coalitions. But the Congress(I)'s weakness is that they cannot offer popular, powerful leaders as chief ministers in most states." The argument was, of course, that the opposition parties could offer strong state leaders, men like Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra, Farooq

BJP meeting: fresh thinking

BHAWAN SINGH

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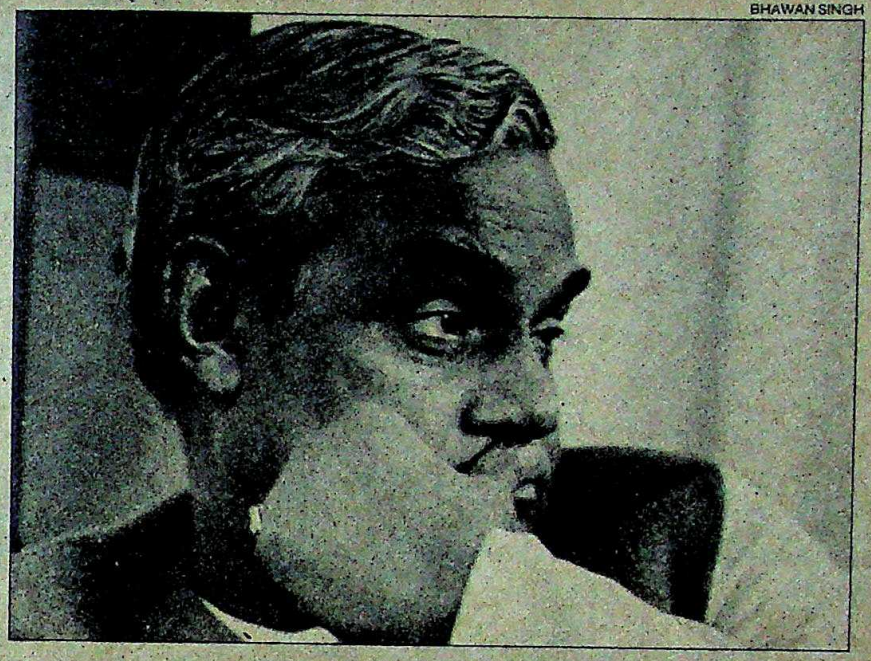
Abdullah in J&K and Hegde in Karnataka.

THE IDEA, basically, is that the Opposition would choose one dominant leader in each state as the prospective chief minister and let him spearhead the campaign. But even before the idea has got off the ground, there are indications of its limited practicality. Specifically, there is no denying that it will fail precisely where the Opposition most desperately needs to show success: in the Hindi heartland. In these crucial states, particularly Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, no opposition party is strong enough and no single leader dominant enough to command sufficient attention. It may be possible to come to working arrangements in some states. The national non-communist opposition parties may, for instance, find it possible to accept former chief ministers Bhairon Singh Shekhawat or Kailash Joshi as the man to rally round in Rajasthan, or find a leader from the BJP in Madhya Pradesh, which got some 30 per cent of the vote. In Orissa, nobody is likely to challenge Biju Patnaik, who has already announced his intention to resign from the Lok Sabha and contest the assembly poll. Similarly, in Maharashtra, the only opposition leader to survive the Congress(I) blitz respectably is Sharad Pawar who not only romped home in his Baramati constituency, but had the satisfaction of seeing his Congress(S) party's 13 candidates acquit themselves well even though none of them won. Pawar has the support of the Janata and the Peasants and Workers Party, but is not yet sure of the BJP which is allied to the Shiv Sena.

The strategy will, however, be put to its severest test in Karnataka where Hegde is on call to save his two-year-old regime. The Janata Party got some 44 per cent of the vote, but lost all but three of the seats it contested. The fly in the ointment is an old one: the reluctance of Janata Party workers to go along with the BJP. A secretary explained: "Many of our workers point out that in the constituencies left to the BJP, we got less votes than elsewhere. So they feel that if they'd fought the election alone, we'd have got more votes." But both Chandra Shekhar and Hegde have come out in favour of the alliance, not wishing to split votes at the poll.

But the fact remains that people like Pawar and Hegde may find they have more in common with the new-look Congress(I) than with the gerontocracy which continues to run the Opposition. Hegde has already raised eyebrows by openly saying that Rajiv Gandhi had won

BHAWAN SINGH



Atal Behari Vajpayee

On election results: We failed to gauge the tide that was building up. The assassination made things so different. A few days before she died, Mrs Gandhi was thinking of finding ways to postpone elections. This result would have been very different but for her death. The main lesson we have to learn now is that positive, issue-based campaigns can be more fruitful in situations like this. For example so far our whole approach has been centred round criticism of Mrs Gandhi. Once Mrs Gandhi disappeared from the scene, it all vanished. Rajiv Gandhi began with a clear slate. What did we have against him? Our campaign should have changed accordingly.

On RSS Loyalties: It is wrong to say that the RSS cadres deserted the BJP and went over to the Congress(I). Nothing can be farther from truth. But I am, at the same time, not denying that there was a strong Hindu backlash. This particularly affected women and lots of our workers say how women in their own families voted for the Congress(I). I went to Bengali Market (in Delhi) the other day and an old party worker asked me why we were making such a noise about the number of Sikhs killed in Delhi as it cost us votes. Now, that is a terrible situation. You can't even talk about massacre of your own countrymen.

On Opposition unity: I can say one thing for sure now. There will be no more conclaves. These repeated talks have made us the country's laughing stock. We meet again and again, have squabbles, the media writes about that and we lose credibility. I am, no doubt, for workable election arrangements among like-minded parties but unity is a rather far-fetched concept now. Look at the last election. In many states adjustments worked out earlier fell by the wayside over last minute wrangles over just one seat.

On the new government: Rajiv Gandhi is trying to project a youthful image. He is even contacting the opposition leaders asking for cooperation. The other day H.K.L. Bhagat came to my place with a message from the prime minister. But I asked him what was the point in talking now to people his prime minister has painted as traitors all through his election. Bhagat said the impression was created by inaccurate newspaper reports. Now what do you say about that?

On the future of his party: The election result gives us time for rethinking. There is need to project new faces. We have young talent in people like Pramod Mahajan of Bombay and Arun Jaitely of Delhi. Besides we have to make every attempt to strengthen our rural base and also make an effort to woo the Harijan vote. All I will say is, *sitaron se aage jahan aur bhi hain* (there are new worlds even beyond the stars).

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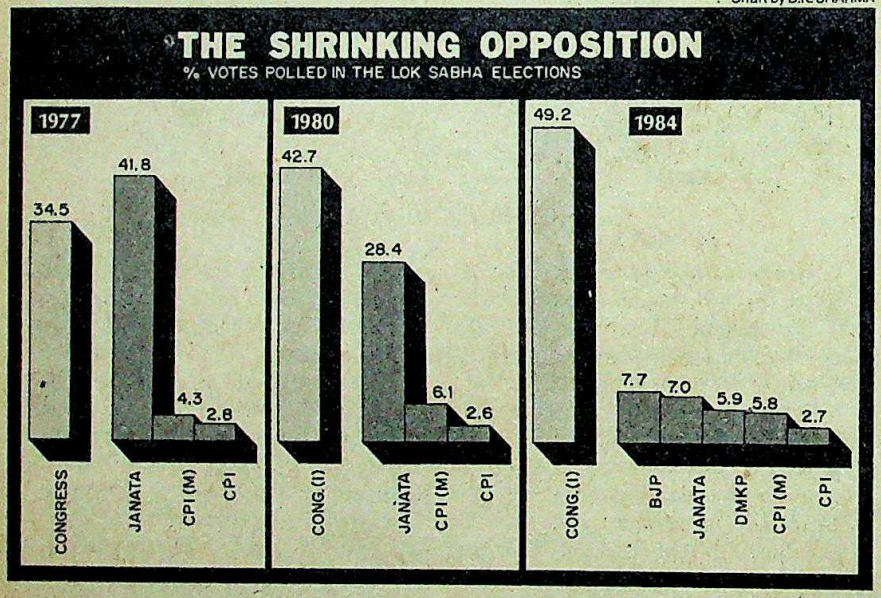
a positive vote for unity and that had he not been a member of a political party, he too would "perhaps" have voted for the Congress(I). It would be far-fetched and manifestly unfair to draw any conclusions from this but it could be different if infighting and political obscurantism continue to rule the Opposition roost. And there has been enough speculation about Pawar for his supporters to feel obliged to deny that he might very soon get itchy feet.

But in the miasma of realpolitik, there is nothing absolute, no ever-lasting loyalty or party affiliation.The very factors that make men like Hegde and Pawar such obvious choices for the Opposition's future thrust also make them less than determined opponents of the Congress-(I)'s policies. In his first fortnight after the election, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi promptly turned his back on his election rhetoric and extended a friendly hand, seeking to pull them into a process of consultation on national issues. His messages to the opposition leaders despatched through Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat were conciliatory. Then, he invited BJP General Secretary L.K. Advani, Congress(J)'s Jagjivan Ram and the CPI's Indrajit Gupta for informal discussions on Assam and Punjab.

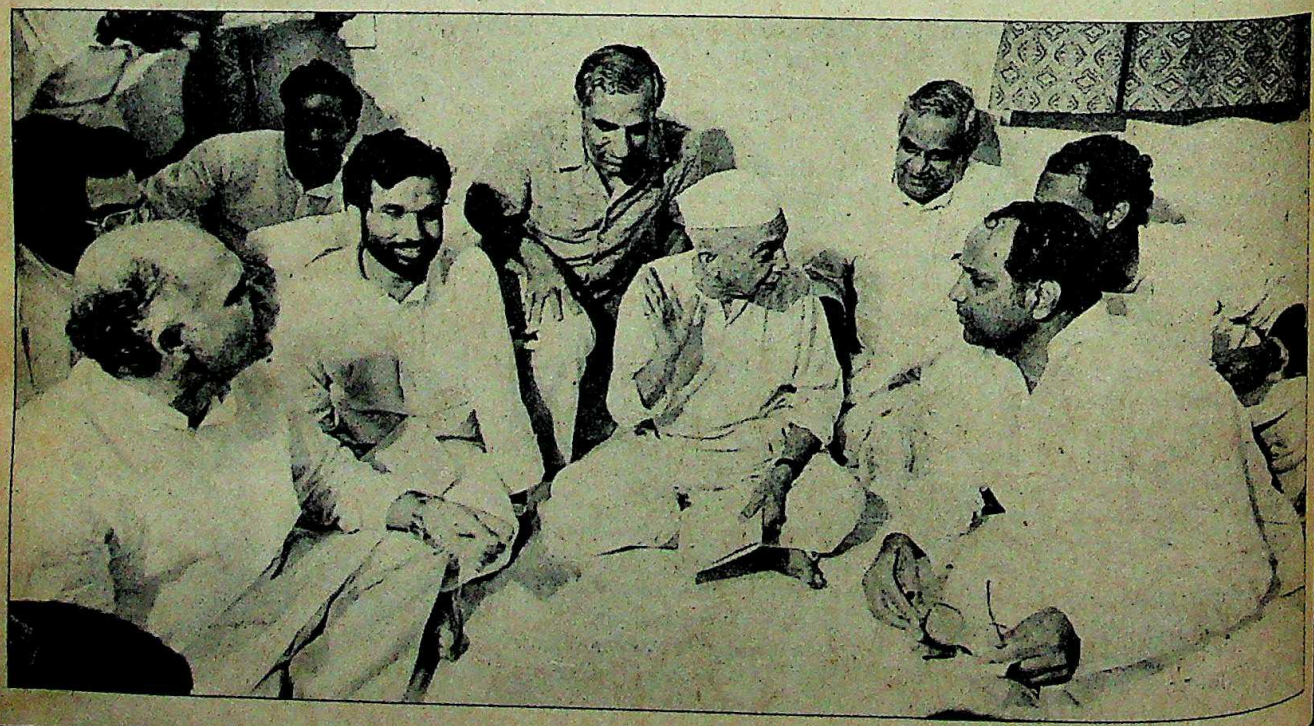
Chart by B.K. SHARMA



IF THE prime minister was acknowledging the necessity of consulting opposition opinion in coming to decisions on national questions, it was a reflection of one side-effect of last month's election: the reduction of the parliamentary opposition to a pale reflection of its former self. Gone are the men and women of past parliaments who in their own way contributed to the functioning of parliament by bringing expertise and hard work to bear on the functioning of parliamentary committees, so essential to the running of a democracy. There may now be temptation for the Congress(I) to ignore the opposition benches altogether in the Lok Sabha. It will also be a house in which three localised parties, the yellow-clad Telugu Desam from Andhra Pradesh, the AIADMK from Tamil Nadu and the CPI(M) with representatives mainly from West Bengal and Tripura will form the bulk of the Opposition. It will be a novel experience for the country to have its affairs debated and policy discussed in such a one-sided house.

Even more than the absence of opposition as a political group, what Indian democracy will miss for the next five years is the liveliness of parliamentary debate which was sustained in the past by people like Jethmalani, Fernandes, Bahuguna and obviously, the inimitable Vajpayee—all committed parliamentarians who have maintained a notable presence in the Central Hall for decades. Even Rajiv

Opposition leaders: change or perish



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Gandhi seemed to regret missing out on the fun when he said that with the Opposition wiped out now, he will have to turn to people within his own party for an opposing point of view. In any case, for the new speaker this Parliament will not present any real challenge.

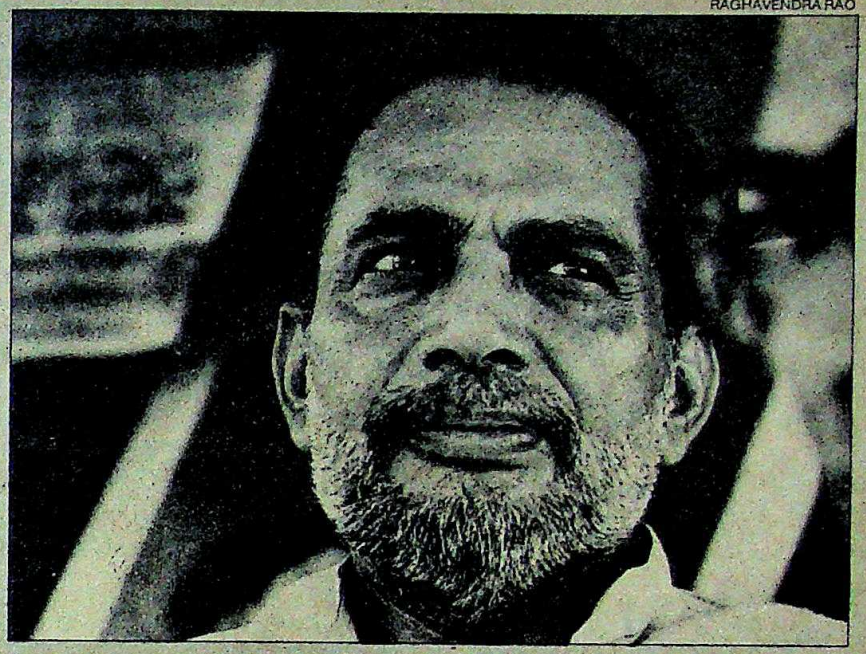
And one-sided it will remain until there is the sort of change in the Opposition ranks that has so recently in such tragic circumstances been forced upon the Congress(I). The difference is that the ruling party is hastening the change. The opposition parties seem to be making haste slowly. In their manner of functioning, nothing seems to have changed when in reality everything has changed. Where the Congress(I) finds the courage to get rid of deadwood or individuals it doesn't want in office any longer, the Opposition chews its nails in anguish. Where the Congress(I) proclaims that it has been through a generation change, the Opposition ranks are still dominated by men who have been active in politics for generations. This in itself isn't necessarily bad, but every party, every organisation needs the infusion of fresh blood. Few people have the courage to act upon it, though enough people now seem to recognise the imperatives. Says Jethmalani: "As a first step (towards unity) these three old men, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram must step down."

The second rung is full of men who even if they have lost the elections or just about managed to scrape through could form the basis of a coming together. Men like Hegde, Advani, Vajpayee, Fernandes, Abdullah, Pawar, Rama Rao, who could conceivably form the nucleus of a revived opposition and open the doors to younger politicians, activists with grassroots communication and an absence of the inflated egos that have been the bane of the Opposition's life.

For the Opposition, the message is clear: Change or Perish. Change that means not merely a different, fresher, more youthful leadership but a new approach, new promises, new goals, new programmes. Change there must be not only because a meaningful opposition is necessary for sound democracy and the smooth running of the country, but because by their vote in December, about half the country's electorate showed that in spite of the Rajiv whirlwind, they were for somebody else. The tragedy is that the massacre of the Opposition at the polls has produced no great impulse as yet. And if this doesn't spark a new opposition, then there is little else that will.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA with bureau reports

RAGHAVENDRA RAO



Ramakrishna Hegde

On what should be done: We do not seem to have learnt lessons. The Opposition should have a deep introspection on why we are incapable of learning. We must quickly recover from the shock of defeat and demoralisation. Also we must realise that our present government and the prime minister are different from the previous ones. Earlier our target was Mrs Gandhi. She represented everything in the Congress(I), its ideology, programme and government. But Rajiv has shown through his doctrine the beginnings of a new policy. Our attitude has to change.

On new strategy: Firstly, we have to wait and watch. Whether he would be like his mother who we knew too well or be different. He seems to have an indication of a break from the past. So far Rajiv Gandhi has been making the right moves, playing his cards well and is showing a refreshing departure from the past. But we have to see whether he will continue to behave in the same vein.

On Opposition unity: I do not see any point in going on with unity exercises. We have tried to unify in every possible way but it has not been possible. All unity has floundered on personal prejudices or ambition and not on the question of ideological differences. These prejudices are so deep-rooted and strong and permeate every opposition party in the country that even if there is cent per cent agreement on policies, ideologies and programmes, there will not be unity.

I am sorry to say that at times the fight was for such ridiculous things as to who should sit where on the dais or who should be garlanded first. The obsession with unity seems to be only to give each other greater bargaining power. We must get ourselves free from this obsession and identify issues.

Hereafter we should work the other way round. That is we should see whether it is possible to bring about unity on the basis of personal likings and rapport and on the basis of compatibility of personalities. For example there is no clash between Vajpayee, Sharad Pawar, Chandra Shekhar, Rama Rao and Farooq. There is no basic difference in our ideology. We all believe in secularism, democracy and socialism.

On his own ideology: We need radical change on all fronts including our thinking. We must not be pinned down by dogmas. Opposition is vital to parliamentary democracy. It also acts as a forum of dissent.

On the Opposition's future: Well, the prime ministership is out of sight for the opposition leaders. I am sorry to throw cold water on their ambitions but the present generation of opposition leaders had better come to the painful realisation that they will never get the prime ministership in their sight.

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WEST BENGAL

Warning Signals

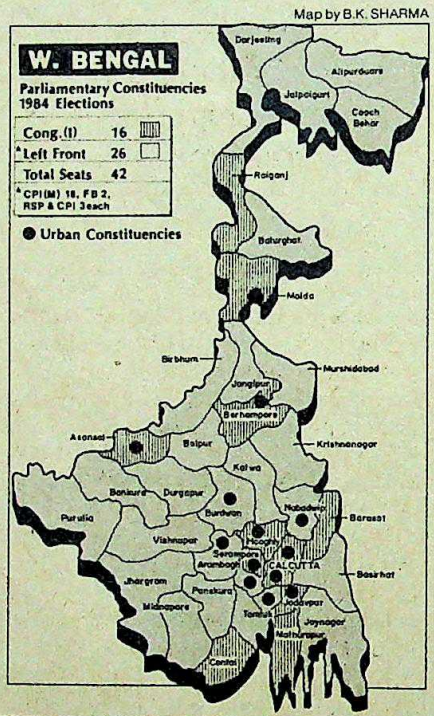
"If today everywhere in the world the parties who claim to represent the 'Moderate Left' are beaten or in retreat, it is because they were found wanting on the most crucial issue of our time."
ARTHUR KOESTLER
in The Trail of the Dinosaur.

WARNING signals for West Bengal's Left Front Government had been flashing on and off during the past couple of years but were dismissed as "aberrations". On the surface the state had remained deceptively calm. The turmoil beneath came to a boil only when the results of the Lok Sabha polls started coming. By the time the loudspeakers finally fell silent on new year's eve, it was evident that a soundless anti-Left gale had swept through the entire state, with the eye of the hurricane in metropolitan Calcutta.

The Congress(I)'s success in winning 16 out of 42 West Bengal seats compared to just four last time is only a part of the story. So is the decline in the electoral margin of Left Front victors. Today, the state is in the grip of a cynicism about the Left movement, a fact admitted even by left-wingers who voted for the Front. As film maker Gautam Ghoshe points out, "the Left is not what it used to be, it has degenerated into something undefinable."

The disenchantment is most pronounced in the state's urban areas. "It is a change in culture, in the way people, especially the young, look at life," observed well-known Bengali novelist, Nabanita Deb Sen.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



While Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, in an interview with INDIA TODAY, admitted that the Front's poll reverses were due to its failure to meet the expectations of some sections of the people, the official party line initially was not quite so contrite. Just four days before the polls, Left Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee had presumptuously declared that the Front was running the Government in accordance with the aspirations of the common people. That there was something drastically wrong in this assumption he did not care to admit even after the polls. Mukherjee continued to claim that the results of the polls were "perplexing" and that a "detailed investigation" was required to find out what went wrong and ascertain the exact causes.

It was only a good 10 days after the declaration of the poll reverses that a joint meeting of all Left Front party leaders forced Mukherjee to admit that "non-performance" of the Left Front was one of the reasons for its debacle. The stress, however, remained on the sympathy wave that favoured the Congress(I). Leaders of the smaller Front parties, particularly the Forward Bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), had been insisting right from the day the poll results were announced that the CPI(M)'s analysis was wrong. They had maintained that "the voting trend in this election here is certainly anti-Left and we do not see any Indira or Rajiv wave". For the

JYOTI BASU

"We have got a jolt"

WEST Bengal's Chief Minister Jyoti Basu is very much a disciplined partyman but he has a mind of his own. When Correspondent INDRANIL BANERJIE *talked to him last fortnight, Basu spoke of his party's recent poll reverses with surprising candour. Excerpts from the interview:*

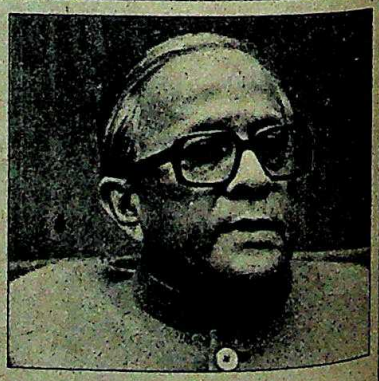
Q. Your party had dismissed the idea of a "sympathy wave" before the elections but after the poll reverses your party changed its mind. Why?

A. In the past, voters in this state had not been swayed by emotional issues and we presumed this time the "sympathy wave" would stop at the West Bengal border. But we were mistaken. There has been a tremendous revulsion against the brutal killing of Mrs Gandhi and she has become a martyr. Our criticism of Mrs Gandhi's regime no longer had any meaning. Unity and integrity of the country became most important to the people, particularly in the absence of opposition unity.

Q. Has the Left Front failed to meet the aspirations of the people in the urban, industrial areas of the state?

A. I have a feeling that in the urban areas our non-performance, or the fact that here we really could not do much compared to what we did in the countryside, had an impact. Besides, our cadres in these areas were not really in intimate touch with the people. We could have saved a little more in the urban areas if the people were more satisfied with us but they were not. In that sense it was a

BHAWAN SINGH



"We must be more humble since we are in the Government and I must admit, unfortunately, that we have failed in this respect."

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"The Left is not what it used to be, it has degenerated into something undefinable."

GAUTAM GHOSHE,
film maker.

"The real malady lies with the present leadership of the Left Front."

Dr ASHOK MITRA
demographer

"The youth are more interested in the good things of life and not social or political questions."

NABANITA DEB SEN
novelist

first time in over two decades, the parties seem to have realised the pendulum is swinging away from the Left.

In 1967, when the Left first came to power, West Bengal's colleges and universities reverberated with the singing of "We Shall Overcome", "The International" and slogans proclaiming the dawn of a left paradise. Thousands of young men and women signed up with the Naxalbari-inspired Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), a Maoist breakaway from the older CPI(M). Formed in the summer of '69, within just two years the party was destroyed and its members slaughtered. The next chance for the Left came in 1977 with the ouster of the Siddhartha Shankar Ray regime which had come to office in 1972.

But things had begun to go sour for the Congress long before. "The rejection of the Congress in West Bengal had started much earlier in the '60s," says M.A. Latif, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) secretary and civil liberties lawyer. He alleges that the Congress came to power in 1972, following a period of President's rule, using strong-arm tactics and had made it impossible for men like CPI(M) peasant leader Harekrishna Konar to file his nomination. When the Congress was defeated in 1977, it was a chastened Left that replaced it.

"The return of the Left Front was like a breath of fresh air, bringing tremendous expectations," says Nabanita Deb Sen. For the first time the moderate Left had been given a chance to rule the state unhindered. But right from the word go the Left Front exhibited a curious unease at being in power and developed a "paranoia" about the Centre and Mrs Gandhi.

negative vote.

Q. *Thousands of unemployed young people in the urban areas have expectations of getting jobs and somehow the Congress(I) has been able to exploit this successfully. Would you agree?*

A. Absolutely. It seems about 36 lakh new voters have come into the electoral rolls. Now, these young voters have no experience of the Congress party and what it has done for 28 years. The unemployment situation has gone from bad to worse while we have not been able to explain to them, it is not our fault that all this has happened. Our explanation that wrong planning, denial of investment opportunity in this state and the bias of financial institutions against us did not convince the young.

Q. *Can your party solve the unemployment problem?*

A. Unemployment cannot be solved by us. Planning is in the hands of the Centre. We have to go on campaigning among the people so as to put terrific pressure on the Centre for more investment and industrial licences. Only in the case of small-scale industry we can do much more. But raising expectations unrealistically will only lead to disillusionment. This time Ghani Khan's ridiculous tactics of distributing railway employment forms drew large numbers of young people. But they are soon going to get disillusioned with the Congress. One of the original promises of the Congress(I), to give a job to one member from every family completely failed.

Q. *Why do you think your party cadres have become arrogant and lost contact with the people?*

A. We are a ruling party and any party coming into government faces this danger. Besides, our party has grown tremendously during the past few years and we have not been able to re-educate the party. We must be more and more humble since we are in the Government and I must admit, unfortunately, that we have failed in this respect. But now that we have got a jolt in the elections we shall take up the job of re-education of our cadres on a priority basis. From the reports we have been receiving it seems a small section of the party has been behaving and speaking arrogantly. Such things give our party a bad name. But we will identify them and take action.

Q. *There is a feeling that after you there is no effective leader in the CPI(M). To what extent is this true?*

A. Nature abhors a vacuum. People thought what will happen after Lenin but something did happen. Similarly with Nehru. Parties continue. But I believe individuals do have a role to play. Our party will continue and I am not, as some papers make it out to be, the party. The party will remain. All the same, a conscious effort must be made to ensure that a new leadership grows.

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Successive CPI(M) resolutions identified the "authoritarian challenge" as the most immediate and crucial issue of the time. The suggestion that the Left Front should have made "an all-out effort to raise the state's populace from the mires of a subhuman existence by creating prosperity" was accorded secondary importance, points out former bureaucrat and demographer, Dr Ashok Mitra.

When it came to the crunch, the anti-authoritarian crusades of the Left Front did not inspire the state's populace, especially those unemployed thousands inhabiting the choked slums of metropolitan Calcutta. The stunning defeat of CPI(M) stalwart, Somnath Chatterjee, in Jadavpur, a refugee-dominated constituency in southern metropolitan Calcutta, is an example. Considered to be a red bastion that had witnessed some of the worst excesses of "authoritarianism" during the early '70s Jadavpur elected Congress(I)'s 27-year-old lightweight Mamta Banerjee because "all of a sudden she and her party had become more relevant than the arrogant Marxist lawyer Chatterjee", says schoolteacher J.N. Mullick.

THE DECISIVE factors in Jadavpur were the youth, who in the words of novelist Deb Sen, "are more interested in the good things of life and not in social or political questions." Young Congress(I) leaders, like Subrata Mukherjee and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, are the heroes of this generation. The identification of the Left Front as the establishment and the creation of a vast lumpen force has seen to it. In the circumstances it is easy to see how Das Munshi managed to inflict a crushing defeat on CPI(M) politburo member, Samar Mukherjee, in Howrah. This basic shift in attitudes is not acknowledged by the CPI(M) leadership. "The so-called theory of anti-establishment is not applicable here since ours is a government of the masses," the Left Front chairman had declared before the elections. Admitting that a section of youths had strayed to the Congress(I), he had moralised: "Any young man with a

NAXALITES

Mellow Stance

THE SPARK from Naxalbari that set West Bengal ablaze during the late '60s is dead. Though a few isolated former Naxalites continue to bump off the occasional "class enemy" in the backwoods of the state, the majority of them have ended up in an ideological cul-de-sac. Perhaps as a reaction, a number of former Naxalite factions have begun to flirt with parliamentary democracy, the very system they so violently opposed only a decade and a half ago.

"The objective situation in the country favours the use of parliamentary forms to accelerate mass movements," argues Arijit Mitra, secretary of the north-eastern zone of the Indian People's Front (IPF), the mass front of the Naxalite faction led by Vinod Misra. The IPF supported Lok Sabha candidates this time not only in West Bengal but also in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. In West Bengal, a prominent candidate it supported was Tridib Chaudhri of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, who lost to the Congress(I). A radical group led by the famed Kanu Sanyal fielded two candidates, both of whom lost their deposits. Candidates fielded by other Naxalite factions did just as badly.

The radicals consider these rebuffs to be of little significance. The idea of contesting the elections, all of them take pains to point out, was not to win but to use the opportunity to campaign among the masses. "We did not put up any candidates of our own but supported candidates who we felt were capable of furthering our aim of containing the onslaught posed by the Congress(I)," says Mitra. This should have benefitted the Left Front, especially the CPI(M). But almost every Naxalite faction, with the possible exception of Ashim Chatterjee's group considers the CPI(M) to be a party of "fake leftists".

Arijit Mitra: significant shift

That is one reason the radical left in the state has not vanished. Many sections within moderate left parties like the CPI(M) have begun to gravitate towards more radical organisations out of frustration. "Our leaders have forgotten revolution in their concern to remain in power," says 21-year-old Pradip Mazumdar, a member of the CPI(M)'s youth wing, the Students' Federation of India. But more significant is desertion from the ranks of the CPI(M)'s district-level leadership which, according to the state's intelligence branch, is one reason for the party's poor showing at the hustings. In Murshidabad district, for instance, three CPI(M) leaders along with 16 local committees walked out of the party last year to form the Marxbadi Sangathani Committee, which has now decided to join the IPF.

Even professional groups disillusioned with the Left Front who would be expected to cross over to the Congress(I) are drifting towards the radical left instead. Two former leaders of the junior doctors' agitation that was brutally suppressed by the Jyoti Basu Government have thrown in their lot with the radicals. Of all the Naxalite factions, the IPF appears to have been the most successful in tapping these left reserves. This has helped it build bridges even with an organisation like the Federation of Government Engineers Associations.

The most desperate need for the radicals remains unity, and in a bid to forge it they have had to fall back on time-worn programmes like anti-eviction and higher agricultural wage movements. And they joined together to fight the Government's decision to raise bus fares. The idea seems to be to utilise whatever opportunity is available to voice their propaganda and secure footholds among the masses.

But despite their ideology most of the radical left groups have become moderate. Their only essential difference with the CPI(M) lies in their belief that potentially revolutionary mass movements, instead of being contained, should be accelerated. "The CPI(M) has made the masses inactive and created conditions for the return of autocracy," says a former CPI(ML) activist. Most of the radicals realise that for the moment, at least, revolution is a distant dream.

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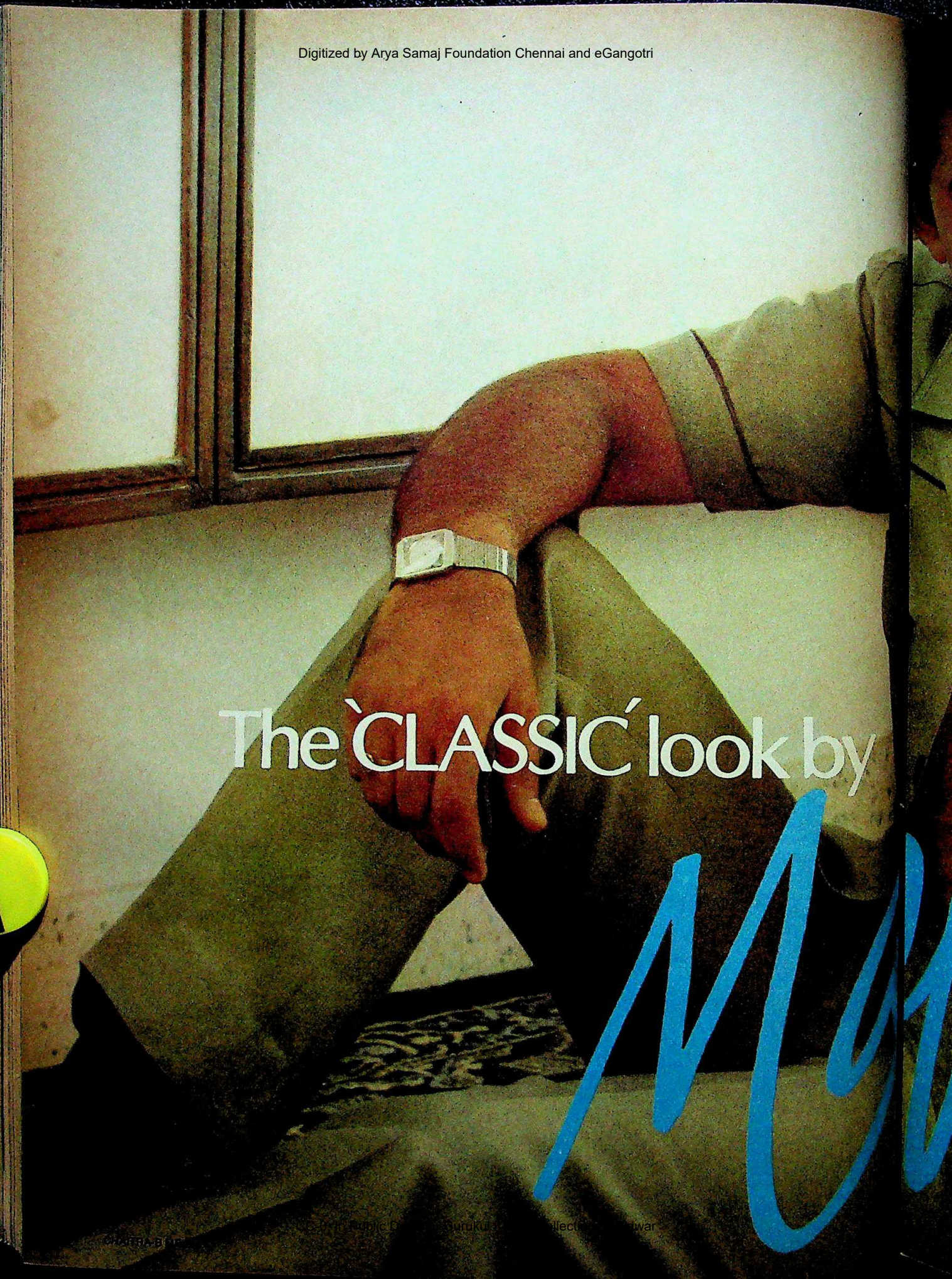

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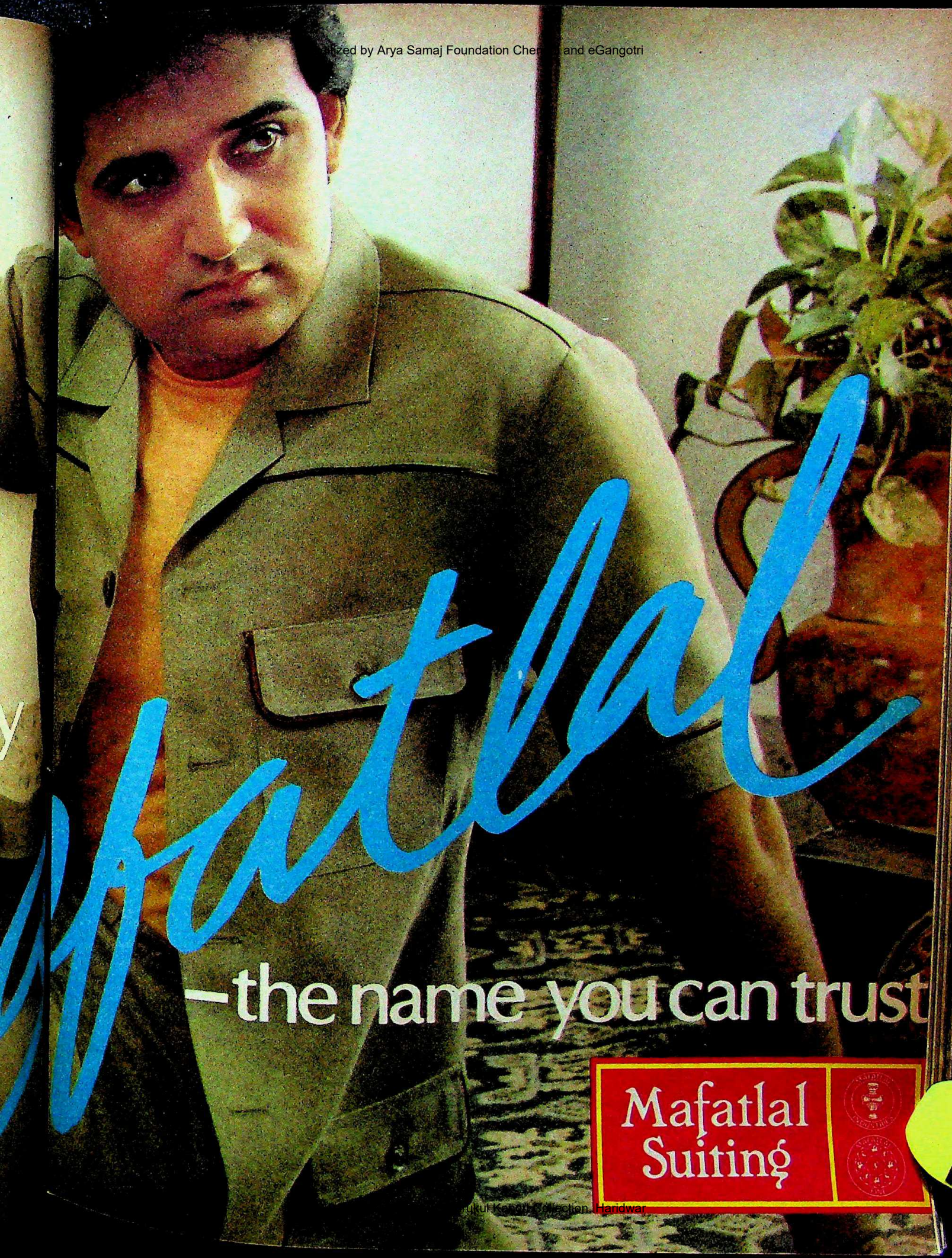

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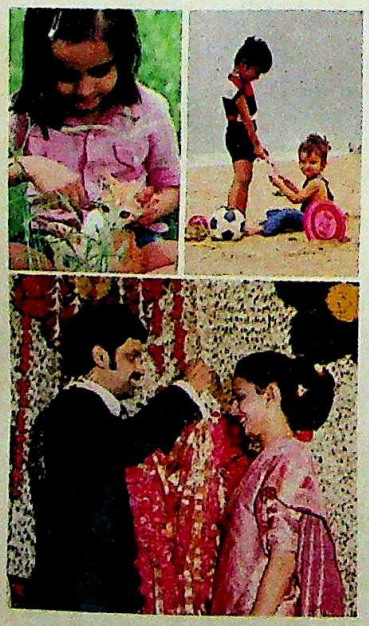

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sense of self-respect should have no truck with that party."

But self-respect is not the issue at all. Left Front leaders have unabashedly admitted they cannot solve the unemployment problem. On the other hand, as CPI(M) economist, Biplab Das Gupta, points out: "Ghani Khan's promise to employ Bengali boys had a tremendous psychological impact on youthful voters." Clearly, the shrewd former railway minister had understood the urban masses better than most leftists. To lend credibility to his promise Ghani Khan had recruited several hundred young men to check ticketless travel.

Being in power seems to have handicapped the CPI(M) since this has meant reneging on rash promises made in the past. Jadavpur resident Gautam Chakraborty, explaining his support for the Congress(I), says: "The CPI(M) had promised us the ownership rights for the land under our occupation but eventually agreed only to make us lessees." Similarly neither could the party go the whole hog in its support of labour. In its anxiety to restrain labour militancy, the Left Front had dealt a grievous blow to the CPI(M) labour movement, represented by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

ALTHOUGH CITU leaders continue to maintain that there has been no decline in the membership of their unions, the Congress(I)-backed Indian National Trade Union Congress's (INTUC) impressive tally of recent wins in union elections indicates otherwise. "The CITU's official membership figures are misleading and its real strength in a particular unit can only be found out from shop level leaders," says Surendra Chatterjee, secretary of the left wing workers' solidarity organisation. In the Durgapur steel plant, Chatterjee's investigations revealed that the CITU's membership had slumped from 16,000 (out of a total work-force of 34,000) two years ago to barely 5,000 at present.

It is not merely a general alarm at the declining industrial employment opportunities and the labour retrenchments necessitated by power cuts that have rendered the CITU and the Left Front unpopular with labour. Misgivings on other counts include the state Government's tolerant stance towards some industries' refusal to honour labour-management agreements. Moreover, a large section of non-Bengali workers scheduled to retire within the next few years have become distrustful of the Bengali leader-dominated CITU. The INTUC has successfully exploited the issue of granting jobs on a hereditary basis, while a few Left Front leaders have opposed such "feudal practices". Not unnaturally, the Left Front has suffered humiliating defeats in every industrial constituency in the state.

"By introducing partisan politics in every administrative level, the CPI(M) has brought corrupt practices to the doorstep of every villager."

M.A. LATIF,
PUCL *secretary*

Economist Bhabatosh Dutta who has headed a number of government commissions traces the roots of these reverses to the Left Front's failure to revive the state's moribund economy. "To be fair, the problems of Bengal are so complex that any government in power for a long time is bound to run into trouble," feels Dutta, who nevertheless admits that the Government, by managing its finances better, could have allocated more funds for creating productive assets. Referring to the unemployment dole, which has already cost the state exchequer about Rs 100 crore, as an example of unwarranted expenditure, he contends that the ample additional resources mobilised by the state Government "ought to have been used wholly for financing plans". Insufficient investment in the state's power and irrigation sectors perpetuated the economic stagnation that began in the late 1950s.

Where the Left Front has had a modicum of success is in the agrarian sector. The anti-left gale that toppled every urban bastion only shook the left's rural forts. Of the six purely rural Lok Sabha constituencies won by the Congress(I)—Malda, Behrampore, Raiganj, Contai, Barasat and Mathurapur—two are traditional Congress(I) strongholds, while Contai has always been a marginal seat for the left. "The fact that we retained most rural seats despite a pro-Congress swing," says senior CPI(M) minister Benoy Krishna Choudhury, "is proof that the rural masses by and large are still with the left."

Currently, however, most of the Left Front's immensely successful agrarian programmes like Operation Barga, land redistribution and the agricultural wage movements, have come to a total standstill. While Benoy Choudhury and other CPI(M) leaders blame this on meddlesome courts and the Centre's refusal to assent to their Land Reforms Act amendment, old bureaucrats like Ashok Mitra contend that the real malady lies with the present leadership of the Left Front. One of the key men behind the present land reforms programme, Debabrata Bandyopadhyay, a bureaucrat who had helped the CPI(M) kisan leader Harekrishna Konar prepare the original land distribution programme way back in 1969, "was hounded out of the state Government by the CPI(M) for his excessive zeal," says Mitra, whose knowledge of the state bureaucracy is phenomenal.

Mitra feels that it was Konar's record that is responsible for the Left Front's foundations in rural Bengal. Konar believed in action and once when confronted by the law, had ordered CPI(M) cadres to forcibly occupy vested land. Today the Left Front has no one like him. After touring various parts of Bengal and participating in panchayat training camps, Mitra found CPI(M) cadres admitting that sharecroppers still got only 40 per cent share of the produce as against the legal 70 per cent. "When I pointed this out to Benoy Choudhury and others, they feigned ignorance," says Mitra.

The possibility that rural Bengal will one day go the way the urban centres have gone may be remote, but PUCL's Latif feels the danger signals have already started flashing. "By introducing partisan politics in every administrative level, the CPI(M) has brought corrupt practices to the doorstep of every villager," says Latif. He argues that if the Left Front fails to keep pumping money into the villages, the rural vote may well swing against it for "the moderate left has proved to be as corrupt and arrogant as the Congress was reputed to be".

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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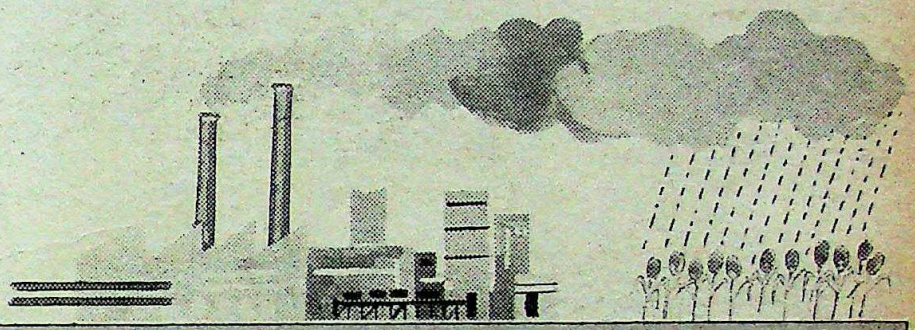

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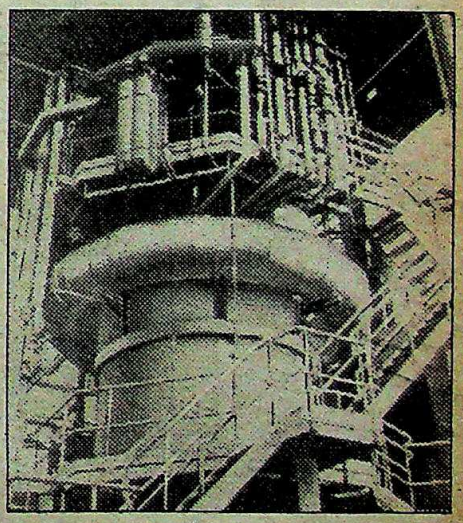

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TAMIL NADU

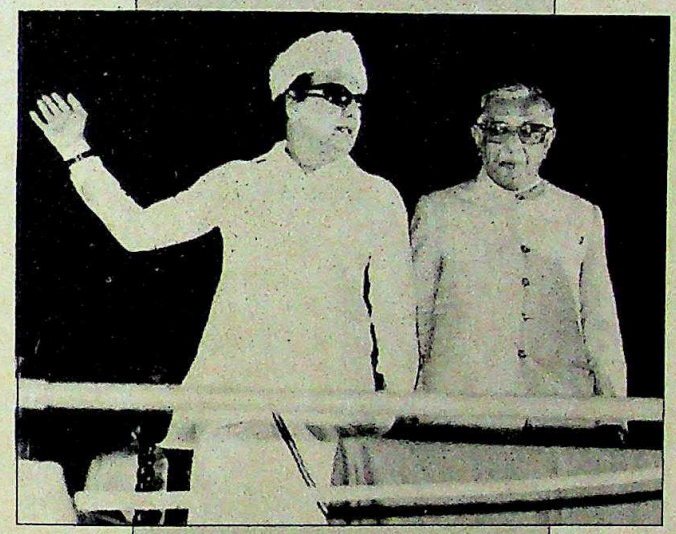
A Vexing Vacuum

SUCCESS breeds its own problems, as the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu is rapidly discovering. The party's current problems in Tamil Nadu have arisen precisely out of its resounding success in the assembly elections in which it had won 133 of the 234 assembly seats, enabling it to once again form a government on its own. This in spite of the fact that it contested the elections in alliance with the Congress(I) and conceded as many as 72 seats to that party in electoral adjustments, itself contesting only 162 seats.

But last fortnight, nearly three weeks after its election victory and a full two weeks after M.G. Ramachandran was formally elected legislature party leader again, the AIADMK was in an unenviable position, with its leader convalescing in New York from speech impairment and paralysis after a kidney transplant and unable to take the oath of office and take charge. In the words of Tamil Nadu Governor S.L. Khurana: "It is an unprecedented and ticklish situation."

While the new Assembly has been constituted on December 28 according to AIADMK ministers, the earliest that MGR is likely to return to Madras from New York is January-end or early February. And that means a minimum delay of more than a month. Also by a letter dated December 28, handed in by Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan to the governor on December 31, MGR had submitted the resignation of his earlier council of ministers. A caretaker government has been in charge since. But more than the possible delay in MGR's return, it is the uncertainty about the actual condition of the chief minister's health that has given rise to the plaguing feeling of a constitutional vacuum in the state.

In the eagerness with which AIADMK partymen and doctors compete with each other to paint rosy pictures of MGR's health, they contradict one another and sometimes even themselves. For instance, neurologist Dr Eli Friedman of the Downstate Medical Centre in Brooklyn, where MGR is convalescing, had told *The Hindu* on the eve of the elections that it would be six months to a year before MGR regained his speech. But now he sets a nearer deadline, predicting "the chief minister will be able to speak in a few days". Dr P. Narendran, neurosurgeon at the Government General Hospital in Madras, who also met MGR last fortnight, goes one step further when he says: "Mr Ramachandran is able to walk by himself and also write legibly with his right hand. His comprehension is excellent. And he is able to speak well."



Governor S.L. Khurana was plainly suggesting that MGR should for the time being appoint some other party leader as chief minister. But that precisely is the insoluble problem for the AIADMK.

What was just flexing the right hand for Nedunchezhiyan became writing legibly for Narendran. And uttering a few words became speaking well. If these inconsistencies weren't enough, there were the earlier photographs of MGR reading the newspapers in his Brooklyn hospital bed and the clarification at the same time that the chief minister had not yet been informed of Mrs Gandhi's assassination. As DMK President M. Karunanidhi rightly asks: "If the chief minister is reading the papers and is able to comprehend, how is it that he has not yet realised that Mrs Gandhi has disappeared from the scene?"

Governor S.L. Khurana has also thrown in an indirect spanner into the AIADMK's works. In a letter to the AIADMK General Secretary P.U. Shanmugam written on January 1, after the party again elected MGR as leader on the previous day, the governor has stated that the swearing-in again of MGR as chief minister "will have to be when he is in a position to do so". That was the catch. The governor did not say that the swearing-in would be when MGR returned to Madras, but when he was in a position to take the oath of office. Khurana didn't stop there. He went on to say in the letter: "It will be advisable to limit the duration of the present caretaker government to as brief a span as possible so that the massive mandate of the people could find articulation in the early formulation and implementation of the progressive policies of the new government."

The governor's new year gift of a letter to Shanmugam placed the AIADMK in a position between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand it seemed to suggest that MGR's swearing-in could not be before he was mentally and physically fit to assume office. On the other hand, the governor wanted AIADMK to form a new government as soon as possible, so that the caretaker government could be wound up at the earliest. The letter made the point that "a caretaker government can only transact routine business," and "as it is, the Government has been affected by the chief minister's absence from active duty from October."

Khurana made the point more explicit and specific in the formal letter he had to write to MGR, as leader of the majority party, inviting him to form the Government. The letter, which was sent through Nedunchezhiyan, said: "My congratulations on your electoral triumph. Nothing will give me greater pleasure now than to swear you in, if it is possible to do so immediately. But in

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case your recuperation, based on medical advice, indicates a longer convalescence, then you may, as leader, nominate someone to whom the oath of office could be administered. Such a person can advise the governor on the composition of the new council of ministers and he can step down when you are in a position to take over."

Khurana was, therefore, plainly suggesting that MGR should, for the time being, appoint some other party leader as chief minister. But that precisely is the insoluble problem for the AIADMK now. If partymen can be convinced that MGR is consciously agreeing to the governor's suggestion and is himself choosing a temporary leader, then it is possible they will gulp down their beloved leader's choice. But if they get the slightest doubt that some other party functionary has taken the law into his own hands and is acting on MGR's name, then rabid factionalism will come into the open.

THERE are three main rival factions in the party, all at each other's throats. One is led by the tough Information Minister R.M. Veerappan, MGR's aide for many decades, with people like Industries Minister C. Ponnaiyan, Agriculture Minister K. Kalimithu, and All-World MGR Fans Association President P. Musiriputhan. The second group is led by the former actress and deputy leader of the AIADMK in Parliament, Jayalalitha Jayaram, the influential Commercial Taxes Minister, S. Thirunavukarasu, Education Minister C. Aranganayakam, and Electricity Minister S. Ramachandran. This group is close to the Congress(I), and it is even said that it was at the invitation of Rajiv Gandhi that an ostracised and sulking Jayalalitha agreed to campaign for the elections.

Finally there are the AIADMK party heavyweights whom MGR kept out of government during his second term despite their hopes of induction into the cabinet being repeatedly expressed. There are men like party General Secretary Shanmugam, Treasurer S. Madhavan, and the speaker of the dissolved Assembly K. Rajaram. These people form the third faction. And finally there are ministers who are respectably neutral like Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan and Health Minister H.V. Hande.

The faction fighting has become bitter. There were objections to Nedunchezhiyan's proposed visit to New York until a telex from the Indian consul general there on behalf of MGR indicated that the ailing leader wanted no one else to come. Party quarrels have erupted in public too: on January 4, when Nedunchezhiyan was leaving for the US, there was an airport altercation between Veerappan and Thirunavukarasu, and a few days later Veerappan was in top form publicly taunting Jayalalitha at the 34th birthday celebrations of film director and MGR's cinematic heir K. Bhagyaraj. Since then, the factions have been counting heads in the legislative party. Musiriputhan claims "over 120" of the 133. Thirunavukarasu on the other hand says 70 are with his faction.

(From top) Nedunchezhiyan Veerappan, Jayalalitha, Rajaram: rival claimants to the throne

The Congress(I) will not capitalise on the factional quarrels within the AIADMK. Informed political observers also concur that because of the bad taste that the Bhaskara Rao chapter left, the Congress(I) would not like to queer the political pitch for itself in the assembly elections due in eight states in March by inducing defections and forming the government in Tamil Nadu. So the divided AIADMK house does not face any danger yet. Even otherwise indications are that party leaders do not want to add any more fuel to the factional fires.

Says Veerappan now, anxious not to set the dovecotes aflutter any further: "We don't think there is any need to elect any interim chief minister. The chief minister will be returning latest by the first week of February and will take the oath of office." Disclosed Nedunchezhiyan in New York, "Even if the chief minister has to relax and convalesce for some more time after returning to Madras, he may take the oath but not take on any portfolio." And adds Khurana consolingly, "according to the eminent Nani Palkhivala whose opinion the AIADMK party has obtained, the chief minister need not even orally take the oath of affirmation. He can do so even by visual representation, that is even by nodding assent to the oath." Which all brings the swearing-in of MGR in the near future closer to reality.

The governor also doesn't rule out his going to Brooklyn to administer the oath of office to MGR, if it becomes inevitable. Explains he, "I don't want to do anything which will have repercussions outside the boundaries of our state. But if my going to New York is the only way out, I may do it." It is sobering that Tamil Nadu's political future still hinges on the health of just one person convalescing in far away Brooklyn.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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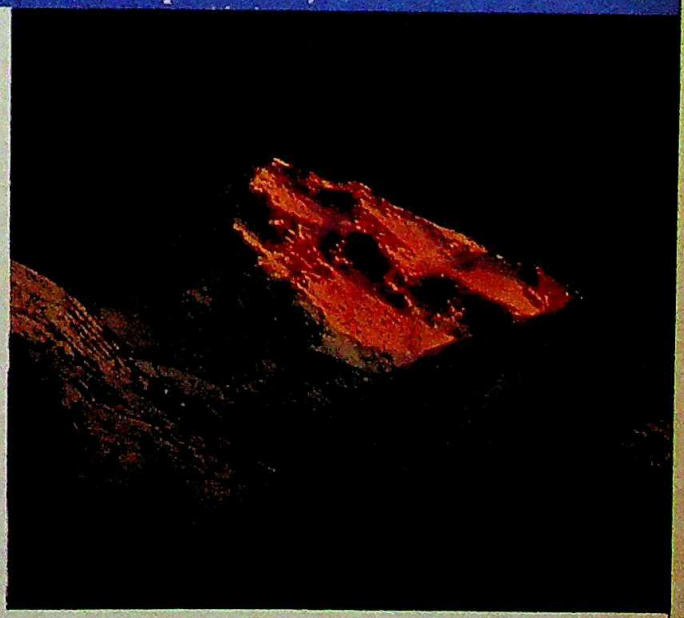

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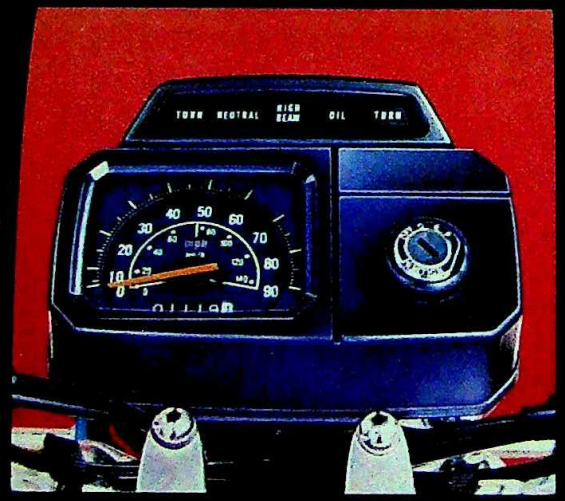

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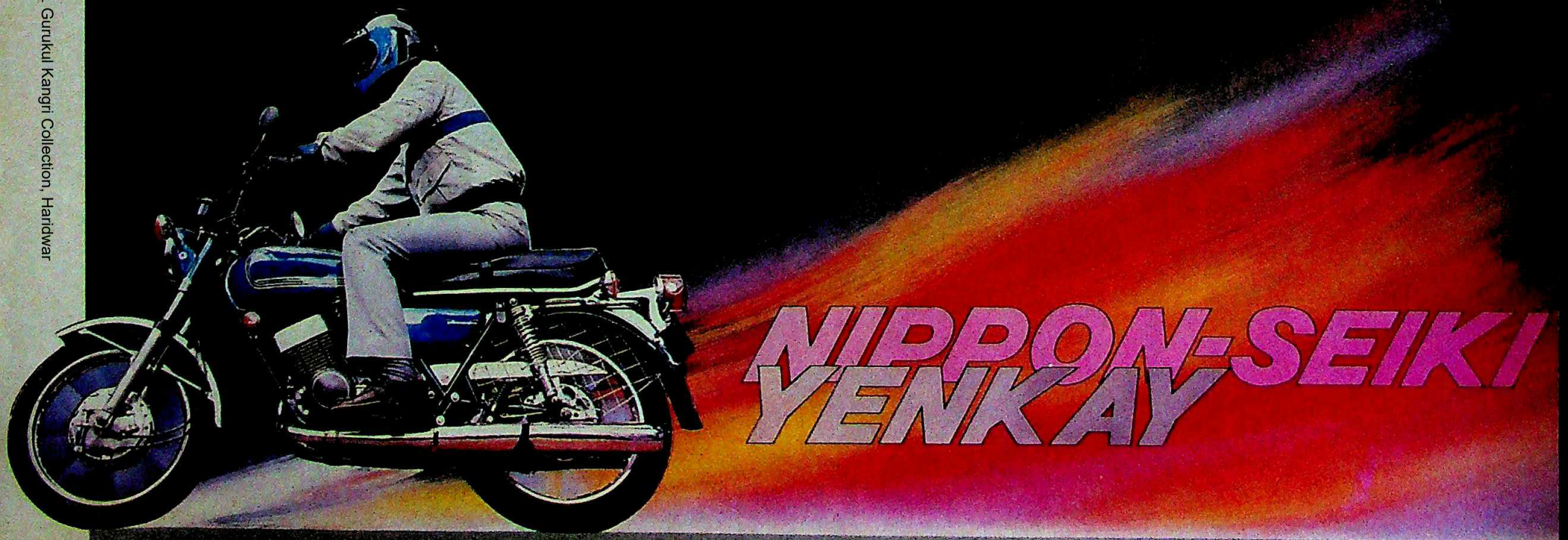

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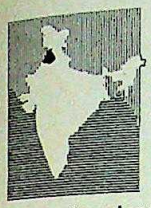
PUNJAB

Changing Attitudes



THE PRE-ELECTION rhetoric had been far from assuring. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made Punjab and the controversial Anandpur Sahib resolution the centre-piece of his onslaught against the Opposition, so it was with considerable relief that Punjab—and particularly the Akali Dal—greeted his bridge-building post-victory national broadcast. The campaigner had been all fire and brimstone; the country's first leader was assuring the country that the lives and property of Sikhs would be protected, and a cabinet committee speedily would go into the Punjab problem thoroughly.

Rajiv's initiatives, most hopefully of all, seem to have prompted the Akalis to change their attitude as well. Realism dictated that a government with a 401 seat plurality in Parliament would be a very different negotiating adversary from the previous one that seemed to be on the skids, and Akali statements made it clear that they welcomed the prime minister's initiatives. "All our demands are within the framework of the Constitution, and this includes the Anandpur Sahib resolution and are certainly negotiable," said Akali leader Major Singh Uboke. Akali ad hoc convenor Surjan Singh Thekedar, however, wanted direct talks with the prime minister, as he had little faith in the cabinet committee.

Thekedar and many other Akalis also welcomed the prime minister's suggestion that the Akalis take the Anandpur Sahib resolution to the Sarkaria Commission—a suggestion first made, ironically enough, by the opposition parties. And for the elderly Akali leader and former minister, Jivan Singh Umramangal, a man who had never compromised with Bhindranwale, the Punjab problem could be solved quite easily provided the Government was honest. "It will not take five minutes for the problem to be solved. Chandigarh should be given to Punjab and Haryana adequately compensated. The river waters issue should be referred to the Supreme Court, a commission of experts should go into the disputed areas," he said, adding Punjab would be a litmus test for the political system.

But quite understandably, the Akalis had certain conditions. Most of their leaders were still in jail, as were many of their rank and file—at least 450 had been arrested under the National Security Act. There were special courts functioning in the state, the army was patrolling its 1,250 villages and 150 towns and Sikhs outside the state still felt threatened. Many of their conditions, such as release of the detained Akalis, could reasonably be accepted and meaningful discussions started. Delay could cause more migration of Sikhs to Punjab and infiltration from across the border by extremists who fled in the wake of Operation Bluestar.

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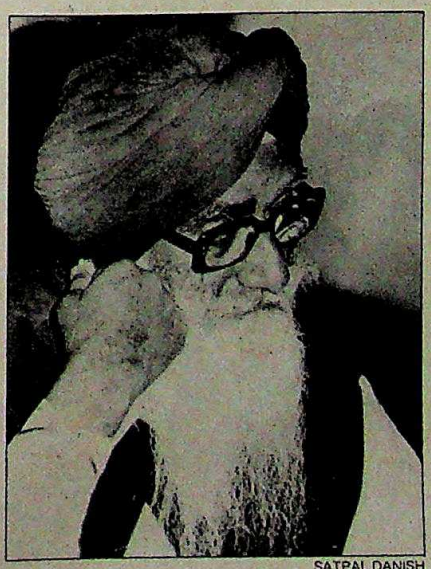
Thekedar: direct approach



SATPAL DANISH

Thus it seems there could be no better time than now to come to grips with the situation. Punjab Congress(I) President R.L. Bhatia met as many of the Akalis as he could, including the five high priests. He had been instrumental in preventing a violent showdown between the priests and Nihang chief Santa Singh within the temple precincts on Diwali day. He and former foreign minister Swaran Singh had last fortnight established discreet contact with the Akali leadership.

And attitudes were definitely softening. Despite Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal's public stand that Chandigarh should be given to Punjab only when Abohar and Fazilka are given to Haryana in return, official sources indicate that Haryana is prepared to accept a reasonable and just solution. Adequate compensation for Chandigarh in the form of land and funds could be one way out. Similarly, on the river waters issue, a court verdict would be welcomed. Surveys are already being carried out in both states to mark areas suitable for an exchange, and the administrative machinery is set to implement any decision.

Most encouraging perhaps is the fact that many Sikhs who were dismayed by the massive swing in favour of the Congress(I) are now greatly relieved. A Congress(I) victory had looked to be a harbinger of sad days for the Sikhs—not only for the 35 lakh of them outside Punjab but the majority who inhabit this prosperous agricultural state. The failure of the administration to control the violence that took hundreds of lives in 10 Congress(I)-ruled states was seen as part of the Congress(I) game, and Rajiv Gandhi's election speeches and, most importantly, the one in Delhi where he had said that "the earth shakes when a big tree falls," were seen as bad omens.

But doubts still linger. In Punjab's towns and cities, where Sikhs are mostly in business, the feeling that another farcical play is on in Delhi is very strong. "There have been committees and meetings for two years and each time when it looked like some decision was around the corner, we went through another holocaust," says Gurdev Singh, a cloth merchant in Ludhiana. This feeling is shared by Sikh doctors, teachers and government servants. Some take it as another gimmick launched by Rajiv with an eye to the assembly polls in March. S.S. Sud, a senior lawyer in

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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

(From left) Jailed leaders Badal, Longowal, Barnala: release prospects

Jalandhar, saw a contradiction in the Government pronouncing its serious desire for settlement and yet arresting so many under the National Security Act.

More encouraging were the attitudes of some rural Sikhs who spoke with INDIA TODAY and indicated that they were prepared to give time to Rajiv to try and bring about a solution. These articulate farmers want certain conditions fulfilled before talks begin: the Government must hold a judicial probe into the post-assassination killing of Sikhs and punish the guilty. There is also resentment that a large number of young men apprehended during and after Operation Bluestar have not been tried or properly investigated so that they can be charged or freed. "What matters is the intention behind these moves. Rajiv must stop playing with fire and settle the Punjab problem once and for all. After his victory he certainly looks more stable and his assurance on TV has helped to kindle confidence among Sikhs," says Satwant Kaur, a teacher.

Sikhs are also worried by the migration into Punjab. While businessmen and industrialists feel threatened by new competitors, others feel a refugee influx might complete the already sharp divide between Hindus and Sikhs. In this context the Government's efforts to provide security and confidence to the frightened Sikhs is being viewed as a step in the right direction. The arrest of a large number of those who indulged in killing and arson has brought the flow of migrants to a trickle. Some 300 families have already moved out of Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Mohali and Patiala back to the states from which they fled.

For most Hindus, on the other hand, though the Congress(I) victory is proof of Hindu assertion, the return of peace is as dear as it is to the Sikhs. Commerce and industry, which they dominate, have suffered much. In Rajiv's victory, they see new hope. They greatly desire a decision favouring Punjab, but are doubtful about the Akali intentions. "They should stop talking about Anandpur Sahib resolution and come to terms with the Centre," warns former BJP minister Balramji Das Tandon. Whatever be the terms of agreement, peace should be ensured for the growth of industry and trade.

For a Punjab that goes dead after seven o'clock every evening, a return to normal life is vital. Once busy bazaars and crowded bus stands now wear a deserted look. Two-thirds of the trains are off the track. Buses do not ply after seven in the evening, and even bicycles are prohibited from moving about. Only the army and police move at night. This chilling stillness not only frightens but kills the spirit of life. "Punjab scares me and I can't go elsewhere," says businessman Jagdish Chand.

The yearning for peace is palpable. People ask the unending question: will there be serious efforts to bring peace and end Hindu-Sikh discord? On the surface, there is calm, but communal feelings are still growing. "I could never imagine Sikhs and Hindus talking about each other as two separate people," says the eminent writer Sant Singh Sekhon.

But the cancer of polarisation between the two communities need not grow to a terminal stage. Sant Longowal told his relations Sher Singh and Surinder Singh who met him in Udaipur jail recently that he was committed to Hindu-Sikh unity. He argued that the party needed the unity of Sikhs and Hindus for a long fight with the Centre. But he is reported to have warned that the Sikhs had made sacrifices and would not accept an unjust solution.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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Anti-acne: A good anti-acne treatment is an application of mint leaves' (pudina) juice. Use tepid water to wash it off the next morning.

Fashions:
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Lip talk: Give a sensuous fullness to your lips. Apply lip colour over entire lips except the centre which should be filled in with a lighter, shimmery shade. Give a final glimmer touch by lightly brushing the lips with gold powder. You'll look wow!

Tomato tricks: Use a lot of soap? Then, your skin is being deprived of its acid layer. To remedy this, cut up a juicy tomato and rub it over your face and neck. Leave the juice on for 10 minutes. Rinse off. You'll find your skin refreshed and glowing.

Tips On Fingertips

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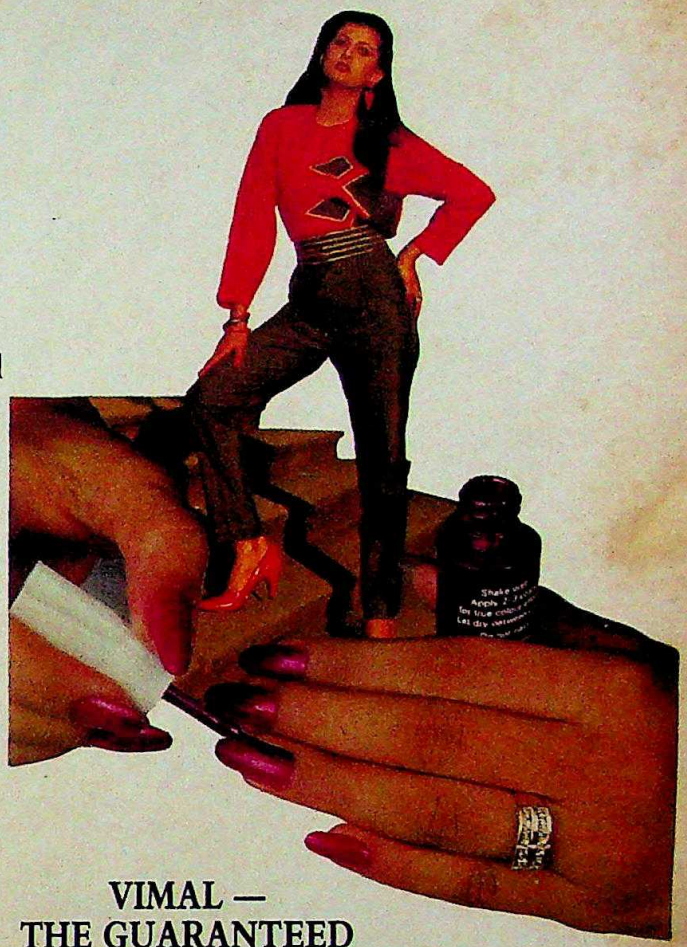
Mini manicure: Push your cuticles back by using warm vegetable oil. Apply a base coat of polish and then three more coatings, completing each application in 3 strokes. Finish the manicure with a dab of polish under the nail. And you're all set to look quite cute when you display your claws.



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...use ... supporters ...gress(I) but also if the ...d links with the BJP the minor-...mmunities may not vote for it.

Hegde was quick to realise the danger of such a move and told his partymen firmly: "The BJP has stood by us and it would be improper to let them down now. Moreover we should not split votes by having multi-cornered contests." The Janata is now working out an understanding with the BJP and is likely to concede around 20 seats. But the grumblings in the Janata over the BJP

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KARNATAKA

Getting Ready

ONLY five days after his dramatic resignation Karnataka's Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde stepped into Room 323, the rosewood panelled office in Vidhana Soudha, settled down on the familiar dull orange chair and told his staff bashfully: "Well, here I am. Not exactly a bad coin. But still around."

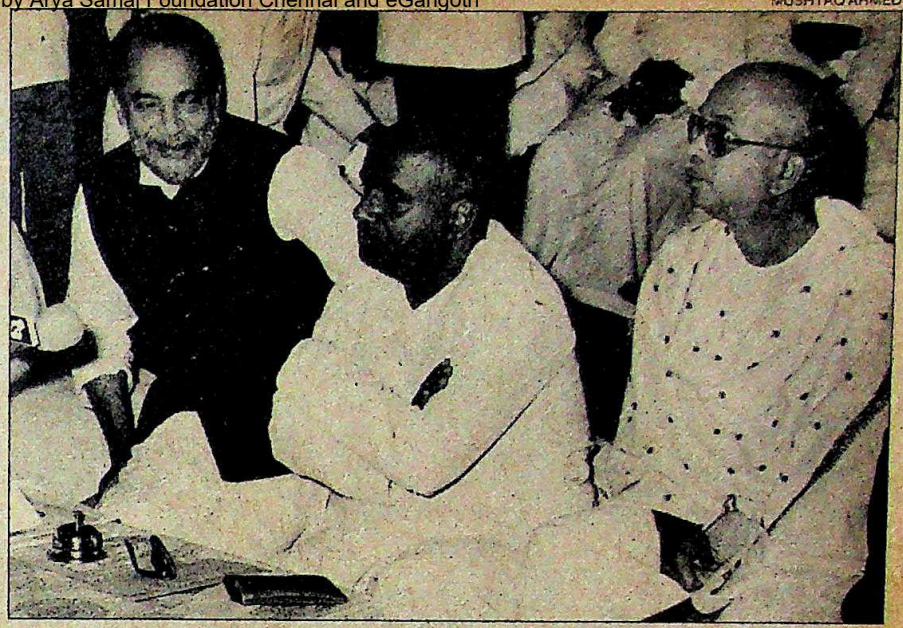
Hegde would have rather been around as an ex-chief minister with a martyr's halo than back to business as usual. By resigning and recommending dissolution last fortnight he had fondly hoped that the Congress(I), in keeping with its tradition, would either form another Gundu Rao's government of defectors or impose President's rule.

But while the local Congress(I) leaders were as usual ever willing to grab Hegde's bait, the new Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was least intent on biting. Much to Hegde's surprise and consternation, Karnataka Governor Ashoke Nath Banerjee accepted his recommendation to dissolve the 225-member state Assembly but, nevertheless, told him firmly to be caretaker chief minister till the assembly elections were held. Hegde was unwilling at first to accept the caretakership but egged on by his partymen, who thought it profitable to be in power till the elections, he reluctantly agreed.

With Hegde's return to office the "sympathy wave" that developed after his resignation is ebbing. Now he is not only burdened with the responsibility of being chief minister, which is likely to confine him to the state, but also answerable for his government's failures till elections are held. Conceded Hegde grudgingly: "Rajiv has played his cards well so far. It is a refreshing departure from his party's old policy of flouting democratic norms."

But the chief minister had other aces up his sleeve. Soon after he joined office, the Janata Legislature Party met in their dilapidated office in Bangalore and elected Hegde as its "undisputed leader" so as to present what J.H. Patel, the party's balding secretary-general, calls "a positive approach and a unified image to the people". This was done to contrast it with the Congress(I) party which was still haggling over the leadership issue.

MUSHTAQ AHMED



Hegde with Deve Gowda and Patel: a positive approach

The Janata Party was in fact borrowing a leaf from the Congress(I) which had successfully hammered away at the opposition disunity and lack of leadership in last month's Lok Sabha poll. Last week the state Congress(I) unit showed no signs of being infused with their party's new dynamic style of functioning at the national level. Instead, the party leaders were back to their old game of asserting their closeness to the high command in Delhi.

Former chief minister Gundu Rao feels that Rajiv favours him because he was the only one granted an interview with the prime minister soon after he assumed charge while K.H. Patil, the state Congress(I) chief, hung around without any such luck. But Patil's supporters hotly refute Rao's claim stating disparagingly that it was film actor Shivaji Ganesan whom Rajiv called and Rao tagged along when he went to meet the prime minister.

Not to be outdone Patil asserted at a press conference that since he was state Congress(I) chief he was for all purposes the leader of the party till the assembly elections. Veerappa Moily, who heads the legislature party and had made a strong bid to form a government of defectors after Hegde's resignation, argued that the claim was rightly his. But the Congress(I) is unlikely to project a state leader before the elections because as one partyman put it: "The moment someone is declared leader the other aspirants would pull the rug from under his feet during elections."

Since the state Congress(I) lacks a leader of credibility and stature to match Hegde, it may be forced to fall back on Rajiv's charisma to pull it through. In fact, this is going to be the Congress(I)'s only strength in the coming assembly poll because although Hegde is an extremely popular chief minister, he could be swept out by the electorate's desire for a break from the old, a break which Rajiv symbolises. Hegde, aware that the Congress(I) may pit him against Rajiv's leadership, said: "Well, Rajiv is Rajiv and Hegde is Hegde. I will tell the people that Rajiv will not become chief minister if they voted Congress(I) but a Gundu Rao may come back."

But the state Janata Party does not seem to have learnt its lessons from the Lok Sabha poll. It is once again having trouble reaching an electoral understanding for the assembly poll with its allies the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the two communist parties. Last week at a party meeting, a large section refused to have any seat adjustments with the BJP. Hardliners in the party felt that the BJP would be a liability because not only are its hardcore supporters with the Congress(I) but also if the Janata had links with the BJP the minority communities may not vote for it.

Hegde was quick to realise the danger of such a move and told his partymen firmly: "The BJP has stood by us and it would be improper to let them down now. Moreover we should not split votes by having multi-cornered contests." The Janata is now working out an understanding with the BJP and is likely to concede around 20 seats. But the grumblings in the Janata over the BJP

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alliance are ominous portents for its chances in the polls.

Meanwhile, the Janata Party has launched its election campaign and Hegde once again hit the campaign trail last week. Said he: "This time we are going to have as close contact with the people as possible. I will tour every constituency." While the Janata Party suffers from a paucity of funds for the poll, it is certainly not lacking in morale.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

ANDHRA PRADESH

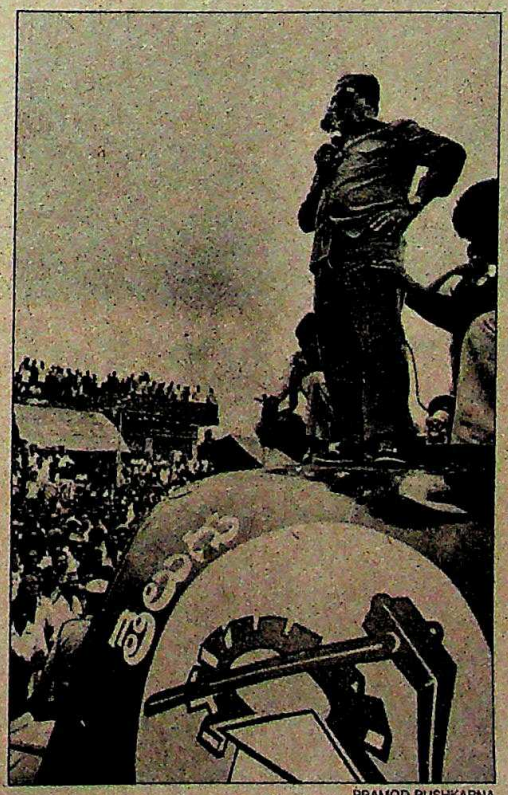
Standing Firm

FOR THE Telugu Desam, it was almost as historic a mandate in Andhra Pradesh as for the Congress(I) in the rest of the country. And it looks as if the Telugu Desam's winning spree is not yet over. On January 28, when elections for the Srikakulam and Rajampet Lok Sabha constituencies are held, the party is expected to capture both, thereby bringing its presence in the new Lok Sabha to a high 30-seat mark. Both seats had been won by the Congress(I) in the last parliamentary elections, but the ruling party this time seems resigned to losing them.

Not that the Congress(I) needs any more seats after its unprecedented December landslide. With the mood resigned, the suspense missing, and the focus having shifted to the assembly elections in March, interest has been largely diffused in the Srikakulam and Rajampet elections which were postponed because of the mysterious deaths of two independent candidates—one, allegedly, a suicide and the other, a murder because of personal rivalry. This postponement, admit local Congress(I) leaders, is going to work favourably for the Telugu Desam. The diffidence is hardly surprising after the dismal rout of the Congress(I) in the state. Said Andhra Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (APCC-I) President Dr Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy: "All that I can say is that we will not relent. I am not one to be easily cowed down. We will put up a stiff fight." Brave talk, but Congress(I) leaders at the assembly constituency and taluk level are worried by the overall poor showing of the party. The segment-by-segment analysis of the Lok Sabha results reveal that the Congress(I) led the Telugu Desam or its electoral allies in only 75 of the 280 assembly segments in the 40 constituencies of the state.

And Congress(I) prospects continue to remain gloomy in N.T. Rama Rao's fortress. For the Rajampet seat, in the south-west corner, the Telugu Desam candidate is Sugavasi Palakondarayudu,41, a former MLA. He started as a Janata man, switched mid-stream to the Congress(I) and then in August last year —after the unceremonious dismissal of the ministry—walked over to NTR, the only one from the Congress(I) to do so. What makes the contest even more poignant—and more humiliating—for the Congress(I) is the fact that APCC(I) President Reddy hails from this area. His party's candidate A. Sai Pratap, 36, shared his bench as a medical college student. It is therefore a prestigious fight for Reddy and he is planning vigorous campaigning in the constituency for a week. The Congress(I) is also deputing K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy, ex-Union industry minister, to oversee the electioneering. At the same time, the charismatic NTR will also move into the area in his Chaitanya Ratham to woo the 775,000-odd electorate.

Congress(I) stalwarts Vijayabhaskara Reddy (left), Anjaiah, and (below) NTR



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

On the north-eastern coast lies Srikakulam, site of the other election battle. The Congress(I) is posting Union Labour Minister T. Anjaiah here to woo the 692,000-odd electorate, of whom little more than half are women. The party's candidate in the constituency is the veteran Boddepalli Rajagopala Rao, 57, who has been a member of the Lok Sabha for three successive terms. A formidable candidate, he this time faces Appayya Dora, 50, a farmer and former Lok Dal activist.

In the 1983 assembly elections, the Telugu Desam had won in six of the seven assembly segments of this constituency where about 250,000 voters belong to the listed backward classes communities. Some poll analysts argue that this block, in fact, tilted the scales in favour of the Telugu Desam in December. Therefore, the prospects of another Srikakulam revolt, this time to mark the return of the Congress(I) to capture power bases, seem dim. And NTR is breaking his hectic campaign schedule to make sure that his Ratham is available for the tour in both constituencies.

Two dominant factors have worked well for the Telugu Desam: one, the undemocratic unseating of NTR in August and second, the upswing of the backward classes' vote in his party's favour. Said the exuberant Telugu Desam party General Secretary P. Upendra: "We will tell the voters that while safeguarding their interests, we have been called upon to play the role of the democratic opposition in Parliament and to strengthen our hands."

Everywhere, then, the mood is favourable towards the Telugu Desam. NTR's and Upendra's houses have been flooded with aspirants for party tickets in the assembly elections to be held in March. There are already over 7,000 applicants for the 294 constituencies—and that has not done much for the Congress(I)'s confidence, which is already at a new low in the state.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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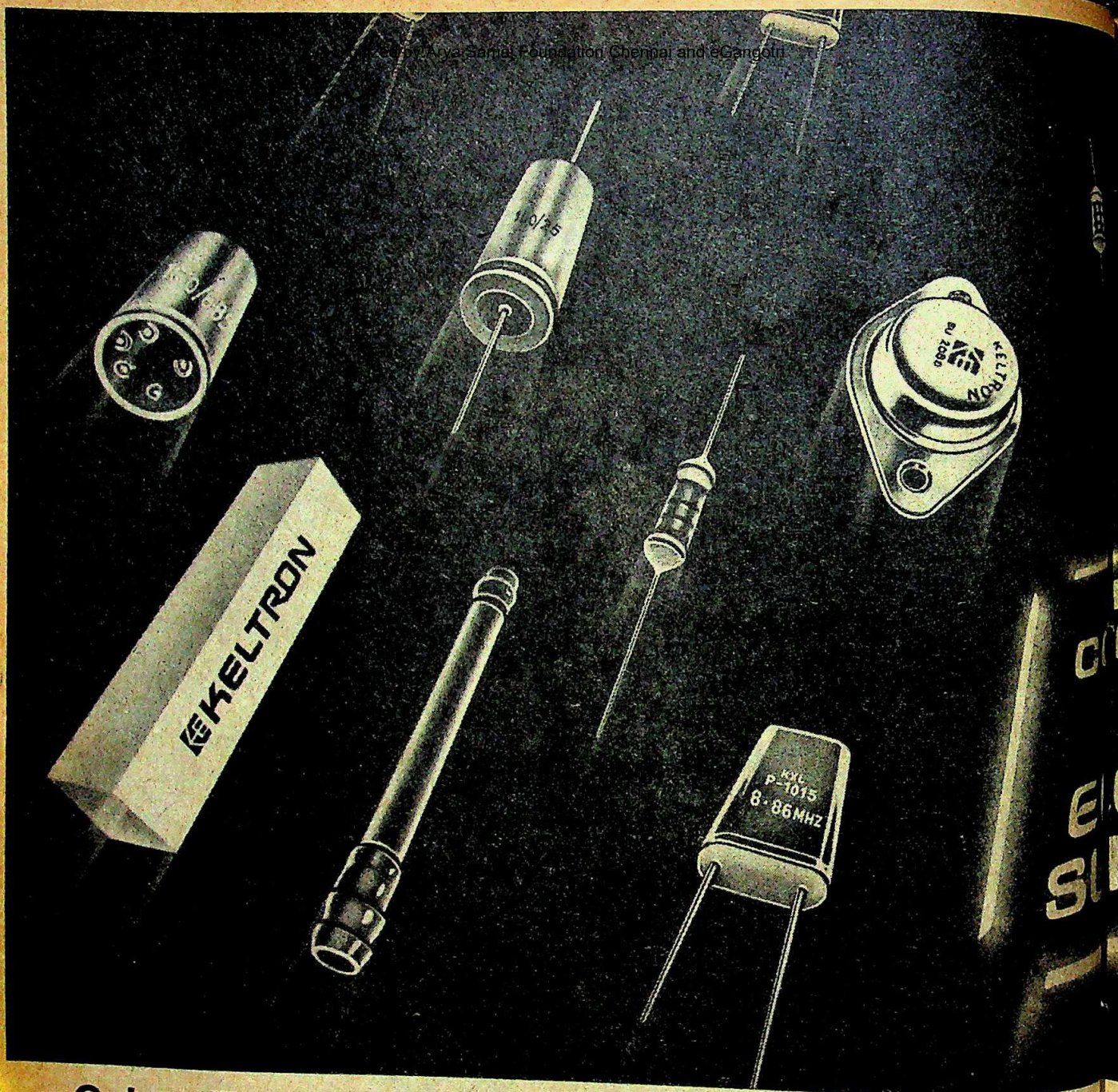

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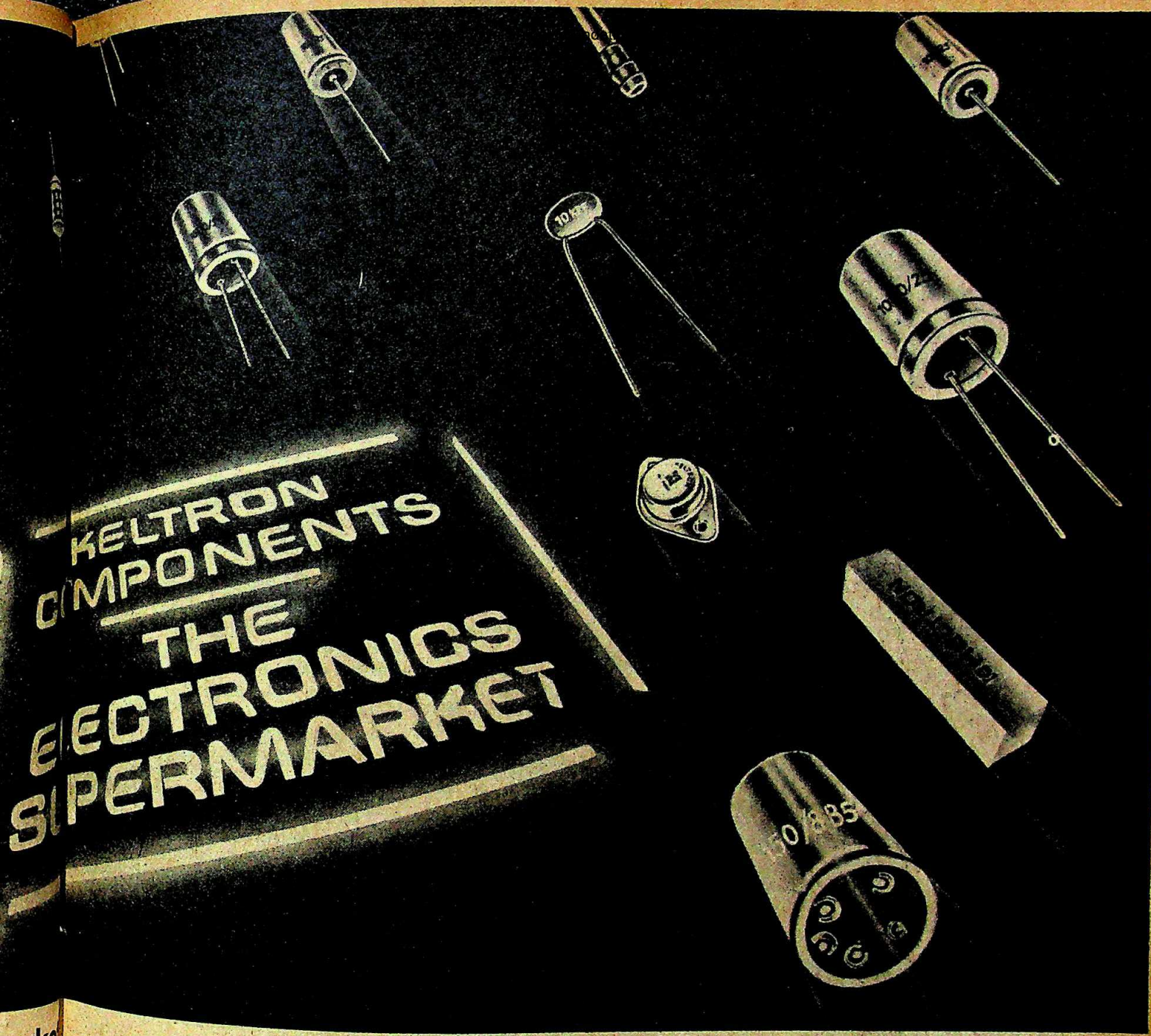

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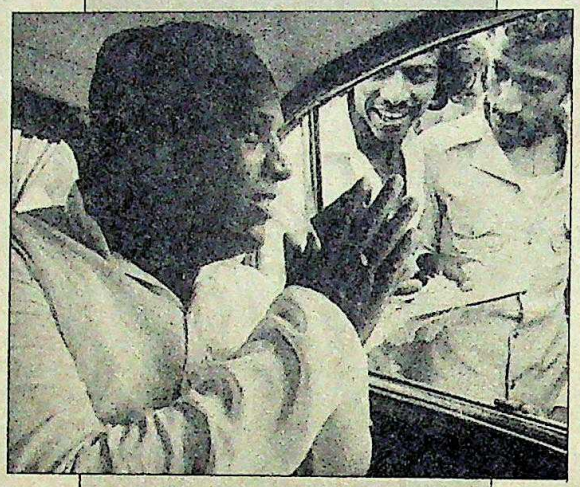
MAHARASHTRA

Crumbs of Comfort

DESPITE the Congress(I)'s overwhelming victory in Maharashtra—it won 43 of the 48 seats in the state—there were still a few crumbs of comfort for the Opposition. Notwithstanding the "wave", the party's popular vote actually declined from 52.9 per cent in 1980 to 51.29 this time. Particularly perturbing for the ruling party is the drop in popularity in its eastern citadel of Vidarbha, where the vote has dropped from 61.3 per cent to 50.2 per cent. The continued backwardness of the region, governmental neglect symbolised by the failure to form a separate regional board, a partial drought, extreme infighting in the party and unsatisfactory cotton procurement prices are all factors which have contributed to the growing disillusionment in Vidarbha with the Congress(I).

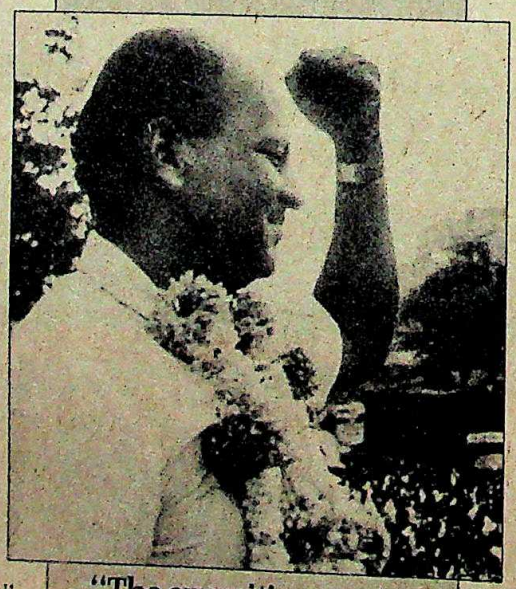


"The issues of an assembly poll are different from a parliamentary election."

SHARAD PAWAR, *Congress(S)*

However, the party's decline in Vidarbha and Marathwada has been balanced by its amazing improvement in Bombay and the Konkan belt, which was earlier an opposition stronghold. In addition, the ruling party has given a good account of itself in both the sugar belt in the south and in north Maharashtra. Rebels like A.R. Antulay who was hospitalised last week with heart trouble and J.B. Dhote, who left the party in a glare of publicity, put up a pathetic electoral performance.

But at least one person is convinced that the assembly polls will tell a different story: Sharad Pawar, Congress (S) president. Pawar himself was elected from Baramati with a thumping majority, and though his party captured only two of the 15 seats it contested, it has undoubtedly reaffirmed its position as the leading opposition party in the state. Party General Secretary Arun Mehta points out: "We have arisen almost from the ashes." In 1981, when senior leader Y.B. Chavan left the party along with 43 of the 49 MLA's, many thought it was the death blow. But starting from scratch with a younger generation, Pawar, who is himself only 43, has managed to emerge fairly creditably. His candidates, almost all of whom were under 40, generally gave a good performance. The Congress(S) led in 26 assembly segments and narrowly missed winning a few more seats. Pawar points out: "The issues of an assembly poll are different from a parliamentary election. And now the long-standing disenchantment in the voters over the party infighting, resulting in the crippling of the functioning of the state Government, will come to the fore."



"The opposition parties are concerned with only paying lip-service to the working class."

DATTA SAMANT, *Kamgar Aghadi Party*

In contrast, the other national opposition parties were badly mauled. The BJP, confident that it was the emerging force in the state, had walked out of seat adjustments claiming that other parties had overestimated their strength, but was itself badly humiliated. Out of the 20 seats it contested, it lost its deposit in seven, and was pushed to third place in half-a-dozen contests. In Nasik Buldhana and Akola, the BJP spoilt the opposition's chances of winning a seat. In Bombay, where it had the highest hopes, its alliance with the Shiv Sena cost it heavily. The Congress(I) improved its popular vote from 39.2 per cent last time to 52.8 per cent, and won so overwhelmingly that it carried every assembly segment in the five constituencies it contested. BRCC(I) President Murli Deora got 60 per cent of the vote in what a BJP leader had described as the party's "safest seat in Maharashtra". Sunil Dutt got 60 per cent against Ram Jethmalani who had dismissed the actor as "no competition". The only cold comfort that the BJP could take was that the Janata Party with whom it had a wrangle over the allotment of city seats was in third place in Bombay and Pune. But the Janata Party managed to win at least in nine assembly segments, compared to the BJP's six. And Madhu Dandavate retained his Rajapur constituency with a greatly reduced margin.

A significant trend which has emerged in this election is that a section of block voters, disillusioned with the ruling party, has opted for special interest parties. Haji Mastan's candidate in Bombay south central picked up an estimated third of the total Muslim vote, as did a Muslim League candidate in Bombay north-east. In Akola in Vidarbha, Prakash Ambedkar of the newly formed Bharatiya Republican Party (BRP) lost by only 13,000 votes and garnered the lion's share of the Scheduled Caste vote. His party put up a creditable

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performance in five other constituencies as well. The BRP, which has been campaigning on the popular call that Dalits should assert themselves and not be tools in the hands of other parties or mortgaged to big leaders, has obviously gained votes at the expense of established republican parties which were in alliance with the Opposition.

LABOUR leader Datta Samant successfully made an issue of the state Government's unsympathetic attitude to the long-drawn-out textile strike in Bombay, to win the election from Bombay south central against Roza Deshpande, daughter of the communist leader S.A. Dange. He was undoubtedly helped by the fact that though in alliance with the Congress(I), Deshpande insisted on fighting on her own election symbol of a pigeon, rather than the hand. Samant's Kamgar Aghadi Party, which put up candidates in three other Bombay constituencies managed to secure a respectable chunk of around 50,000 votes. The first breakdown of votes suggests that Samant has managed to woo away a section of voters who traditionally supported the Shiv Sena. Samant now plans for his party to contest 35 to 40 seats in the Bombay-Thane industrial belt for the assembly poll. He says: "The opposition parties are concerned with only paying lip-service to the working class."

Quick to see the writing on the wall, the state Janata Party unit announced that for the assembly it was going into an alliance with the Congress(S) and the Peasants and Workers Party on a common symbol. The BJP meanwhile fears it is being isolated, but it has still to make up its mind whether its alliance with the Shiv Sena stands. "Even if one marries in haste, one does not divorce in haste," says the party's Bombay President Ram Naik, still unconvinced about the enormous damage the alliance had done to the party's credibility.

Pawar, now undoubtedly in a position of strength, has said his party will be contesting around 200 seats. Within a day of his victory, he was back on a tour of the countryside that had responded so well to his call for support. Consequently, the Congress(I) was perturbed enough to demand that the Congress(S) and Antulay's Bharatiya Congress stop using the tricolour, as it was confusing voters.

This fortnight, at an MPCC(I) meeting, some Congressmen demanded action against those sabotaging the party's official candidates, a difficult demand to implement. Even Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil had remarked during the campaign that the seat of Home Minister S.B. Chavan was rather shaky thus partly confirming rumours that the chief minister was trying to sabotage his old rival's election. Chavan won by a handsome margin. Generally in Marathwada like Vidarbha, the party's position was less happy. The Congress(S) won the Aurangabad seat, and the ruling party's share of the vote fell from 54.2 per cent to 50.9 per cent.

Boosting the morale of his party workers, Pawar observed last week in Pune that the sympathy wave for the Congress(I) would soon recede. "The inability to continue to ride a wave invariably makes it unfavourable to the ruling party," said the Congress(S) leader. All the same, since the Opposition only won in 57 assembly segments out of a total of 288 in the state, it remains doubtful whether the wave can recede in time for the assembly polls, to cover up this enormous difference.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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KERALA

Left in the Lurch

ARE THE communists in Kerala a spent force? The surprise results of last month's general elections would seem to suggest precisely that. Together the CPI(M) and CPI contested 14 of the total 20 seats in the state but while the CPI(M) managed to hold on to one seat, its fellow-traveller drew a humiliating blank everywhere. Communist leaders, however bewildered by their unambiguous rejection by the electorate, have inevitably come up with facile explanations for the disaster. "We never expected an Indira wave in Kerala," says CPI(M) strongman and former chief minister P.K. Vasudevan Nair, adding bravely, "it is only a temporary setback to the left movement."

But not many people even within the left movement can swallow the top leadership's excuses which range from "a sympathy wave" to the "Hindu backlash" and even "money power". "E.M.S. Namboodiripad (the 78-year-old CPI(M) general secretary) and the moth-eaten leadership should resign and retire from active politics if the party is to survive in Kerala," says a young party member grimly. And he is just one of the many who hold the septuagenarian leader responsible for the party's debacle at the polls as well for the fact that it is being deserted by its staunchest supporters, the youth and the working classes.

But CPI(M) leader and former chief minister E.K.Nayanar stood up for his aged colleague. "Namboodiripad is one of the greatest intellectual giants the country has ever produced," he said. "There is no question of him retiring." Nayanar was contemptuous of the argument that the party's top leadership was "too old". "Ho Chi Minh led the armed struggle in Vietnam when he was 75," he pointed out. "This theory of youngsters taking over the party is unscientific and pseudo-left."

Nevertheless, pressure on the old guard began to mount soon after it became obvious that the CPI(M) was being swept off by something of a Rajiv wave. In the round of fault-finding that followed last week at the party headquarters, Namboodiripad found himself the target of much of the attack. His fellow partymen decided in retrospect that Nomboodiripad's election tactics were all wrong. He had not been able to tell the electorate who would be prime minister if the opposition parties came to power; he had said the CPI(M) would not be party to a coalition government at the Centre; and worse, he had never taken a stand against the Hindu Front —and that might have led to the consolidation of Christian and Muslim votes for the Congress(I). "Namboodiripad by his utterances helped the Congress(I) to get all the seats they contested in Kerala," said Vayalar Ravi, state home minister, somewhat smugly.

Many partymen hold Namboodiripad responsible for the CPI(M)'s debacle as well as for the fact that it is being deserted by its staunchest supporters, the youth and the working classes.

Trivandrum provided a prime example of the CPI(M)'s dithering. They had supported DMKP's Nilalohitadasa Nadar in a triangular contest with the Congress(I)'s Abraham Charles and the Hindu Front's Kerala Varma. The CPI(M) gloated—rather prematurely—that with the Hindu Front in the fray, the Congress(I) would lose out on the Hindu votes in the constituency. On the contrary, a consolidation of Christian and Muslim votes saw Charles winning by over 50,000 votes—and even the Hindu Front candidate polled over a lakh votes, the highest ever for his party's candidates in Kerala. "The communists' politics and policies have become irrelevant in the present context," says Kerala's leading political commentator K.R. Chummar.

In fact, the Hindu Front presents the biggest threat to the communist movement in the state. Hard core CPI(M) sympathisers have evidently been won over by the Front which, although it lost all the four seats it contested, nevertheless received unprecedented support. Says P. Govindan Pillai of the CPI(M): "The support the Hindu Front received in a state where voting has always been political should make politicians sit up and take notice."

What was most shocking was the outright defeat of all the sitting MP's of the party, including politburo member E. Balanandan from Kasargod, the cradle of communism in Kerala and long considered a safe seat. Equally shattering was the defeat at Alleppey of Susheela Gopalan, widow of the legendary A.K. Gopalan, who had won the same seat with the highest majority in the state in 1980.

The only consolation for the CPI(M) was the surprise win of Suresh Kurup from Kottayam, the Christian bastion. Kurup, who at 26, is now the youngest member of Parliament, charmed the electorate with his clean image and dynamism. He certainly worked hard at it: in a move that no orthodox Marxist would care to adopt, Kurup personally met every bishop in the constituency and even paid courtesy calls to powerful anti-communist newspaper establishments at Kottayam. It paid off. "Traditionally we are Kerala Congress supporters," said Varghese Thomas, a businessman, "but this time the youth and dynamism of Suresh Kurup made us vote for him above religious considerations."

Kurup too sees his victory as a vote for youth. "My victory is a tremendous boost for youngsters in the state. We will revive the communist movement in the state," he says. A.C. Shanmughdas, a Congress(S) MLA who is close to the CPI(M) leadership, says: "The Left Democratic Front should use its defeat to clear out its ideological differences and find a confident voice to inspire the youngsters in the state." Shanmughdas's advice also implies a warning: the results of the three by-elections being held late this month may well decide the possibility of mid-term elections to the Assembly, and give the communists, their last chance to recover lost ground.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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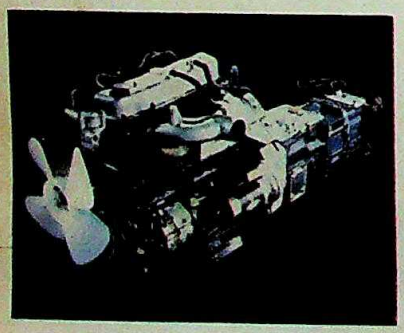

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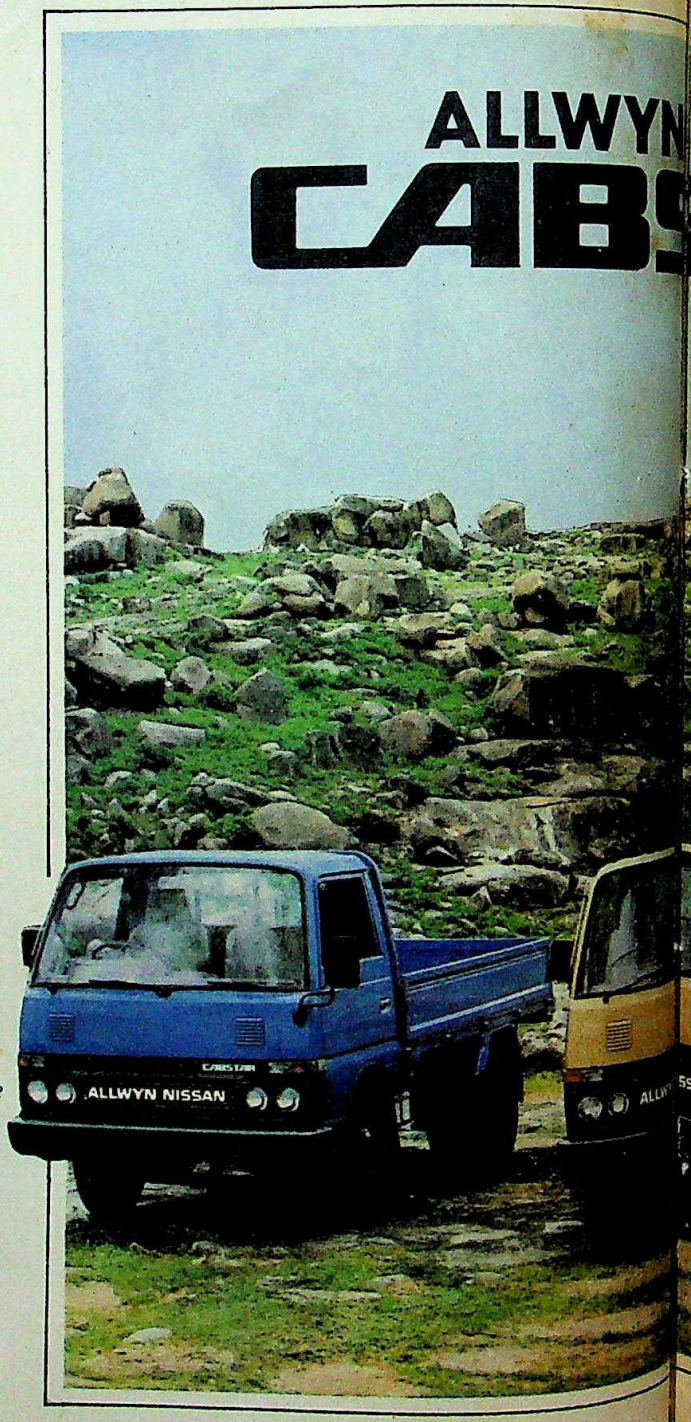

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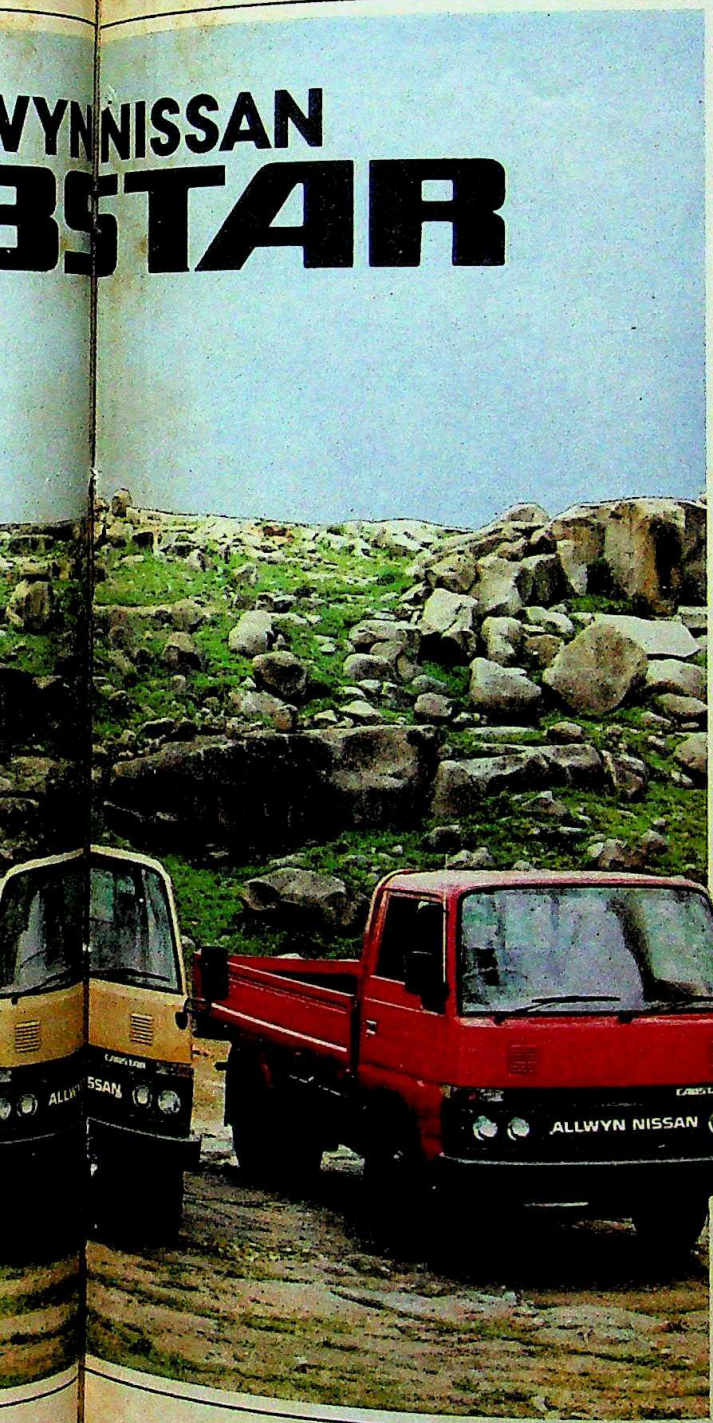

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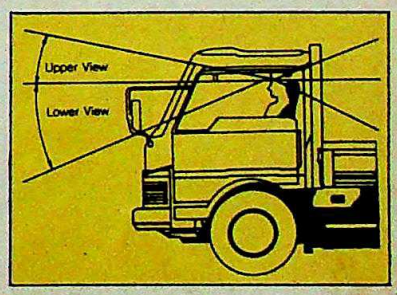

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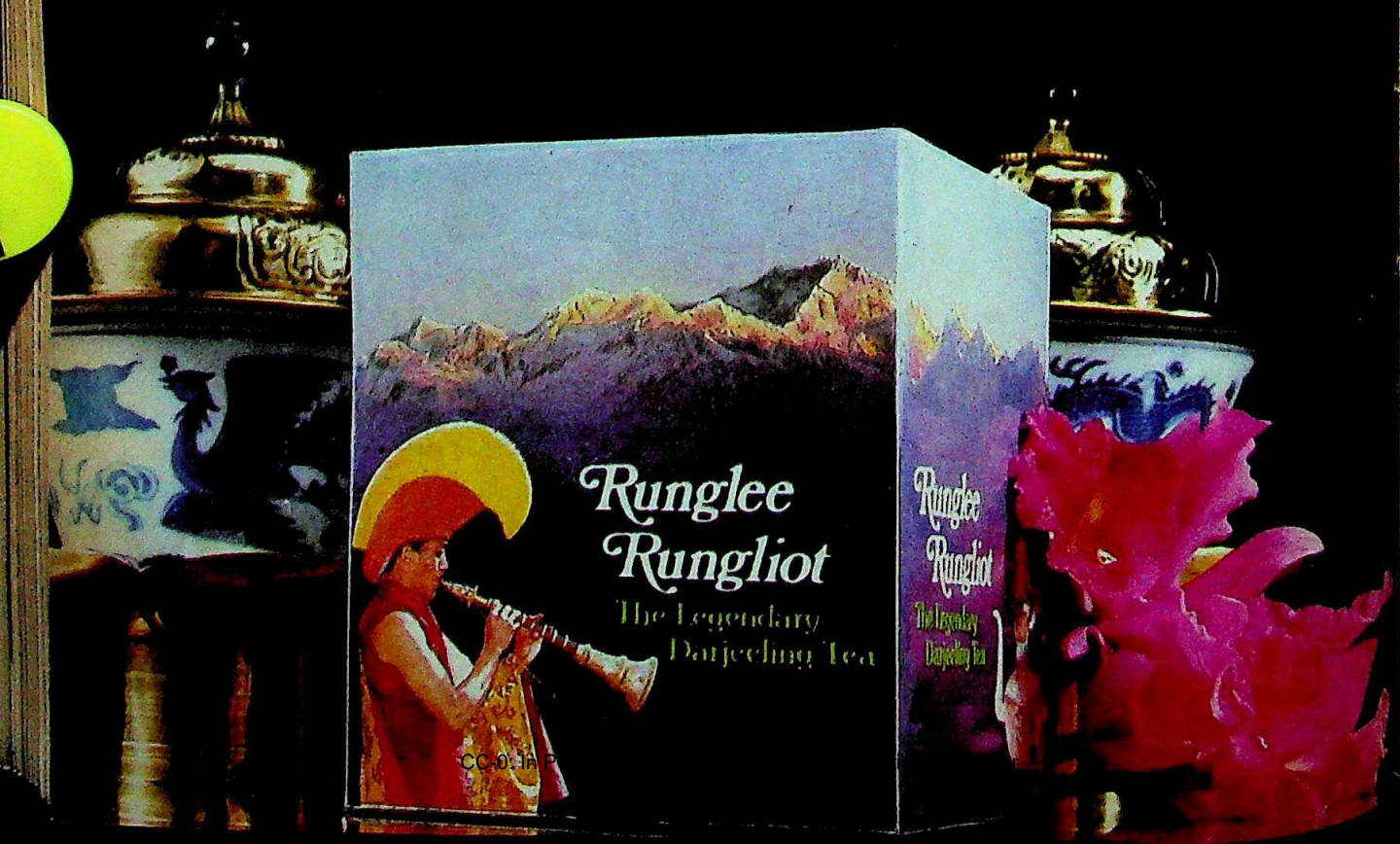

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BIHAR

The Victory War

THE TWO Bihar Congress(I) arch-antagonists are at it again. To see Jagannath Mishra and Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh —and their supporters —slug it out, anyone would think their party suffered a humiliating electoral defeat instead of a superlative, historic win. Unfortunately the party lost six seats in Bihar. And that was enough cause for the chief minister's men and the former chief minister's men to start a slanging match about "manoeuvring".

In focus was the sensitive seat of Darbhanga, where the Congress(I) candidate, former Union minister of state Harinath Mishra was defeated by the DMKP's Vijay Kumar Mishra—who happens to be Jagannath Mishra's nephew. "Dr Jagannath Mishra not only manoeuvred the defeat of Harinath Mishra, he organised booth-capturing and used his black money to get his nephew elected," alleged Darbhanga District Congress Committee(I) chief Harish Chandra Jha, who demanded his expulsion.

There's more to the Bihar shenanigans than just the defeat of a few candidates. According to party sources, the defeats, particularly that of Harinath Mishra who was once a serious contender for chief ministership, symbolised the fight for supremacy between Jagannath Mishra and the Chandrashekhar Singh-Nagendra Jha (education minister) combine, specially in the Mithila region from where Jagannath Mishra hails. An earlier statement signed by 51 legislators stating that Nagendra Jha and Harinath Mishra had worked for the ouster of Jagannath Mishra had greatly angered the people of Mithila—of which Darbhanga is a part. Harinath Mishra's defeat, say the former chief minister's supporters, is the "revenge" of the people of Mithila. Says a derisive Jagannath Mishra supporter, Kamalnath Singh Thakur: "It is a shameless cover-up game being played by Nagendra Jha, who was the election-in-charge of Harinath Mishra. Jha has become so unpopular in the area," he adds, "that if he's given the party ticket this time, he will lose his assembly seat. In a bid to divert the high command's attention, he is indulging in gimmicks."

Nagendra Jha has reason to worry about the defeat, because of Rajiv Gandhi's warning that sitting MLA's would be denied party tickets for the assembly polls if the party's candidates for the Lok Sabha polls lost in their assembly segments. Harinath Mishra lost in all the six assembly segments of Darbhanga constituency, including Manigachi which Nagendra Jha represents.

K.M. KISHAN

Jagannath Mishra (left) with Chandrashekhar Singh: short-lived cooperation

Another alarming signal for the chief minister's men in this defeat is that at least in Mithila, the Jagannath Mishra factor is still strong. DCC(I) general secretary Tilaknath Mishra explains that the chief minister erred in seeking in his election speeches a "vote for Harinath Mishra to strengthen the hands of Nagendra Jha"—the predominantly Brahmin voters interpreted this as a challenge to their favourite, Jagannath Mishra. For his part, the powerful Brahmin dissident carefully avoided campaigning in Darbhanga.

Party leaders have now begun to recall Jagannath Mishra's rather ominous statement three months ago that his commitment to maintain unity within the party and cooperate with Chandrashekhar Singh would last until the Lok Sabha elections. He himself has made no further comment on this, but his supporters have already begun lobbying for a change of leadership before the polls. They say Chandrashekhar Singh's "bureaucratic image" and the lack of coordination between the party and the Government would mar the Congress(I)'s chances of winning the assembly elections.

The chief minister himself had bad news when he made a department-wise assessment of plan performance. Not only did he discover irregularities, he found to his dismay that some departments had not even managed to use 45 per cent of the funds in nine months' time. Mishra supporters naturally flaunted this as the Government's "record non-performance". While admitting that Singh had indeed tried hard to meet his commitments only to be handicapped by a corrupt and inefficient administrative machinery, a senior leader said: "Such a poor record would not only invite the wrath of Rajiv Gandhi but also result in a drastic cut in the allocation for the next financial year."

Meanwhile, reports reached the state party headquarters last week that the high command had begun conducting a secret inquiry into the role of those leaders who had allegedly worked against party candidates in the Lok Sabha elections. Pradesh Congress Committee(I) chief Bindeshwari Dubey also sent a confidential circular to all DCC(I) presidents seeking their reports on the role of party leaders and workers in their areas. But these developments have only fuelled the infighting in the party.

The chief minister, apart from being caught in the battles and shows of strength, also faces another problem: with four of his ministerial colleagues sent to the Eighth Lok Sabha, another reshuffle of the Cabinet is on the cards. But experience has shown such a move only creates more enemies within the party. No respite seems likely for Chandrashekhar Singh, at least in the near future.

—FARZAND AHMED

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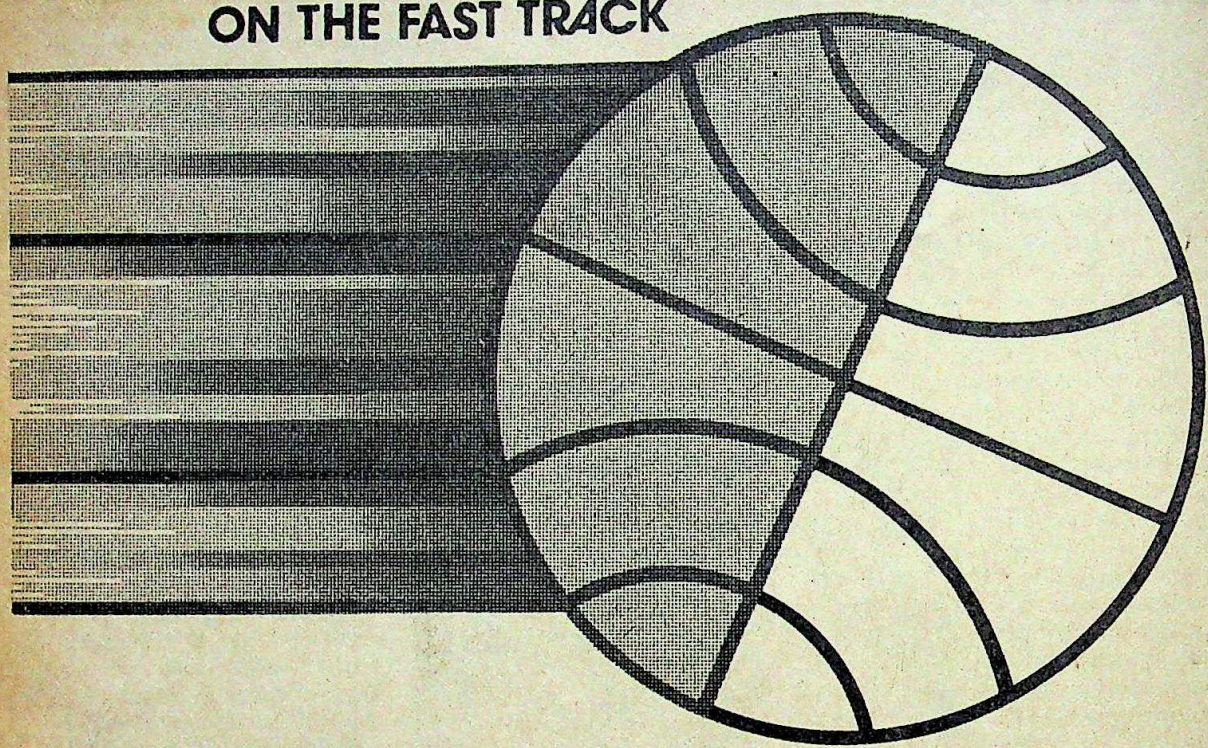

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MANIPUR

Prospects of Peace

THREE decades of insurgency in the remote north-eastern state of Manipur appears to have only strengthened the people's resolve to remain in the national mainstream. This was clear from the unexpected performance of the Congress(I) in the recent elections. For the first time since the formation of the state in 1972, the Congress(I) won 38 of the 58 seats declared, a majority no other party had ever achieved in the 60-member Assembly. Apart from this, both the Lok Sabha seats in the state also went to the Congress(I).

With this outright majority, and a host of independents clamouring to be admitted, the Congress(I) had no problem in forming a ministry. Last fortnight Rishang Keishing was reappointed chief minister by the high command emissary Hiteswar Saikia.

Most relieved by the electoral verdict was Keishing, for whom defeat would have meant living as a fugitive from the vengeful insurgent group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). With this solid support behind him the chief minister appeared determined to go all out for the NSCN with army help.

In his first press conference after assuming office, Keishing declared that "the Naga rebels would be treated as criminals". So confident was the chief minister that he even suggested that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act imposed in the state three years ago could be revoked as the situation had returned to "near normal".

Keishing seems keen on diffusing as many problems as possible. Perhaps realising that the electoral victory of the ex-leader of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), N. Bisheswar Singh, could pose a problem in future if not handled properly, Keishing allowed the ex-PLA leader's release from prison. Bisheswar, who has been in jail since his capture in 1981, continues to be an immensely popular figure in Manipur, judging from the spontaneous celebrations in Imphal that followed his election victory. At the moment, Keishing has claimed that Bisheswar wants to join the Congress(I) but whether the PLA leader will go the whole hog in asking his former comrades to lay down their arms is not known.

In the hilly Naga-dominated regions of Manipur too, insurgency shows no signs of abating. Although Keishing, himself a Thangkul Naga, won from a constituency in the middle of rebel country, his partymen did not fare all that well. Of the 19 assembly seats in the hills only nine were won by the ruling party, while the rest went to independents. The Congress(I)'s main success was in the plains where it had won only four seats (out of a total of 13) in the last assembly elections. All the same, Keishing can take some comfort from the fact that there are indications that the Nagas want peace and a government capable of containing the militant rebels.

Rishang Keishing

Bisheswar Singh

It's not clear whether Singh will now abjure insurgency and offer a Laldenga-type peace offer. Neither has Keishing agreed to grant him amnesty.

The Congress(I) also managed to retain the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat which covers the hill areas of the state. In Ukhrul district, the hotbed of NSCN activity, a record 70 per cent of voters braved the icy winter wind to cast their votes most of which went to the Congress(I). "Many ordinary villagers here are disgusted with the rebels and want peace," said a young second-lieutenant in charge of a lonely army outpost in the hills of Ukhrul. The growing unpopularity of the NSCN, according to the army, is the practice of forcible "tax" collection from the wretchedly poor villagers. According to one estimate, the NSCN collected as much as Rs 30 lakh during 1982-83.

"Most Nagas have very large families and cannot afford to pay taxes but usually pay up," says the army officer. Refusal to pay the taxes or shelter the rebels means execution, which explains the killing of as many as 88 people by the NSCN in the past few years. The disenchantment with the rebels is also proved by the disastrous showing of NSCN candidates in the district council polls held last year. But nobody here can dismiss the armed terror of the rebels and even Keishing is reported to have sent a peace delegation to the leader Muivasn Tangkhul before the elections. The chief minister had denied this report but had admitted that the "people of Ukhrul have sent five churchmen across the border to meet the NSCN and start peace talks".

The threat of continuing violence is not restricted to the hills of Manipur. According to recent reports collected by the army, the course of insurgent activity in the plains will depend not so much on Bisheswar Singh as on the present PLA chief, Temba Singh. About 90 PLA activists along with Temba Singh are currently undergoing training in guerrilla warfare in the Kachin area of Burma with the NSCN's help. Insurgency may become more difficult to combat if the NSCN's "foreign secretary", Angelus Shimray, succeeds in uniting the six extremist groups in the region: the NSCN, PLA, Federal Government of Nagaland, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kangleipak Communist Party and the Mizo National Front.

While insurgency will continue to plague Keishing he has been spared challenges within his party. Former Congress(I) chief minister R.K. Dorendra, and deputy chief minister I. Tompok Singh, both of whom had aspirations for the chief ministership have been neutralised by the announcement that Keishing was the "unanimous and democratic" choice. The other parties, notably the Manipur People's Party, the CPI, and the Janata have also been humbled, giving Keishing a clear mandate for restoring peace in this strife-torn state. —INDRANIL BANERJIE

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MADHYA PRADESH

Painful Indecision

MORE than a month after the Bhopal gas tragedy, the problems it has thrown up are still far from being resolved. Over the past fortnight the complicated issues were taken to the streets with various citizen groups organising demonstrations to protest the inadequacy of relief measures undertaken by the Government. While Chief Minister Arjun Singh dismissed the demonstrations with the comment "it is distressing that people are trying to play politics in relation to even this issue," he did meet a 28-member delegation of the Jaharili Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha on January 4 and address the demonstrators. His assurances, however, failed to impress the Morcha representatives and their dharna outside Singh's residence continues. In New Delhi last fortnight, the new Rajiv Gandhi ministry was quick to show its concern for Bhopal victims by sending the Minister of State for Law and Justice, H.R. Bharadwaj, for an on-the-spot survey of the various ramifications. Bharadwaj on his return announced that the Attorney General K. Parasaran was being sent to the US to consult legal opinion on the maintainability of action and jurisdiction of American courts over charges to be filed by gas victims at state expense.

Not withstanding such signs of hope for the gas victims, it is still unclear why the lack of direction still persists. The dilly-dallying is best illustrated by the functioning of the 36-member state level relief and rehabilitation committee, set up on December 5 with Singh at its head. Despite its two meetings—on December 6 and 27—it has yet to arrive at any major decision except to set up two seven-member subcommittees. The financial relief subcommittee with Bhopal Mayor R.K. Bisariya as convenor decided that ex gratia payment to victims would be made after a survey and that the director of veterinary services would undertake a survey on dead cattle. Nothing concrete appears to have been done on both counts. The rehabilitation subcommittee convened by the chief minister's wife, Saroj Singh, decided in its only meeting that milk would be distributed free to children and lactating mothers—the only step of any consequence.

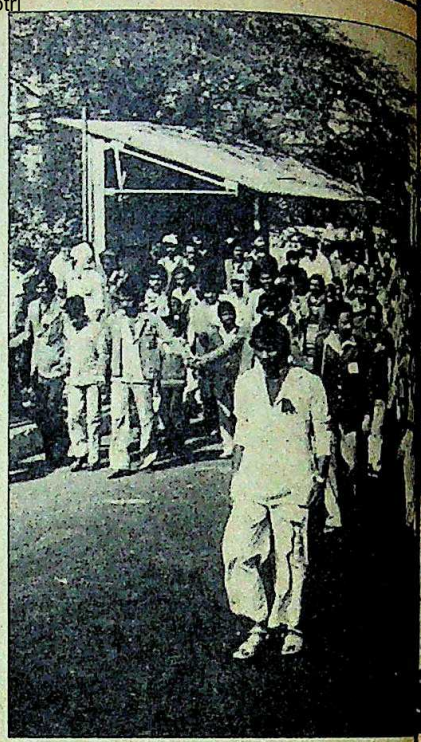
In every area of government the lethargy is evident and the only major decisions relate to the distribution of free milk and ration. Apart from 11,000 litres of milk being given out per day, the Government announced that all families in the affected areas of the old city would be given 3 kg of wheat and rice per unit, on their ration card, for December. The benefit was later extended to January—and 12 kg per unit—and for all slum-dwellers of the city, including new Bhopal, because of the severe dislocation in city life over the last month. By January 6, over 850 tonnes of wheat and 410 tonnes of rice had already been distributed through 180 centres. Edible oil and sugar are also being distributed.

But the logistics created problems too. Nearly, 21,000 temporary ration cards had to be made almost overnight for residents who had none. Officials agree that many bogus applications had been entertained, but then the burden of work and short notice left them no option.

The single biggest ground for resentment among the survivors is the delayed distribution of ex gratia by the Government, which had announced that Rs 10,000 would be given to the heir of every dead, Rs 2,000 to those seriously affected and Rs 100 to Rs 1,000 to those slightly affected. In its initial panic the Government decided to rush the payment and Rs 36.67 lakh was paid in cash as ex gratia to 5,724 victims.

The haphazard manner was clearly a mistake, and within four days the Government suspended the operation because it had the potential of creating serious law and order problems. It was declared that the disbursement would be resumed on December 12—and payment would be by cheque—only after a quick house to house survey of the affected localities.

But it remained suspended well into January when payments to the relatives of the dead were resumed. According to informed sources, no decision could be taken on who would take responsibility for what was clearly a thankless job: neither the Finance Department nor the district authorities wanted to assume the burden of sorting the really needy from the avaricious who were sure to claim that they too were affected. Therefore, payments to them have been withheld owing to lack of positive identification.



The key questions remain: Who is an "affected" person? Which is the "seriously affected area"? Says an official: "Every local leader claims that his area is affected. In a sense that is true because most of the city's population was either medically affected or dislocated during Operation Faith, if not earlier. But does that mean that the Government will pay ex gratia to each of Bhopal's 8 lakh citizens?"

The authorities are unwilling to take a stand. If they identify the slightly and seriously affected they will be stuck with demands for money from a huge population which they cannot satisfy. And with the postponed parliamentary election due on January 28, they are just sitting out the problem for the time being. But the net result is that the really needy, many of whom are unable to resume work because of illness, are not getting their just dues.

Argues Vibhuti Jha, a local lawyer, and a Morcha leader: "Surely there is no dispute about the fact that everyone in the settlements immediately around the factory inhaled large quantities of methyl isocyanate (MIC). Why isn't everyone in these areas getting Rs 2,000 per head as per the administration's promise?" The Government considers this demand unreasonable but can offer no solution of its own either. It has only agreed to settle the ex gratia claims of the 1,404 officially declared dead.

Providing relief to the owners of the 1,776 cattle and goats killed by MIC poses similar problems. In principle the admini-

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KAMLESH SAHNI

A protest demonstration in Bhopal: fighting lethargy

stration has agreed to compensate them but according to one official "corporators of various wards are making such exaggerated claims that it is no longer possible to determine the truth from the lies". And, therefore, this money isn't being released either.

If identifying the genuinely needy from the bogus poses a problem to officials handling the distribution of relief for material loss, officials in the Health Department have a problem many times that size. They are yet unable to detail how precisely tabs will be kept on the condition of virtually thousands of people who have inhaled MIC. The documentation of these cases is essential not only for medical reasons but from the legal point of view as well. The extent of injury suffered is a vital issue in any case of compensation be it in an Indian or an American court. As of now, the only thing definitely known is that the lungs and eyes have been damaged. But in each case, the extent of injury will have to be quantified: merely arguing that a person was admitted to hospital following MIC poisoning will not do in court.

Already, only a month after the tragedy, government officers are unable to distinguish a seriously affected victim from a normal person or a slightly affected one. How then, with the existing limited documentation, will victims establish in a court of law several months or years later that their illness is the result of MIC and not something else? Says 30-year-old Garish Sarin, a California-based attorney: "Carbide is going to use everything it has to disprove claims. If a person has no medical proof, he may as well say goodbye to compensation."

PREMJI Srivastava, secretary of the State Legal Aid Board, while willing to talk of the rush of people to fill forms for the case which the Madhya Pradesh Government has decided to file in the US, seems to treat the issue of medical documentation as of no consequence currently: "Our first priority is to fill the forms. We can deal with the medical problem when it arises." But later may be too late.

There is another danger. American lawyers may hire doctors to record the medical condition of their clients but it is going to mean huge expenses to cater to so many thousands. The fear is that they may consider it a viable proposition only to fight cases of death and the very seriously affected, which may mean that partly affected people are left high and dry.

The Government's extraordinary attitude of secrecy right from day one has led to needless speculation, rumours and doubts. Whether it was the abrupt closure of schools and colleges without assigning reasons last month before Operation Faith or the manner of neutralising MIC; whether it was the question of the quantity of MIC to be neutralised or the nature of air, water and plant safety tests; whether it was the names of the dead on the official list or details of the manner in which ex gratia had been distributed, very little information was forthcoming.

Also curious was the state Government's anxiety at the writ petition filed at the high court in Jabalpur on behalf of a Bhopal citizen, by lawyer Rakesh Shrouti, on December 16. The petition sought that the Government be directed not to neutralise the entire quantity of MIC and a sample be preserved for the commission of enquiry that has been set up to go into the tragedy. It also asked that the equipment should not be tampered with.

The high court vacation judge B.M. Lal directed that 15 kg of MIC be put in three containers and put under the custody of the district and sessions judge at Bhopal. On December 19, however, Union Carbide and the state Government moved an application arguing that it was not feasible, indeed dangerous, to preserve this amount of MIC. The judge modified the earlier order and reduced the quantity to 1,500 gms. Union Carbide and the Government moved fresh applications stating that even such a quantity could not be safely stored. At the final hearing, on January 4, a division bench comprising Justice Faizamuddin and Justice M.D. Bhatt directed that not only the quantity of MIC be preserved for the inquiry commission, but also ordered a re-analysis of the chemical. The justices ruled that while the re-analysis would take place under the direct supervision of CSIR chief Dr Vardarajan, a scientist of the petitioner's choice could also be present. The anxiety of a government which once thought nothing of storing nearly 90 tonnes of MIC, over being required to preserve even a sample of the toxic chemical, is seen as something suspect by many.

If the Government is faced with a problem of credibility it has only itself to blame. At no point has it bothered to take the public into confidence. Though the chief minister asserts that "we are not tinkering with the problem," nothing has been done to rehabilitate the families of those dead or those too ill. It awaits the results of a detailed survey being conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, along with other organisations, of about 25,000 families. Mrs Nirmala Buch, secretary of the state level relief and rehabilitation committee, says that it will be completed by January end. But again, it may take some time before the findings are tabulated. Meanwhile, the survivors, it would seem, will simply have to learn to wait.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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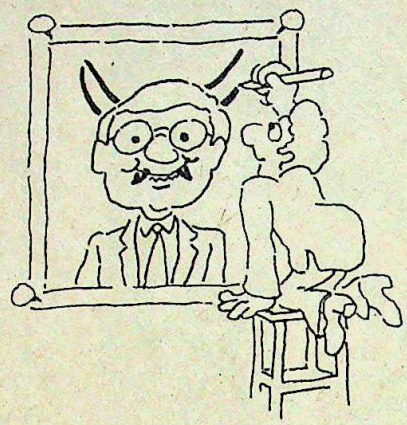

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DELHI RIOTS

The Crucial Probe

TEN WEEKS after the bloody riots in Delhi that left over 2,000 Sikhs dead, the accountability, or lack of it, for the massacre still continues to haunt the future of a majority of the capital's Sikh population, 2,000 of whom are still living in refugee camps. Many of them see their only glimmer of hope in the team led by Additional Commissioner of Police Ved Marwah, appointed recently to probe into the riots. However, the fact that the list of those guilty of instigating or actively participating in the riots would undoubtedly include a number of police officials has endowed the Marwah report with unusual interest and significance.

Over the last two months, at least 1,000 Sikhs have testified before the team and in most cases have alleged open police connivance. The team has also been inquiring into the reasons why some police stations refused to register cases and Station House Officers (SHO's) have been asked for explanations.

Marwah, a quiet, efficient officer, however, appears confident that the inquiry report, due in the first week of February, will be an independent and fair assessment. "Our probe will cover all aspects of the riots but whether or not the report will be made public is still to be decided," he says. Both Marwah and Police Commissioner S.S. Jog have a reputation for being tough disciplinarians and current indications are that the team will not succumb to political pressure or whitewash their colleagues. If that does come true, indications are that at least 10 senior police officers will be indicted for negligence or for openly conniving with the rioters.

According to sources, serious charges could be brought against one additional commissioner of police, two deputy commissioners, three assistant commissioners (one of whom has already been transferred) and six SHOs, three of whom have already been issued transfer orders. So far, in connection with the riots, only one police officer, the SHO of Kalyanpuri, has been charged under a criminal case.

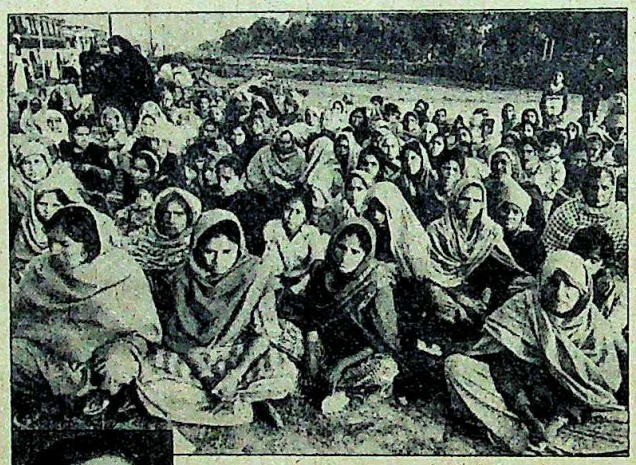
The probe team has considerable evidence in the form of eye-witness accounts by victims which indicate that:

► A deputy commissioner on duty literally disappeared from his post when the riots broke out.

► In Delhi cantonment, where 300 Sikhs were massacred, the police control room was informed as late as November 7 by the local police that only 3 people had died.

► In Trilokpuri, there was a criminally fatal delay on the part of the police to reach the riot spots.

► Innumerable eye-witness accounts all over Delhi have charged the police with actively participating in the looting of shops.



Widows of Sikhs killed in the riots protesting in Delhi against harassment and (inset) Marwah: credibility question

Marwah concedes that much of the information the team is gathering has been garnered from reports in the media which were found to be usually accurate. The team, however, has gone about its task in as fair a manner as possible by writing to individual policemen suspected of complicity and asking for their comments. So far, the answers have mainly been evasive, pointing instead to the limited force available. Several policemen have, however, complained that there was a lack of direction on the part of senior officials as well as a reluctance to accept responsibility in the event of the police being forced to open fire on the mobs.

But the main problem facing any probe of this kind will undoubtedly be the involvement of prominent ruling party politicians in the riots and whether or not they will get off scot-free. The inquiries as well as media reports have established the role of one sitting MP and prominent supporters of at least two other former Congress(I) MP's. But officers connected with the probe express doubts as to whether those named will actually be indicted in the final report, especially since many of the displaced Sikhs still claim that their lives are being threatened.

Following the appointment of Marwah, 375 cases have been registered against people involved in the rioting. Of these, the largest number, 131, were registered in south Delhi. But this seemed hardly adequate considering that almost all the 3,000 people arrested after the riots were released on bail or merely with a warning. What is worse is that the arrest records show that the areas which witnessed the worst rioting saw the fewest arrests. In Kalyanpuri, only two stray cases were registered while only three cases each were registered in Sultanpuri and Mongolpuri. Little wonder that 2,000 Sikhs from these localities are still refusing to leave the sanctuary of their three camps.

The Sikhs are also upset at the slow pace of compensation. Delhi administration officials claim that till the first week of January, Rs 4.3 crore had been paid as compensation to those who lost family members or had their dwellings destroyed. They also say that nationalised banks have disbursed Rs 22.71 crore at a concessional rate of interest of 12.5 per cent to industrial units destroyed in the riots.

Sikh spokesmen, however, say that any number of Sikhs are still to receive compensation and many others have yet to file their claims. Officials claim that they have to go slow because of the unusually high number of false claims being lodged, as high as 55 per cent according to official figures. But ultimately, it is the Marwah probe that will represent the biggest test of the Government's credibility as far as the Sikhs are concerned as well as the restoration of their feeling of security.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

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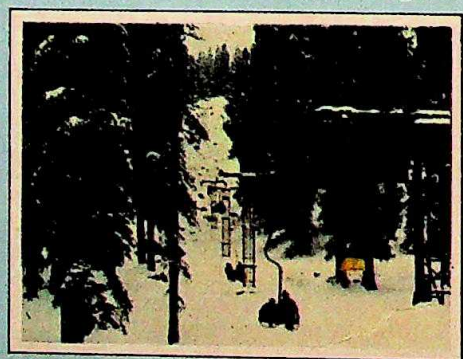

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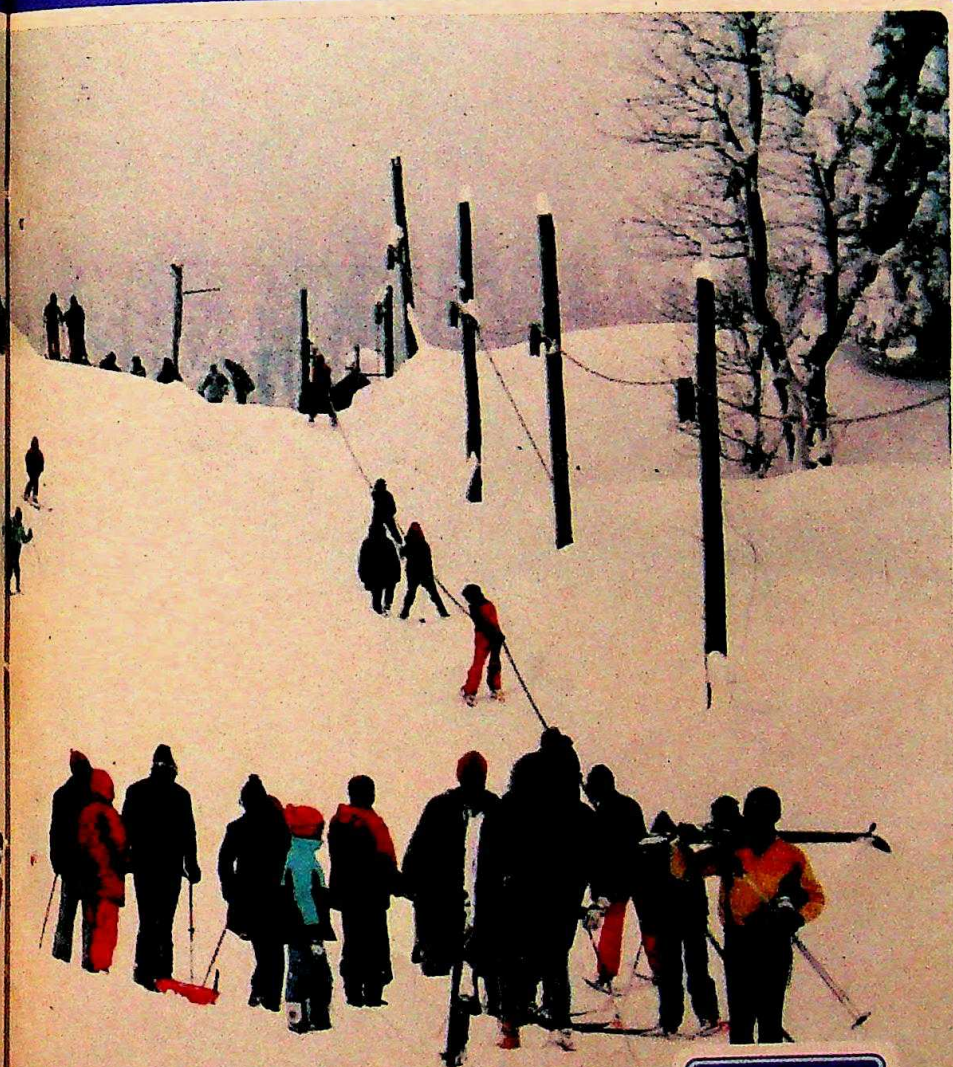

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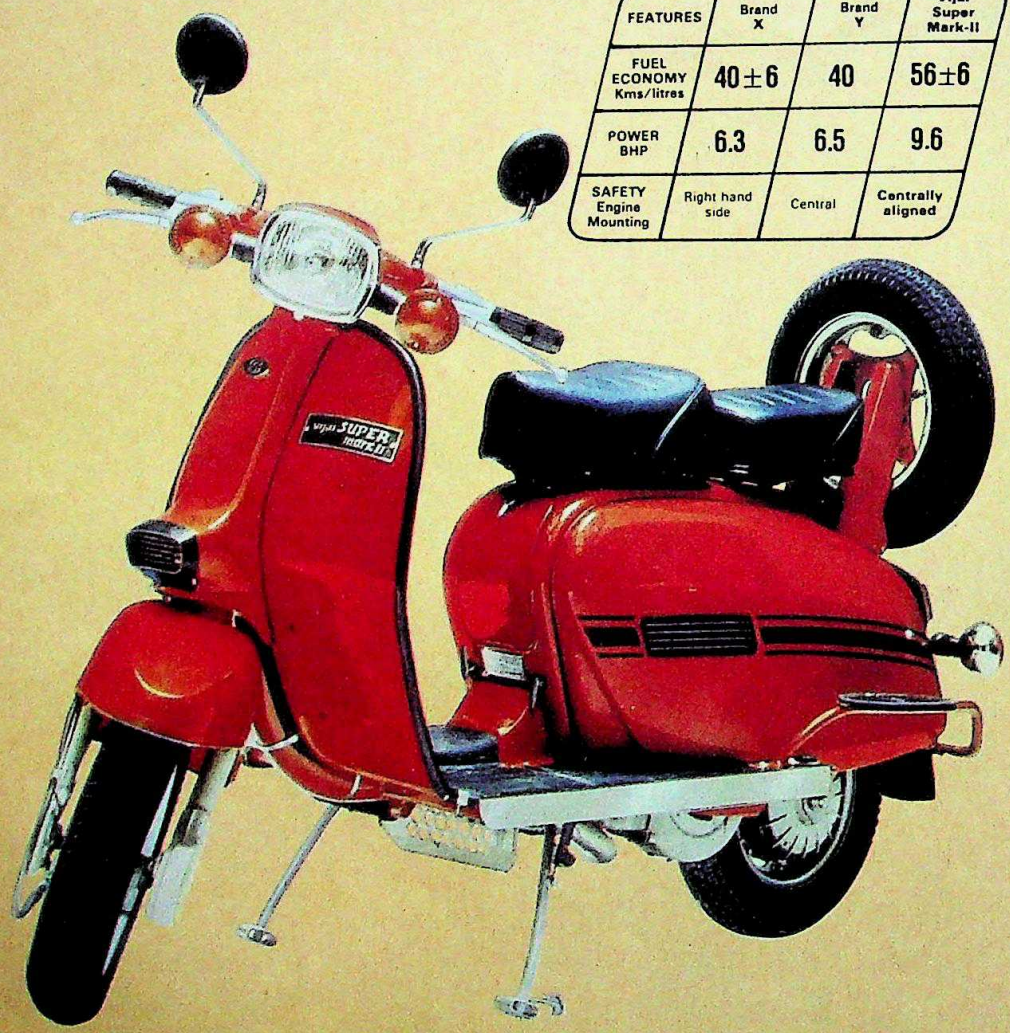

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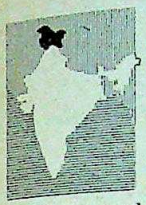


IF IT was meant to divert public attention from the humiliating defeat of the National Conference (Khalida)-Congress(I) combine in Jammu & Kashmir, it didn't succeed. Last fortnight, when Devi Dass Thakur, the dapper deputy chief minister released a 133-page "White Paper" on the Farooq Government's alleged objectional activities while in power, it failed to generate the expected public condemnation of Farooq. The charges substantiated by the report were the same old chestnuts pulled repeatedly out by the Congress(I) and the NC(K) during their campaigning in the state. The response to it was that it was nothing but "witch-hunting" by the state Government, clinging precariously to power.

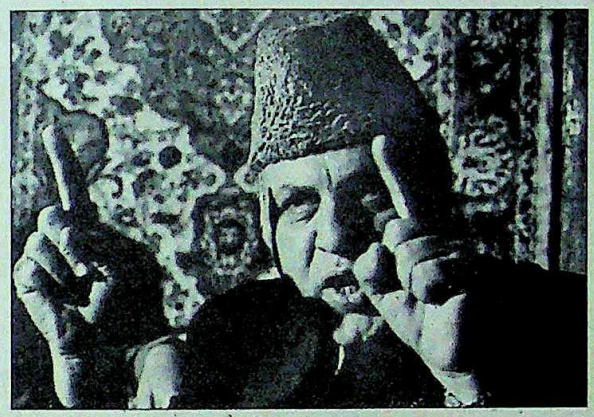
The responses of both the Congress(I) and Farooq himself to it were typical: if Srikant Verma, the new AICC(I) general secretary exulted: "It has vindicated our earlier stand that the Farooq Government was hob-nobbing with anti-national elements," Farooq himself treated it with disdain: "I am prepared to face the gallows if any of the charges are proved in court. The people of Kashmir have already given a verdict on their baseless insinuations."

The Thakur panel scrutinised over 4,000 government files before coming to its conclusions, indicting the former chief minister on several counts including security of the state, communal harmony, national integrity, abuse of official position, favouritism and financial irregularities. Some of the charges:

- the Farooq government had adopted a too-lenient attitude toward Sikh and Muslim extremists in the valley;
- it had released on parole all detenus who were allegedly involved in 29 cases of bomb explosions in the state;
- it had misappropriated funds in buying a helicopter and a fleet of trucks from a private agency and indulged in gross financial indiscipline.

But clearly the panel's most important concern was with Farooq's alleged relationship with the extremists in the valley. In fact, even before Farooq's ouster, the late prime minister Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had cried themselves hoarse about Farooq "protecting" Sikh extremists.

The report indicts the previous government for, among other things, revoking the detention of 31 alleged antinational activists on purely technical grounds. It says their detention orders were not confirmed by the advisory boards within the stipulated time, because inexplicably enough, the district authorities did not put up the cases for confirmation. "Circumstances suggest that Dr Farooq Abdullah and his government encouraged the anti-national elements by conniving at their activities, and as a result, a serious threat to the security and integrity of the nation has been posed," says the report. But it goes on to make a suprising comment on the defections and the toppling of Farooq's government: "If the members of the Assembly belonging to the National Conference had not realised the threat and had not withdrawn their support from the Government headed by Dr Farooq Abdullah, a very grave situation would have arisen."



Farooq (above) and Thakur: paper ploy

Since the G.M. Shah Government's primary objective was to expose Farooq's "anti-national activities", the panel made only cursory inquiries into the other charges tabulated. But the timing of the report's release is significant. The decision was taken in New Delhi last month when Chief Minister Shah and Governor Jagmohan flew into the capital to meet the prime minister, Home Minister S.B. Chavan and other Home Ministry officials. Ever since the December polls which clearly emphasised Farooq's popularity in the sensitive state, the deposed chief minister has been urging the Congress(I) to withdraw its support to the Shah Government and call for assembly elections. The Centre opted for an offensive against Farooq in making the report public.

In fact, state Congress(I) MLA's complained that senior pro-Farooq civil and police officials were trying to sabotage the report because it would disclose their involvement in the murky dealings. Evidently Shah agreed with them. Soon after his return from New Delhi, he sacked about 10 officials and ordered a major reshuffle of the state civil and police set-up. Among the officials affected were Director General of Police, Peer Ghulam Shah, and Deputy Inspector General A.M. Watali, who were transferred. With these "pro-Farooq" officials out, the Government strove to expedite the report.

Politically, such a move was of tremendous tactical value to Shah, especially in the face of Farooq's obviously conciliatory stance towards Rajiv Gandhi. Even after the parliamentary elections, Farooq had offered his cooperation to the young prime minister. Indeed, even for the Congress(I), a rapprochement with the former chief minister, who has shown himself to be invincible in the valley, would make sense, and several party leaders had advocated this. However Shah has evidently been able to prevail upon the Central leadership to stand by him and rebuff any advances from his rival. But with the first round of the electoral battle lost, the state Government report seems unlikely to serve much purpose beyond burdening some dusty shelf in the state's archives.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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INDIAN ARMY

Asking for More

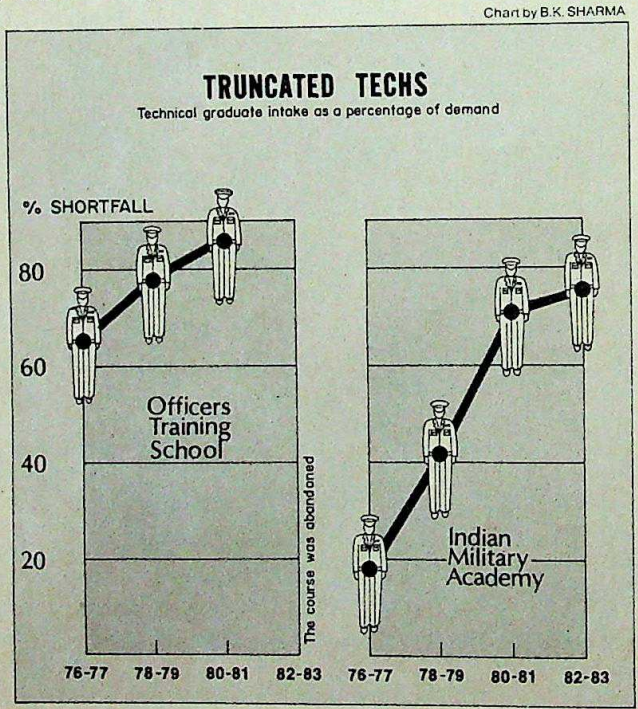
UNKNOWN to the world outside, the Indian army, over the past few months, has been engaged in unconventional warfare. There are no gallantry awards at stake, nor are the men in olive-green fighting for territorial gains. It's all, in a way, for a few hundred rupees more. As a senior officer summed it up: "It's a tussle against the bureaucracy that has an inbuilt resistance to the army getting its due and the popular prejudice that merely putting a man in uniform makes him patriotic and keen to sacrifice his life for the country. All we want is an adequate cash compensation for the work we soldiers do."

The army's concept of "adequate compensation" has been explained in detail in a 326-page document submitted to the Fourth National Pay Commission now sitting in the capital's Vigyan Bhavan annexe. Gaining exclusive details from it, INDIA TODAY found that the army's case has undoubtedly been argued strongly in the deftly drafted document. And even if the demand for a starting basic pay of at least Rs 2,200 per month plus allowances for a second lieutenant and the maximum basic pay of Rs 8,800 for a lieutenant-general raises eyebrows, there is no denying that steps need to be taken urgently to remove the army's personnel problems. Whether that can be done without an above 100 per cent increase in the Defence Ministry's wage bill is another matter.

The case for drastic hikes is based on the argument of increasing shortfalls in the vital arms of the country's land forces. Based on figures that sound nothing short of alarming, the army argues that it is the lack of financial reward that is increasingly keeping good, capable men away from the armed forces, leaving various units and specialised arms to operate at starvation levels (*see charts*). Also, there is a worrisome increase in the number of officers and men seeking early retirement. The grimness of the situation can be gauged from the following examples:

► Of the troops selected for training nearly 10 per cent are unable to join the army ultimately due to various reasons. But as many as 37.5 per cent don't get into uniform because they choose desertion to the harsh military life. The authors of the army document, the adjutant-general's branch, blame it on "quick disillusionment" of men "sucked into the army enamoured by the prospect of a secure career and adequate remuneration and perquisites (particularly rations)".

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



► In the last four years the shortage of number of matriculates available to fulfil the demand for sepoys has gone up from 32 to 40 per cent. At the same time there is no substantial shortage in the number of uneducated men available for sepoys' jobs, leading the army to argue that their basic problem is not so much the number of recruits but that the present salaries do not attract the people with the right kind of attitudes and education.

► In the Indian Military Academy, the main feeder institution for the officer cadres, the shortfall of recruits in engineering branches has gone up from 18.3 per cent in 1976-77 to 75.06 per cent in 1982-83. Even more pathetic is the state of affairs at the Officers' Training School (OTS) where the technical course has been discontinued from 1982-83 "on account of inadequate response".

► In all courses, including combatants and supporting services, the Indian Military Academy has had, on an average, 18 per cent vacancies in the previous decade. For OTS the figure is a staggering 35.5 per cent.

► In the Army Medical Corps only 34 officers applied for premature retirement in 1979. In 1983 the number had gone up to 81. Of these, 44 were above the rank of lieutenant-colonel. This is even more striking considering that in the whole branch, in the normal course, only 38 officers were actually scheduled to retire in 1983.

► In the judge advocate general's branch, that handles the army's internal legal cases and problems, the shortfall is now 64 per cent. The law graduates just do not want to join.

► The same problem prevails in practically all arms ranging from Remount and Veterinary Corps, which has nearly 30 per cent of jobs vacant, to the special commando units which just do not seem to get volunteers.

► Of the cadets graduating out of Indian Military Academy at least 30 per cent more are placed below 'C' grade today than were a decade ago.

If the paucity of men opting for the defence forces in spite of widespread unemployment is not paradoxical enough, there is more of it in the way the trend has changed on the preferences of those joining the army. Over the years, the popular perception of the elitist wings of the army has been the fighting arms: the cavalry, infantry and artillery. On the other hand, wings like Army Service Corps, which looks after supplies and transport, and Army Ordnance Corps, which looks after the weapon inventories have been considered Cinderella services. But figures now tell a different tale. Between 1966 and 1970, for every 100 posts of officers in the artillery there were 85 volunteers. Today there are merely 56. For infantry, the number of volunteers has come down from 79 to 63. But more significantly, the number of applicants for

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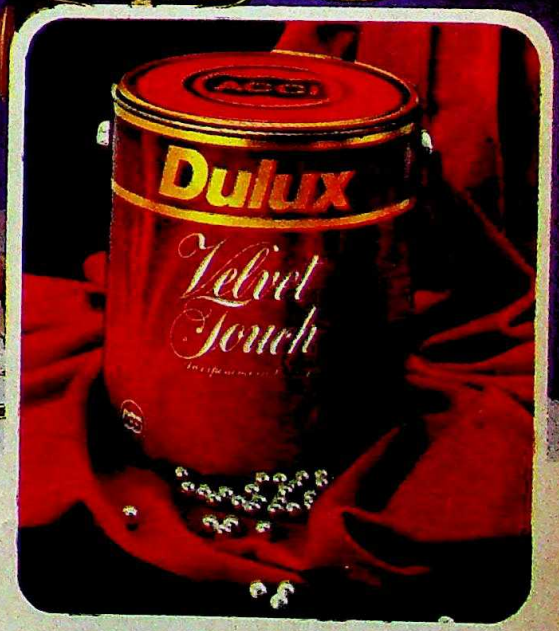

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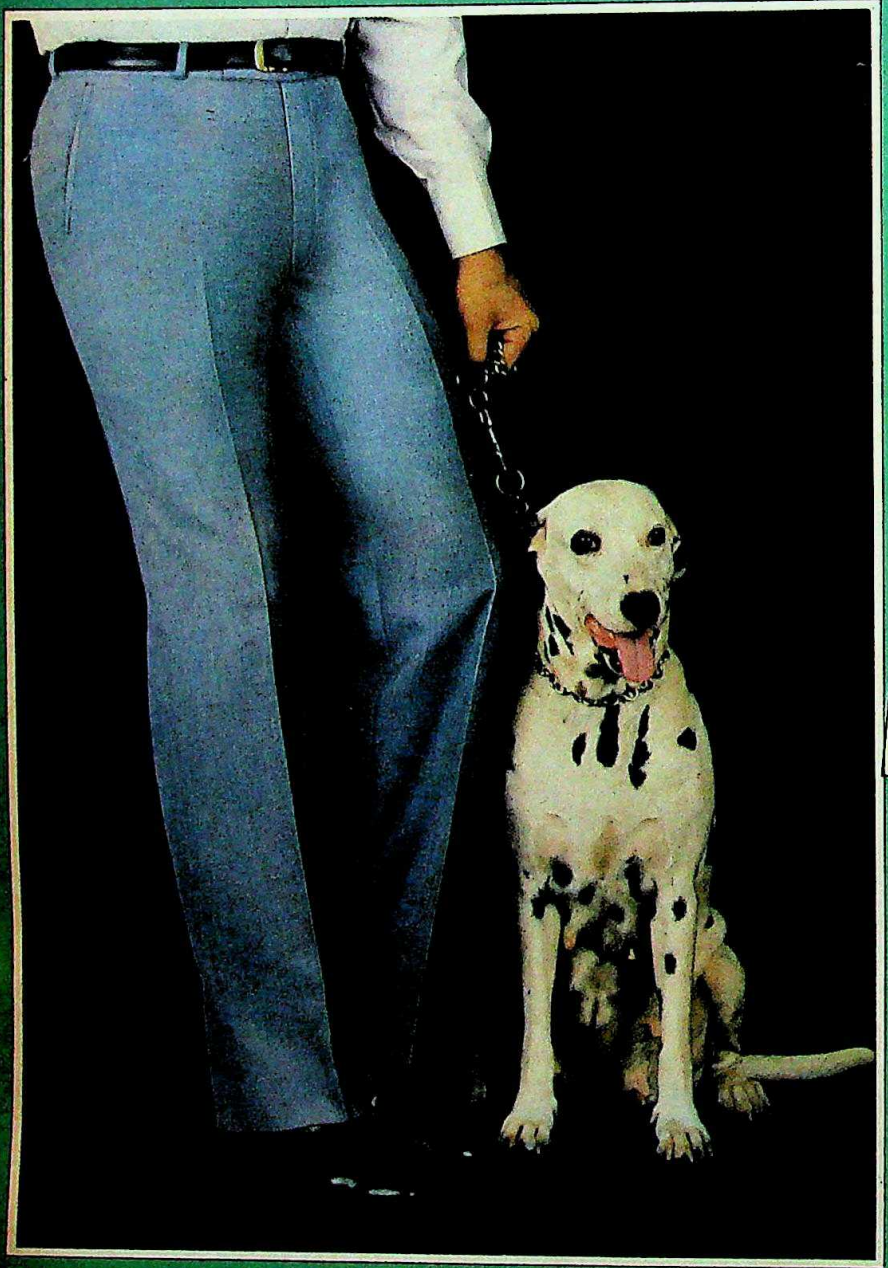
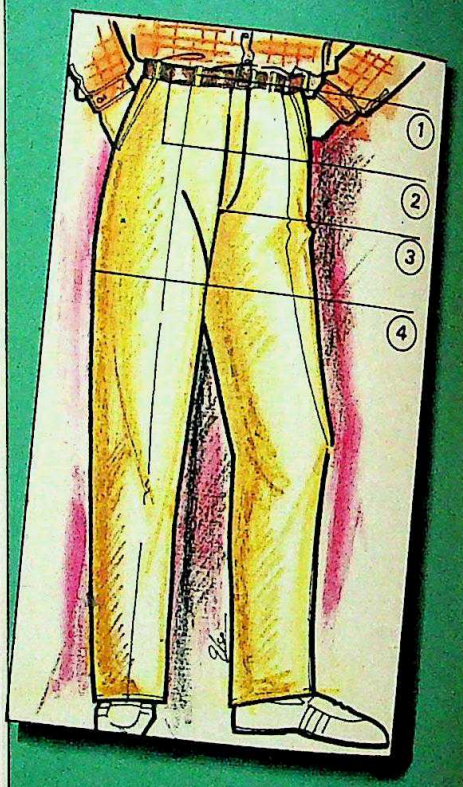
RAYMOND'S BODYLINE STRATEGY FOR READY-TO-WEAR TROUSERS.





(1) Loops made on a Rimoldi Loop Machine.

(2) Fused waistband to prevent unsightly 'roll-over'.

(3) Bar tacking at stress points.

(4) Chain-stitching on the side seams and seat seams.

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The guide to the well-dressed male

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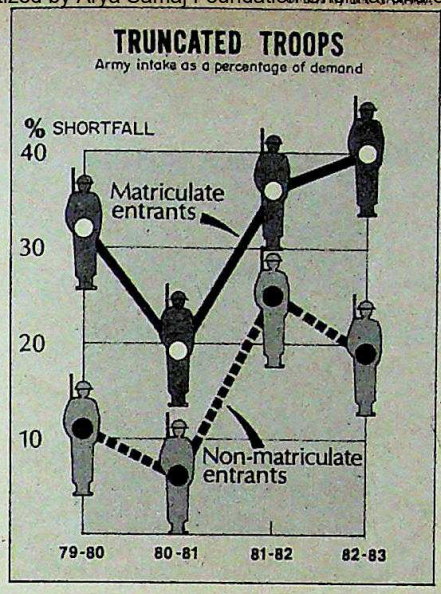
every 100 posts in Army Service Corps has risen in the same period from 114 to 217. The increase is even steeper for the Army Ordnance Corps—159 to 350.

Clearly, more and more young men today either do not want to join the forces or are looking for softer options that involve lesser risks. Says a general: "Our problem is simple. First of all we do not get the best recruits. The most promising ones go into medicine, engineering, business and other professions. We normally make up for this initial lack of quality by stringent training. But what will we do with men who are just not motivated to fight and take risks? It is painful, but the time has finally come to ask, who will fight for India?"

BUT WHAT will reverse the trend? The army argues that more bucks will do the trick. It says that the two things that make a soldier fight with a will to sacrifice are the elitist feeling of being in the army and the traditional concept of *izzat* (dignity) of the soldier. The progressive decline in his living standard has robbed him of both to some degree. Said a general: "In the British times the Government went out of its way to give the forces an elitist image. There was pride of uniform and generous compensation for special, hazardous jobs like paratrooping and commando branches. But over the years, these special allowances have not kept pace with inflation. The very idea of giving these allowances was to tell the soldiers that to become the elite of the elite they had to opt for riskier jobs. That dividing line has faded now."

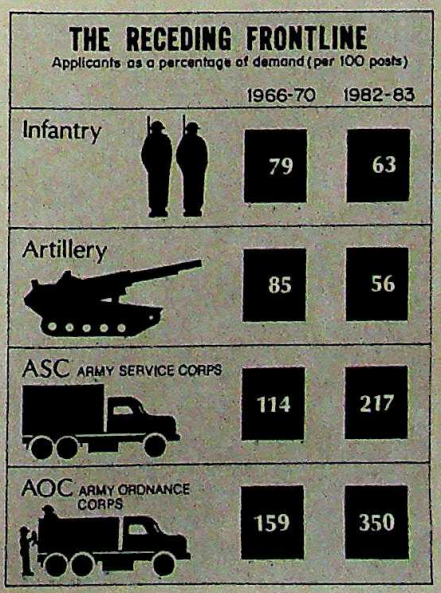
For starters the army asks for three months' salary as a lump sum grant to young men on the threshold of their careers, opting for important but unpopular disciplines like infantry, artillery and signals. Within the fighting arms, better wages have been recommended for high-risk jobs. For example, officers opting for the para units now get a mere Rs 55 per month as special pay. A jawan gets only Rs 20. The document states that in a paradrop, it is expected that 20 per cent of the troops will suffer casualties within the first 48 hours of the operation and the figure is only likely to increase with the advent of new electronic devices that make secret paradrops almost impossible.

Another bizarre anomaly is that though a paratrooper dying in a plane crash while on his way to a dropping zone gets full ex gratia payment like any crash victim, he is deprived of it in case



he dies because his parachute failed to open. Similarly, the officer opting for the toughest of all army disciplines, the commandos, gets a special pay of only Rs 200 per month (the jawan gets Rs 70). Even this is not given to him if he is not a paratrooper besides being a commando. The men in the commando units specialising in the even riskier underwater operations get a ridiculous "dip money" of Rs 75 per month, calculated on the basis of the amount they spend under water every month at "15 to 95 paise per minute depending on the depth to which an individual has been diving". Understandably volunteers are hard to get for these disciplines. "These," said a Defence Ministry official, "are special units which just have to be built around volunteers. You can't force just anyone to become a commando."

In bureaucratic circles there is considerable scepticism in the kind of pay-scales the forces have sought, but the demand for special allowances for specialised jobs finds a more favourable response. For example, there is some justification in asking for a hike in field posting allowance and separation allowance for married officers who have to run two establishments while serving in the forward areas. Similar hikes have been asked for in the high altitude allowance, snowbound area allowance and hard area allowance. But it is unlikely that any finance man will agree to give all of these together to an army man on posting, say, in Dras in Ladakh which will fall in all three categories. The army also wants income tax concessions on most of these allowances. There is also the quest for rationalisation of outdated allowances. In 1950 when a Gurkha soldier went to Nepal on leave he was given a rupee a day for hiring a porter on his trek to the village from nearest rail or roadhead. This is obviously ridiculous now and the army wants it raised to at least Rs 15 a day. There are plenty of similar examples.



While the demands cut across a wide range of subjects, from better pensions to speedy promotion to naik (corporal) level for jawans and from increased kit maintenace allowance to conveyance allowance and a nominal entertainment allowance for senior officers, there are also aspects in the list that clearly betray the eternal ego problem between the uniformed forces and bureaucracy. There is, for example, the demand that civil officers should give prompt and preferential treatment to the defence services officers who visit their offices.

The defence forces think this is their best time for squeezing concessions out of the Government. Even though the last decade has had no wars, it has proved the army's importance in internal security. In fact, the document begins with a mention of Operation Bluestar in Punjab and continues to describe the role played by the army in Punjab, Assam and insurgency-prone north-eastern states. But that, ironically, may prove to be a tactical error. For, as a Finance Ministry official candidly put it, no administration is going to like being told that the forces' are becoming more important because they (the civil officers) can't run the country well enough. But the brass and bureaucracy are old adversaries, and this time the forces do not seem to be in a mood to throw in the towel in a hurry.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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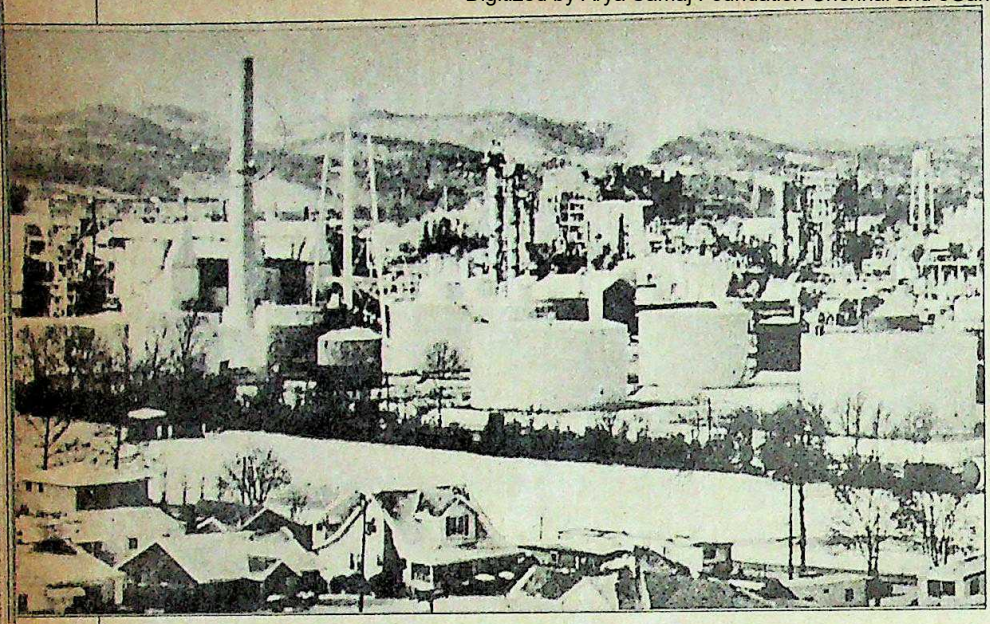

The Union Carbide plant in Virginia: raising crucial questions

CHEMICAL PLANTS

Exporting Hazards

THE BHOPAL tragedy, in addition to highlighting the widespread danger from chemical and industrial pollution within the United States, has also underscored another dangerous development: the increasing export of hazardous manufacturing plants from the United States and many of the other industrial nations to the Third World.

As hazardous and polluting industries have come under increasing regulation in industrial nations and as environmental protection groups have gained social, economic and political acceptance and momentum, these nations have begun to export plants for these products to Third World countries in what are known here as "runaway shops". The reasons, according to Barry Castleman, a recognised authority on the environment, are obvious: "Cheap and ignorant labour is abundant. Runaway shops can then market their products in industrial nations with the competitive advantage of not having had to comply with costly workplace and also pollution control regulations."

In what is perhaps the only comprehensive study of this problem, Castleman predicts that in the next decade the export of hazards from the US to the Third World will increase. "In many of our most polluting and hazardous industries," Castleman notes, "the existing plants are very old and incapable of being made safe by adding on control devices. They need to be redesigned and rebuilt, not just fitted with exhaust fans. Faced with this reality, some manufacturers find it economically attractive to move hazardous manufacturing plants to less restrictive locales rather than stay where they are and meet tough regulations."

Castleman reported, for example, that before 1970, 99 per cent of asbestos imports into the United States came from developed countries—Canada, Europe and Japan. In the aftermath of the proven links between asbestos and lung cancers, imports from Mexico, Taiwan and Brazil shot up by over 2 million pounds more than what the US imported from its original sources. During the early '70s American companies began closing down relatively new asbestos yarn mills and establishing plants in Mexico and other Third World countries. And US tariff policies have encouraged such exports. Castleman shows that Mexico, Brazil, Taiwan and South Korea are among the developing nations that recently have been declared 'beneficiary countries' under the generalised system of tariffs on US imports. Some of the asbestos textiles from

EDWARD J. BERGIN

Call for Reform

EDWARD J. Bergin, 42, is a senior policy advisor in the US Department of Labour. For the past 11 years, in his role as a top civil servant, he has been involved with a wide range of government programmes dealing with occupational health and safety, mine safety, workers' compensation, and educating workers about hazardous pesticides and chemicals and related environmental dangers in and around factories, workplaces, and communities built around industrial areas.

"Bhopal is a tragic lesson for the entire world, particularly the US," Bergin told INDIA TODAY'S INDERJIT BADHWAR *in a lengthy interview in Washington. During the last four years Bergin has emerged as a bitter and outspoken critic of his own government's failure to deal with the widespread danger of chemical pollution. Drawing on his dozen years of experience Bergin has written a fast-selling book*—How to Survive in Your Toxic Environment—*in which he excoriates several government agencies along with the chemical industry for failing to protect the American public from pollutants in the environment. Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *Can it happen here? Can a Bhopal be repeated in America?*

A. Chemical companies here try to perpetrate the myth that it can't happen here, that it's always going to happen to the other guy. But in truth, we're living in a chemical nightmare. Because I say this my critics call me apocalyptic. Bhopal simply, and tragically, highlights the problems here.

Q. *What is the reality of the nightmare?*

A. At any given time 2 million American workers are totally disabled from occupational and environmental diseases. Much of the underground water of the nation is threatened by toxic chemicals that seep in from thousands of abandoned chemical dumps. States throughout the nation are affected by the deadly poison dioxin. The Government recently paid $33 million to buy the dioxin-contaminated homes in one community to relocate them elsewhere.

We heard horror stories about chemical pollution in Love Canal, New York, and about the Valley of the Drums in Kentucky where 100,000 rotting and

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decaying drums are leaking deadly wastes into the land and streams. And polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), a dangerous chemical used in electrical equipment has found its way into the tissues of nearly every man, woman and child in the country.

Q. *But haven't the really deadly ones like DDT and asbestos been banned?*

A. We heard of the people in Triana, Alabama, who were absorbing deadly levels of DDT from contaminated fish. Asbestos was used everywhere and got into our schools, plumbing, and heating ducts and now it's flaking and getting into children's lungs where it can cause lung cancer. Asbestos will claim the lives of about 12,000 Americans a year through the end of the century.

Q. *What about drinking water?*

A. Some of the drinking water in Long Island and Florida has become contaminated with aldicarb, a pesticide called Temik produced by Union Carbide. The lovely James River in Virginia was banned for a while to commercial fishing because Allied Chemical wanted to make a few dollars selling a pesticide called Kepone that polluted the river.

Q. *It looks as if there's a chemical at every turn.*

A. It's a big business with more than $113 billion in annual sales. The number of chemicals is staggering—there are food additives, cosmetics, drugs, shampoos, detergents, polishes, carpeting, car seats, clothing, pesticides. An average room in America contains 2,000 man-made chemicals.

Q. *Are you saying all chemicals are dangerous? Haven't they contributed to raising standards of living?*

A. All chemicals are not dangerous. But it's a good idea to be careful. The attitude of the Government and industry is that chemicals are innocent until proven guilty. What I'm saying is that the burden of proving that chemicals are safe—through adequate testing—should be shifted to the industry.

Q. *What do you mean?*

A. The sad truth is that there is no toxicity information available on about 78 per cent of all the chemicals that are now in commerce. These chemicals are untested. Industry resists all pressures to do the testing. So we have very little ability to make health hazard assessments. The chemical industry makes guinea-pigs out of gullible consumers.

Q. *How much is the Government at fault?*

A. Let me cite a specific example. The case of ethylene dibromide (EDB) is pretty well known by now. Residues of EDB were found in food almost 15 years ago. And EDB was found to cause cancer in 1973, more than 10 years ago. But the federal government did not even begin to move against EDB until last year.

Q. *But aren't regulations too expensive? Besides, if everything causes cancer, why worry?*

A. These are all myths. Chemical companies talk from both sides of their mouths. Whenever the Government tries to regulate a chemical through testing, building in safety devices or cleaning up or controlling pollutants, the industry raises a ruckus and wants us to believe it's too expensive to protect people. Then when the damage is done and people start becoming sick, they argue the other side and say it's too expensive to pay for the victims. In the case of asbestos, the product liability costs from workplace exposure alone has been estimated at over $90 billion—more than the book value of all the companies that made asbestos.

And as for the argument that all chemicals cause cancer so why worry, the blunt truth is that of 3,000 commonly used chemicals that have been tested, only 200 have been shown to cause cancer and other diseases.

Q. *Was methyl isocyanate—the Bhopal poison—ever tested?*

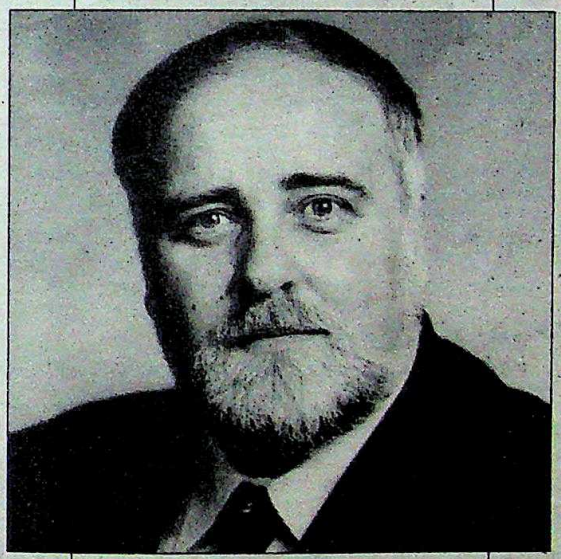
A. No long-term studies that I have been able to find. But my colleague, Arthur Palotta who is recognised world over as a brilliant toxicologist, believes that the substance is so reactive that it is potentially a mutagen, teratogen and carcinogen.

Q. *In any future compensation award, how will Bhopal's victims be compensated for these diseases?*

A. That's the whole trouble. The acute, immediate injuries are easily compensible. But we have seen that exposure to dangerous chemicals leads to slow-developing diseases such as birth defects and cancers and neurological disorders that may show up 10 or 20 years after the initial exposure. My suggestion is that all the people in Bhopal exposed to the gas should be placed on a registry and followed up by experts for long-term epidemiological studies. And Union Carbide should be made to deposit a sum of money in an interest-bearing escrow fund from which victims on the registry who fall prey to cancers and nerve diseases 10, 15 or 20 years from now should be compensated. And the company ought to bear the costs of the long-term study and care of the people on the registry.

Q. *What about the future? What reforms are needed?*

A. Chemical companies must be required to make pre-marketing tests of their products and to test the ones already on the market. Reforms would include improvement in the rights of victims, changes in product liability laws that will permit people to sue chemical companies immediately if they impose unreasonable risk on society.



"The attitude of the US Government and industry is that chemicals are innocent until proven guilty. I'm saying the burden of proving chemicals are safe should be shifted to the industry."

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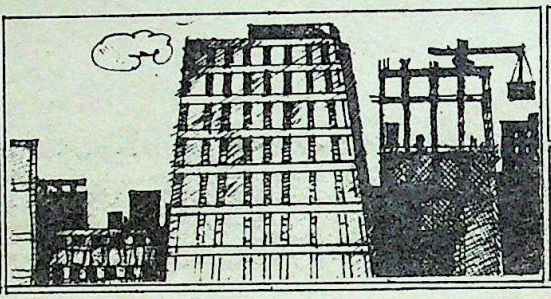

The Product

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The collaborators

CeramicUS of USA, with their proven ceramics technology spanning over 70 years, have extended their technical as well as financial collaboration to this venture. Their fast-fire technology cuts fuel costs by nearly 70%.

Sacmi Impianti of Italy provide plant and machinery as well as special technical assistance.

The market

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The collaborator has assured an export of 60% of the production.

The management

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Present status of the project

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- No gestation period. Production early 1985.

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these countries enter the US duty-free and the standard 4 per cent is charged for the rest.

The United States has also sharply increased its import of benzydine dyes after major domestic manufacturing plants began closing down during the mid-1970s because of long-term health hazards. The imports into the US are now mainly from Romania, Poland and India.

Vincent A. Gallagher, a US Government health official who investigated conditions in runaway shops in Latin America came away horrified. He made a report to the US Labour Department in which he noted: "In one mine 74 per cent of the miners on the payroll were suffering from silicosis. No dust suppression equipment is used in these mines. In one Central American country it was found that the nursing milk of the mothers who lived in the cotton growing regions contained between six and 200 times the amount of DDT permissible according to WHO standards." And there is evidence of US complicity in sending pesticides that are banned in the US to other countries. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has played a willing role in this. Leptophos, a Velsicol chemical product that is known to cause nerve damage and even deaths was shipped by the tons by USAID under economic assistance programmes to Indonesia and other countries. Other US-banned pesticides—heptachlor, chlordane and DDT—were also shipped under USAID auspices to developing countries.

Some other cases documented by Castleman:

► **Asbestos.** After strict regulations imposed in the US on the production of asbestos, American companies began exporting their factories. Abex Corporation, a US subsidiary of Imperial Chemical Industries "built an asbestos friction products plant in Madras. In 1976 the plant was covered by over $1 million in political risk insurance by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), an agency of the US Government whose mission is to promote needed US industrial investment in developing nations. OPIC made no effort to obtain an accounting of measures that would be taken to protect workers in the design and operation of the plant. Abex replied to OPIC's perfunctory question on ecological effects by simply saying: 'The company will comply with government regulations regarding wastage disposal'."

"Our safety standards in the US are identical to those in India, Brazil or someplace else. Same equipment, same design, same everything."

WARREN ANDERSON
chairman, Union Carbide

► **Arsenic and Refined Copper.** Epidemiologists at the National Cancer Institute reported that mortality from lung cancer in US communities with copper, lead and zinc smelting was significantly higher than in other areas and concluded that arsenic air pollution was a contributing cause to the high cancer rate. The US Government set tough standards to lower the workplace limit for airborne arsenic exposure. Leading companies such as Asarco and Lepanto, as well as mining companies like Amax have begun shifting operations to the Philippines, Mexico and Namibia. The Namibia operation supplied 8 per cent of the US arsenic imports in 1976. That same year, one-third of US imports of refined copper came from Zambia.

► **Mercury.** The substance was designated an air pollutant in the US in 1971. The number of mines producing mercury in the US plunged from 109 to four. And the US began importing more from countries like Algeria, Yugoslavia and France.

► **Lead Smelters and Battery Plants.** Studies have shown lead poisoning among children of lead-exposed workers caused by dust contamination brought home by worker's clothes and shoes. The Center for Disease Control also cited lead smelters' air pollution as a cause of neurophysiological damage in children. The US Government is contemplating imposing stringent control for lead air pollution and the industry is threatening to take its jobs and operations elsewhere.

► **Vinyl Chloride Industries.** In the mid-1970s reports surfaced linking vinyl chloride with liver cancers in workers exposed to the gas. But despite predictions that tough new government regulations on workplace and pollution controls would wipe out the industry, the manufacturers for the most part complied with the new regulations and somehow survived the financial burdens of these changes.

During the last several years human and animal data have pointed to the carcinogenecity of chromates, chloroform, trichloroethylene, benzene, acrylonitrile, cutting oils, 2-nitropropane, phenylmethane, ethylene dibromide, berylium and cadmium. The US Labour Department has also issued emergency standards for lowering the workplace exposure to workers of benzene to no more than two parts per million.

Castleman calls for a major worldwide thrust to combat these problems. All nations, he says, need to develop expertise in toxic substances control to protect their people from the time that new industrial projects are planned, as well as later, in the course of their operation. "Unfortunately, few nations have so far set up regulatory agencies with sufficient resources, expertise, and authority to provide much protection to workers and communities from the dangers of operating plants." He recommends that an international organisation should organise a "hazard information export service that would disseminate current knowledge about health risks and their control; assist interested governments and affected individuals in appraising industrial project plans and setting standards; gather and distribute knowledge about the movements of hazardous industries around the world; and keep track of other aspects of hazard export, primarily movements of banned foods, drugs, consumer products and pesticides to other nations from the nation where they were banned."

The main objection to the idea of preventing hazard export is the argument

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that poor people are better off with hazardous factories and goods than they would be without them, and their governments ought to be able to assess the risks and make their own choices.

The notion that hazard export with informed consent is a legitimate way to do business raises disturbing questions. Castleman says: "What's at stake may be the destruction of the environment's capacity to bring forth food that is not poisoned, and a starving man might accept a polluting factory even at great peril to future generations of man and other living things the world over. And might the hazard exporters offer the poor man more if the course of hazard export was barred?"

UNION CARBIDE

Same Danger

AN INVESTIGATIVE committee of the United States Congress which began an emergency investigation into the safety of chemical plants following the Bhopal tragedy has reached a preliminary conclusion that the safety and physical features of a Union Carbide plant that manufactures methyl isocyanate in Institute, West Virginia, are identical to those in Bhopal.

The conclusion has raised the alarm that if the two plants are indeed identical, then there is a very real possibility of a Bhopal-type disaster occurring here as well. In preparation for the investigation Union Carbide was forced to close down a production line in its West Virginia plant that produced the deadly gas.

Warren Anderson, chairman of the board of Union Carbide, stressed repeatedly before formal Congressional hearings in Institute, that "our safety standards in the US are identical to those in India, Brazil or some place else."

The investigation, spearheaded by Representative Henry Waxman of California, has made it clear that Carbide's safety standards—globally identical though they might be—are far from adequate. An investigative staff memo made available to INDIA TODAY by aides to Waxman stated bluntly: "Our interviews with (the West Virginia) plant and state officials only seemed to confirm that both sets of officials seemed to have little knowledge and control over the very toxic processes that they oversee."

Plant records revealed the startling fact that 12 pounds of methyl isocyanate had been leaking from the plant into the community every hour. The staff memo noted: "Yet this system is supposed to be closed without any openings to the atmosphere that aren't first vented through a scrubber or flare stack. State officials didn't have the faintest idea where the leak was coming from within the plant."

Inspection of other plant records offered an even more frightening spectre: these records identify massive leaks of toxic gas which the plant personnel have identified as at least as toxic as methyl isocyanate. For example, 90 pounds of formaldehyde, 22 pounds of chloroform, 40 pounds of acrylonitrate, and two pounds of phosgene were leaking from the plant on an hourly basis.

"You really don't know what you're putting into the air, do you, and what effect it has?", Waxman asked Carbide Chairman Anderson at the open hearing in Institute. Replied Anderson: "Current technology prevents an emission-free plant...but I'm sure there are emissions coming from the plant from time to time that are controllable and are not harmful."

Union Carbide's emergency procedures consist of a system of bells and whistles to alert the community and its workers to catastrophic events such as gas releases. "If there is a gas release," the staff memo said, "citizens are supposed to check the wind direction and if the wind is blowing from the plant toward you, you are supposed to immediately evacuate on foot by going crosswind. This procedure is absurd. The valley is bordered on one side by a river and on the other by a mountain range. According to an aerosol dispersal expert we talked to, if there were a major release only the fleetest would get out alive."

Perry Bryant, a representative of the West Virginia Citizens Action Group, told the visiting Congressional investigators that the Bhopal tragedy was "not a case of 'can it happen here?' It happens here every day. We have experienced an increase in respiratory cancers 25 per cent above the national average."

Donald Wilson, who lives within a mile of the plant, told members of the Congressional committee that he and his son were choked and burned by an emission from the Institute facility some years back. "In the spring of 1975 I stepped out on the patio and entered a nightmare world," he said. He said the effects of the incident—that burned his chest and throat—still linger.

Future Congressional hearings will focus on the important issue of compensation for Third World victims of disasters caused by American companies.

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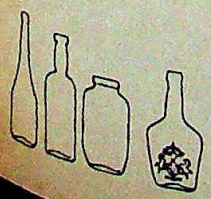

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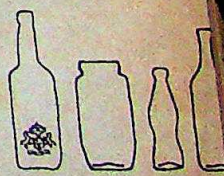

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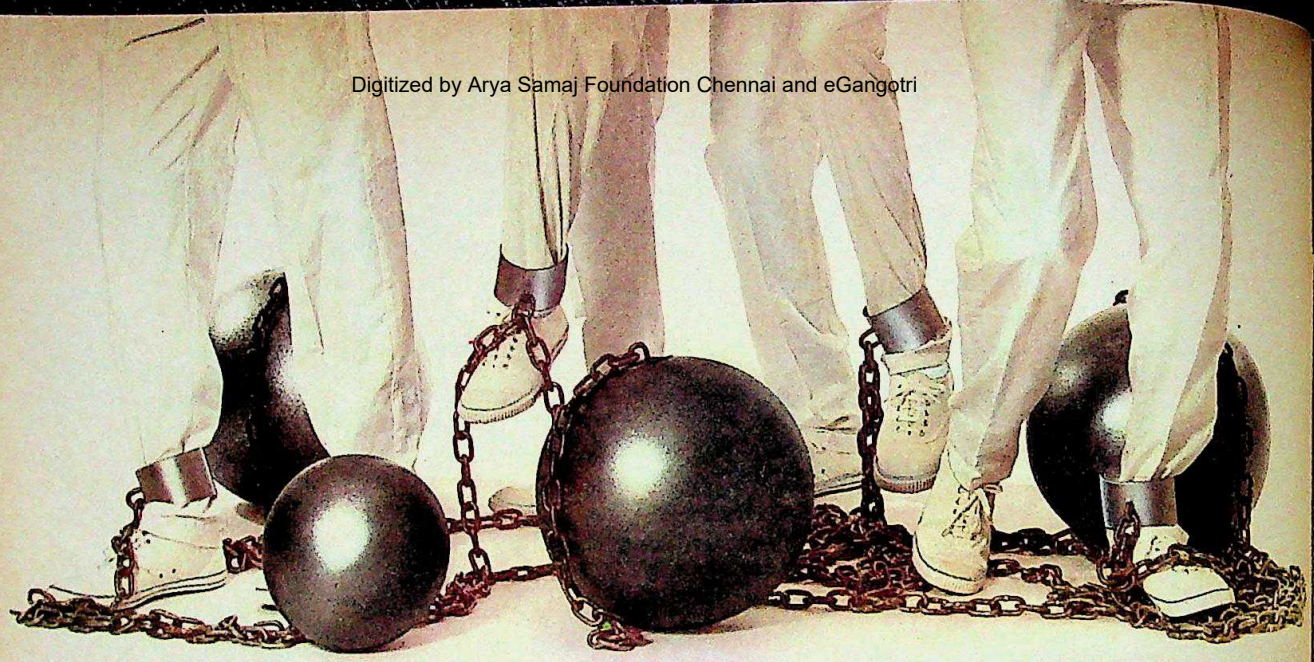

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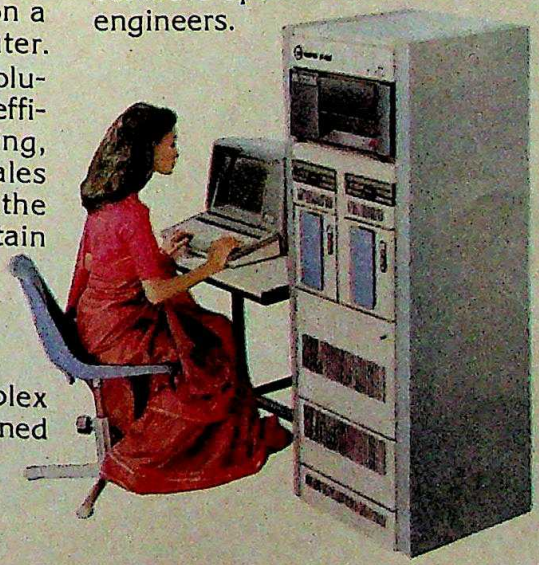

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THE GOVERNMENT

The New Politics

WITH the advent of 1985, India has entered the age of New Politics. At the helm is a young prime minister representing the generation born on the eve of, and immediately after, Independence; his council of ministers has more young people than any previous one, and the Lok Sabha in which he enjoys an unprecedented majority is overwhelmingly composed of men and women below the age of 45. As the medium is the message, so is political style the political leader. Rajiv Gandhi has suddenly changed the political climate of India from one of protracted combat and confrontation to another of quiet conciliation. His modest, calm and self-confident bearing, the soft language of his politics, the cleansing process that he has unobtrusively set in, the subtle skills of management of power that is manifest in his craft of ministry-making: all this amounts to the silent inauguration of a new chapter in India's political life.

For ten years, beginning with the Jayaprakash Narayan-led people's movement against Indira Gandhi in 1974, India carried an overload of political conflict, combat and confrontation both at the national and local levels. First Assam and then Punjab allowed a flood-tide of violence to gush into the political process. The Centre's handling of political issues in Sikkim, Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh amounted to trampling on the dignity and self-respect of politically conscious and mobilised local elites. Now, at last, the country's political climate is suddenly relaxed for the first time in a decade. The opposition parties, benumbed by the pitiless rejection by the electorate, have stopped hurtling invectives at the ruling Congress(I). The young prime minister has not allowed the spectacular victory to go to his head. He has spoken of his desire to seek the cooperation of the opposition parties in solving national issues.

Rajiv Gandhi's two greatest assets are the massive positive mandate he has received from the national electorate, and the autonomy of his political stature and office. Indira Gandhi was made prime minister by the Syndicate in January 1966. Rajiv Gandhi owes nothing to any organised interest or caucus. The brutal assassination of Indira Gandhi and his own self-confident visage that was watched for hours by 90 million people on the television screen on the day of the funeral, have won him the support and confidence of the vast majority of his countrymen. The vote was an unmistakable assertion of Indian nationalism by all segments of the population all over the country, including the minorities. Since the electoral verdict became known, Rajiv Gandhi has shown that he knows history has cast him in the role of an usherer of change. Above all, change in the morals and behaviour of people in power. He has made his first moves towards creating a new political morality by discarding people who had become, in the public eye, symbols of political amorality and arbitrary use of power, by leashing potentially ambitious men with demanding ministerial jobs and neutralising others, and by initiating on a soft moderate note, a new politics of conciliation and accommodation.

As the medium is the message, so is political style the political leader. Rajiv Gandhi has suddenly changed the political climate of India from one of confrontation to conciliation.

The response in India from political parties and the intellectual community has been hearteningly positive. And, it would seem, from the outside world too. The rumbustious Khalistanis in the foreign countries have retreated into silence. In the United States, Canada and West Germany, governments have made it known that they would not permit suspected Khalistanis to enter their territories. Even Pakistan seems to have realised that it had overreached itself by extending support and assistance to Khalistanis. When the plane carrying Jasbir Singh from Dubai to Manila touched down at Karachi, he was not allowed to leave the aircraft. The world has taken note of the change in India. It is no longer a country in which the rulers are pitted against large segments of the ruled. The powers have suddenly become very cautious about playing with India's internal schisms and conflicts.

The caution may not last if the prime minister does not build on the mandate he has received. He cannot be unaware of the fact that one-half of the electorate voted against his party. That in the three states in which the people nursed strong grievances against the Centre's cavalier treatment of their local identities and aspirations, his party was rejected by a majority. That the massive majority his party enjoys in the Lok Sabha does not mirror the actual political alignments in the country. That if the Opposition barely exists in the Lok Sabha, it exists very much in the political life of India. And that the electorate is as capable of delivering a stunning rejection vote as it is an astonishingly positive verdict.

Rajiv Gandhi therefore has to unfold steadily the grammar and syntax of his New Politics, marshalling the words and idioms of change to write a new prose of political and social democracy. Rapid politicisation of the masses has intolerably increased the demand load on the political system. There is an urge for autonomy of the units of the Union, for self-government at the local layers of the polity. It is necessary to diminish the demand loads on the Union as well as on the states. This can be done only by expanding the resource base and the functional reach of the states and by building a constitutionally-sanctioned infrastructure of local self-government.

Rajiv Gandhi can, if he wishes, create a dynamic and enduring national constituency for himself and his party if he enforces long-delayed structural changes in the political system which would vastly expand its adoptive and accommodative strength. He has to fill the big void in India's political democracy, adopt the legitimate political demands of the emergent local elites, design institutional mechanisms for recruitment and training of political cadres, and defer to the right of political parties to govern in the states where they may be elected to office in clear unmistakable electoral verdicts. Only on a sound and healthy political system can he mount his campaign for modernisation and efficiency and a renewal of political morality.

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PLANTING PALMS

HINDUSTAN Lever is getting ready to work out a project for palm tree plantations. The idea grew out of the successful plantations that Unilever runs in Malaysia, and from which the company exports palm oil to England. In India, Lever is looking at sites in some of the southern states, in Assam and in the isolated Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The company would like to invest a large sum of money in the proposed plantation but the project is still in its preliminary stages and no final decisions have been taken. However, several paper manufacturing companies have been trying for some years now to acquire large wood plantations on a lease basis, but with little luck because of local political opposition. It now remains to be seen whether Hindustan Lever will meet with better luck.

SMOKED OUT

THE GENERAL Insurance Corporation of India (GIC) has suffered a loss on its underwriting business for the first time in its 12-year history. The loss of Rs 10 crore during 1984 is due primarily to the insurance claims put in by the owners of vehicles that went up in flames during the communal riots following Mrs Gandhi's assassination. The claims as a result of this totalled a staggering Rs 20 crore.

However, GIC and its four subsidiaries managed to make an overall profit on their total operations, helped by earnings of Rs 100 crore on investments.

MIXED GRILL

THE EMBATTLED Nanda family, which controls Escorts Ltd, seems intent on diversifying into other businesses. Three years ago, Escorts President Rajan Nanda's wife Ritu Nanda successfully launched Niky Tasha as a frontline producer of kitchen equipment and later television sets. Now it is the turn of Anil Nanda, Escorts joint managing director, to start in a big way a series of fast food outlets in different parts of Delhi, called "AN's Hott-Potatos".

Escorts itself has had mixed luck last year. The company's turnover rose 18 per cent to Rs 330 crore, but profits dipped sharply by 26 per cent, to Rs 13.1 crore. This was primarily because of a loss of Rs 4.5 crore suffered on account of the troubled dry dock project and a further loss of Rs 2 crore incurred as a result of a long lock-out at the company's Bangalore plant.

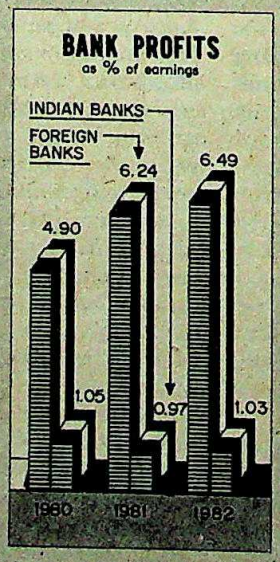
ADMAN COMETH

IT IS boom time for advertising agencies in Kerala, especially those with ministerial connections. People connected with state ministers have floated new agencies and promptly grabbed a series of accounts from state government corporations. One case is that of Leno Jacob, son of the state's Agriculture Minister A.L. Jacob, who has promoted Guide Advertising and grabbed the accounts of the Coconut Development Board, the Milk Marketing Federation, the Agro-Industries Plantation Corporation, Oil Palm India Ltd and the Kerala State Warehousing Corporation. These and other similar developments have provoked an established advertising agency chief in the state (M.E. Cheriyan of Waves) to protest to the state governor. But Cheriyan was quickly blacklisted by government agencies, and barred from the largesse while the new ministerial agencies continue to prosper.

SECOND THOUGHTS

THE GREAT rush into telecommunications seems to have been premature, after all. After announcing some months ago that private sector participation would be welcomed in this field, reserved till then for the public sector, the Government seems to have developed second thoughts on the subject. The current thinking is once again to keep the all-important field of switching equipment reserved for the public sector. As for subscriber-end installations like telephone instruments and telex machines, the Government now argues that these should be manufactured by four state electronic corporations, and private sector entrants should join hands with the state corporations. The technology is to come from abroad. Four European firms have been shortlisted for the purpose: one French, one Italian, and two German. Two of these will eventually be chosen, each of which will then be asked to tie up with two state corporations. Clearly, the great telecommunication boom does not seem ready to materialise just now, and some of the biggest industrialists and business men of the country who had hoped to jump on the bandwagon are going to find themselves sorely disappointed.

FASTER BUCKS



THE RESERVE Bank warning on the falling profitability of banks is timely. The figures show that the 20 nationalised banks saw total earnings rise by an annual average of 22.6 per cent since 1980, but profits rose by an average of only 18.1 per cent annually. The State Bank group, similarly, saw earnings rise annually by 26.3 per cent but profits rose by only 22.2 per cent. In sharp contrast, the foreign banks operating in India have seen profits rise faster than earnings, the respective figures being 31.1 per cent and 17.2 per cent. In fact, the foreign banks made a profit of Rs 17.01 crore on earnings of just Rs 261.93 crore during 1982, while the 20 nationalised banks made a profit of only Rs 37.3 crore on earnings of as much as Rs 3,676.6 crore. Clearly, the domestic banks' profit margins are razor-thin, with little cushion left for unexpected setbacks.

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PLANNING

The Versus Complex

THE BEST way of running a government—in fact, the only way, in a democracy—is to find out what people want and give it to them. This is also the best way to run an economy. Growth, planning, trade, foreign exchange and so on are just abstractions. What ultimately counts is whether those at the end of the long pipeline receive what they are supposed to, and what they do get is more or less in line with their expectations.

The prime minister must be inundated with advice from all and sundry but he is evidently a young man who knows his mind and needs nobody's help in making it up for him. There is, however, just one tiny bit of advice, or suggestion, that he should heed. Indian society has developed over the last couple of decades a number of complexes, of which perhaps the strongest and the most virulent is the versus complex. We are apparently unable to perceive things except in opposition to each other: public sector versus private sector, large industry versus small industry, urban sector versus rural sector etc. This may be good politics but it is certainly not good economics. If Rajiv Gandhi can help the country shed this versus complex, he will have done more for the economy than all the economists.

Let us start with the planning process itself. It is not clear why this should be the sole preserve of the Establishment. The new team in the Planning Commission consists entirely of persons who are either government officials or have been very closely associated with the official machinery of the Government. Since the prime minister is so keen on opening up the economy—his own words—he could have made a start by bringing in people from outside, particularly from private industry, which now has a wealth of planning and technical talent. The involvement of men from the private sector at the highest level would have cleansed the Yojana Bhavan of that air of fustiness that hangs about it.

On the public sector issue, the prime minister has said the right things, but this is not the first time they have been said. The public sector has indeed been a tool of development but the tool is now blunted and the giant machinery in which more than Rs30,000 crore have been sunk has nearly ground to a financial halt. The reformation of state undertakings should be the first priority for an administration that sets such big store by efficiency.

For years, the Heavy Engineering Corporation at Ranchi has contributed virtually nothing to development, including its own, and absorbs public funds like a sponge. A few hundred miles away in Kansabahal in Orissa, a private sector company has been doing wonders with its own heavy engineering works. There are, of course, vested interests which may and almost certainly do come in the way of bringing the two sectors together and harmonising their working in such a way as to maximise production and financial returns. However, if the Government can take over sick units in the private sector, there is no reason why sick units in the public sector cannot be handed over to private industry or co-managed jointly by both. There are private industry directors on the boards of state undertakings but their contribution is nominal. What is required is a more deliberate mixing of two cultures, the public sector culture which is essentially procedure-based and the private sector culture which is result-oriented. An administration committed to results can hardly shy away from the latter.

> **What is required is a more deliberate mixing of two cultures, the public sector culture which is essentially procedure-based and the private sector culture which is result-oriented.**

The versus complex that affects the Government's attitude towards large industry is even more insidious. It is not clear why large industry should be seen as enemy number one of the socialistic pattern of society. A well-run large industry in the private sector is a far better tool of development than a state undertaking as it raises its own resources and is not a charge on the public exchequer. Yet while the chairman of a state undertaking can walk into a ministry and come away with mounds of cash, his counterpart in private industry has to wait his turn for months, even years, for his licences to come through. Rajiv Gandhi has done well to assure the private sector that it will now be allowed into areas otherwise closed to it.

But he might go a step further and ask himself whether the distinction between the two sectors, perhaps necessary at one time due to historical reasons, has not now outlived its usefulness and whether the entire industrial sector, including the portions under the Government's charge, should not be set free so that it can settle down in a new pattern that can bring out the best in both. A start could be made by asking state undertakings to raise their resources in the open market, not by borrowing from banks which are also state undertakings, but directly from the public through the sale of equity shares. The public sector now is insulated from the market and is not responsive to it.

Rajiv is a cautious man and is not interested in change for the sake of change. The elections have proved, if they have proved anything at all, that the people have by and large accepted the system as it is, though they want it to be made more productive. But how do you make the system more productive unless you know what to produce? The only way to know what to produce is to expose it to the market and let it decide what it should and should not do.

This is why we should begin at the planning process itself, which should be more exposed to the public view and should not be the incestuous affair it has become. It is also not necessary for the plans to be so comprehensive and all-embracing, the figures drawn up to the last decimal point. India is changing and changing rapidly and a lot of flexibility should be built into the plans so that they do not become too rigid to conform to the changing requirements of the economy. Let the planners concentrate on a few areas and leave the rest to find their own place and their own level. If the people can sink petty differences like caste, class and religion and vote *en masse* on a national issue, the Government could take a cue from them and rise above the versus complex on national economic issues also.

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INDUSTRIAL SAFETY

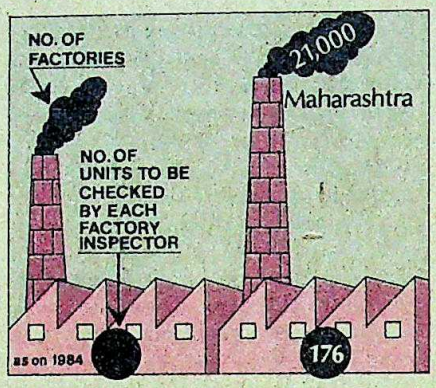
Belated Awakening

AS THE devastating implications of the accident at Union Carbide India Ltd's Bhopal plant rocked the nation last fortnight, the spotlight swung to other industrial plants. In the glare of public attention, at least three cases of gas leakages that might have otherwise escaped unnoticed hit the headlines. In Gujarat, ammonia and other gases leaked from Gufie Chemicals, a pharmaceuticals unit. The gases irritated the eyes of residents of the neighbourhood and the state pollution control board ordered the plant shut down till scrubbers and other equipment are installed. Similarly, gas leakages from Fine Chemicals, an alcohol distilling unit, led the Gujarat pollution control board to order the plant out of the residential area it is located in.

And, at the Madura Coats thread factory at Koratti in Kerala, hydrochloric acid that was being unloaded from a tanker spilled into a drain containing unwashed bleach sediment, producing chlorine. The chlorine was swept by the wind into an area where workers had assembled to collect pay packets. Forty-five people had to be hospitalised "as a matter of abundant caution", says K. Sukumar, finance director of Coats. He adds that steps have been taken to separate the unloading and waste disposal of hydrochloric acid and bleach liquor and normal work has resumed at the mill.

The three accidents together showed that the hazards are more widespread than popularly believed, and heightened the need for greater government policing of industry. And last fortnight evidence was piling up of official concern on the issue of industrial safety. State governments formed committees to investigate plant safety, hazardous factories were closed, laws were reviewed and some concrete suggestions were put up.

But for all that, it was not quite clear how decisively officialdom would change track. An Industry Ministry official argued that there were any number of laws on pollution and safety—the Factories Act, the Boiler Act, the Indian Explosives Act, the Indian Electricity Act, the Pesticides Act, the Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act and the Water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act. "Where things go wrong is in the implementation of the laws." And a senior bureaucrat working in the Chemicals and



Fertilisers Ministry pointed out that an examination of the laws and agencies responsible for monitoring industry and the environment had till now "shown no major gaps".

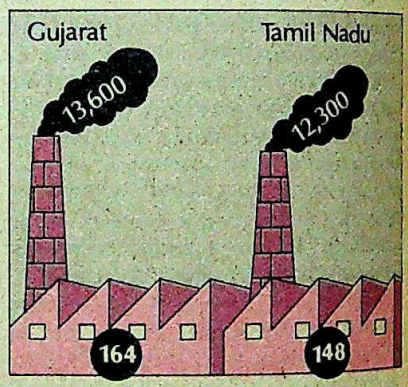
Still, all of officialdom did not share that view. A working group headed by the director-general factory advise services and labour institutes (DGFASLI) met in Bombay early this month and recommended sweeping legal and penal changes designed to improve safety at the plant level. The group suggested that the Factories Act be amended to define the occupier of a factory as the head of the organisation, instead of lower level functionaries. Thus the blame for non-compliance with safety regulations will be pinned on managing partners or managing directors of companies. Secondly, it recommended that environment committees be set up in each state entrusted with the power to clear industrial projects for safety before they are sanctioned. Thirdly, it said that equipment manufacturers should be held responsible for accidents arising from equipment failures. Fourthly, the panel suggested that the maximum fine for violating safety standards be raised from Rs 2,000 or three months imprisonment or both to Rs 5,000 or three months' imprisonment.

More specific steps were taken at the national level. An inter-ministerial joint task force that has been looking into the whole gamut of environmental and safety rules in the statute books for months was told last fortnight to speedily hand in its report. Stock was taken of toxic substances manufactured domestically or imported, and the Ministry of Environment and Forests recommended that official reports on whether safeguards are being built in while industrial plants are being set up should be sent to it for assessment and approval.

Action was contemplated in other areas: fresh legislation on handling dangerous chemicals and a spanking new agency staffed with technical highfliers to oversee in-plant implementation of laws.

The Bhopal accident had clearly galvanised state and local governments too. In the Union territory of Delhi, Director of Industries B.P. Misra shot off a request to the Central Air & Water Pollution Control Board to recheck the possibility of gas leakages at the public sector Hindustan Insecticides Ltd (HIL) and Sriram Food & Fertiliser plants.

Gujarat's pollution control board went one better. It ordered the 14 plants that produce pesticides and pesticide raw materials in the state to close down pend-



ing a review of on-site factory precautionary measures, relenting in the case of two companies after they handed in written assurances that they would take the action desired. In a bit of me-tooism, Maharashtra and West Bengal quickly followed suit by directing their pollution control boards to identify and study the safety standards of all potentially dangerous factories.

Companies on their part, buffeted by the shock waves of Bhopal, sought higher "public liability" insurance covers of up to Rs 2 crore each, stepped up the frequency of safety drills and, in at least one case, decided to up investment in safety precautions. Says H.S. Behl, secretary of the 90-member Pesticides Association of India: "We have advised our members to review safety procedures." Adds S.P. Dua, managing director of HIL: "Our company has increased its budget for safety."

Despite industry introspection, scepticism was expressed as to whether it would amount to much. "There is a lot of complacency in this country on industrial safety," warns Dinesh Abrol, secretary of the Delhi Science Forum, a watchdog body of scientists. Mounting nation-

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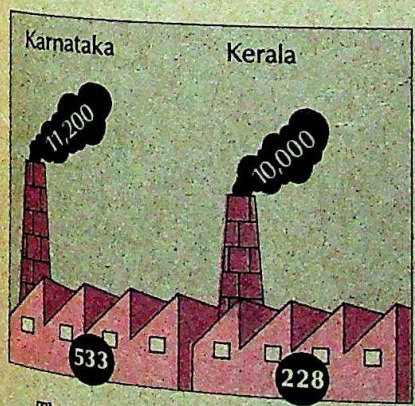
wide evidence supports that observation. A broad spectrum of industries are disingenuously oblivious to the dangers to human life posed by their operations, even fairly well-regulated ones like the petrochemical idustry.

Refineries dispose of toxic wastes irresponsibly, those in the populated Chembur area of Bombay being the worst offenders. Their crude oil tanks are cleaned once in two or three years and the sludge removed from the bottom is allowed to flow into lagoons, technically called "weathering pits". The sludge cannot legally be sold because it can be used as an adulterant in petrol. One engineer describes these lagoons as "time bombs" because they are open and a spark alighting on them could send the whole complex into flames.

Says Anil Deshpande, manager of Enviro Systems, the division of Thermax Pvt Ltd that deals with waste treatment, "The best way to get rid of toxic waste is to burn it." This involves dumping the waste in a furnace which continuously burns oil at a temperature of 1000 degrees Centigrade. But only a handful of companies in the country have incinerators chiefly because installing them calls for a chunky investment of up to Rs 3 crore. "This sort of technology is viable only if there are paybacks in the form of reusable chemicals," says Thermax chairman Rohinton Aga.

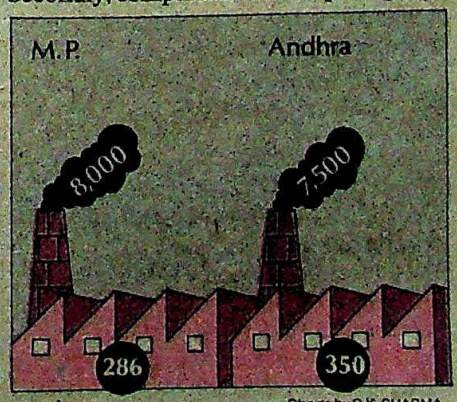


Thus one pesticide manufacturer was most reluctant to buy an incinerator for a plant at Ankleshwar, Gujarat, but had to do so on the urging of the state pollution control board. The refineries themselves, especially the seven public sector ones built in the '60s or earlier, are vulnerable to fire. Fire-fighting facilities in the seven public sector refineries need to be checked, a public sector petro-chemical plant designer points out in warning.

Management and instrumentation failures and poor plant layout can compound hazards, notes an unreleased government document that examined the causes of the fire and explosion at the Cochin refinery last March. Even the newer refineries are not exempt from the possibility of explosions occuring. An officially sponsored assessment of safety measures at the Mathura refinery in Uttar Pradesh does not rule out a vapour cloud explosion at Mathura following the catalytic reactor or the gas and liquid hydrocarbon-filled atmospheric distillation unit rupturing. The vapour cloud could be carried by winds to heavily populated areas.

THE PRIVATE sector is equally guilty of negligence on the safety front. At times even elementary precautions are not adopted. Official reports on fires that broke out in April 1983 at a cotton ginning factory owned by the Kotharis at Adoni, Andhra Pradesh, and at Fabina Textiles Pvt Ltd in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra, last March note that the fire was mainly aggravated by the absence of adequate water supply facilities in the former case and by the lack of fire-fighting equipment such as hydrants or sprinklers in the latter. And in petrochemical complexes, where megadisasters can occur, private companies at times scrimp on safety devices to cut costs. "They bargain with the foreign licenser to cut costs and safety gets the go-by," says the plant design engineer.

A manufacturer who supplies equipment to HIL questions the assumption that the public sector's track record is vastly better. "No HIL inspector has come to our factory to see equipment tested before his eyes," he says. Manmohan Singh, chairman and managing director of Frick India Ltd which manufactures industrial cooling equipment, advances a number of explanations for the precipitously low safety standards in industry. First, Indian industry regards human life as cheap. "We all think this. Nobody wants to say it," Singh says candidly. Secondly, companies do not replace parts periodically but wait till they can no longer be used.



Charts by B.K. SHARMA

Abrol of the Delhi Science Forum observes that Indian plants are not designed with enough back-up safety systems. Others in industry point to corruption in the factories inspectorate, the government arm that is supposed to check on safety at the factory level. A manufacturer confesses that he bribed a boiler inspector Rs 5,000 after the inspector said that the boiler's tube outlet for steam should have been stamped "boiler quality tested". The newly set up plant could not go on stream because the boiler had not been certified by the factories inspectorate.

The factories inspectorate in at least one state is undermanned and in a mess. At least half the 11,200 factories in Karnataka were not inspected for safety by state factory inspectors last year. Each of the 21 enforcing officers is supposed to supervise 533 factories annually, but their diaries reveal that only 10 to 15 of the monthly target of 30 factories are actually visited. The growth in inspectorate staff has lagged far behind the growth in the number of factories in the state. In 1962 there were only nine inspectors for 2,416 factories. Fifteen years later, just five more inspectors were added to police 8,614 factories. By last year, another seven were added to oversee 2,586 more factories. With no telephones, department vehicles or status (a factory inspector is on the same rung as a junior engineer), the department is in a shambles, says M.J. Surendra Kumar, chief inspector of factories and boilers in Karnataka.

While Kumar estimates that there should be at least 1,000 prosecutions annually in the state, only 121 offenders were actually prosecuted last year, and 116 the year before. "The fines are so low that managements smilingly pay them and go back and commit the same offence," he says.

Not surprisingly, factory accident figures have been spiralling from 5,289 in 1962 to 18,563 last year. Companies are lax in the main about safety, and most have no contingency plans for evacuation of residents who live near plants that process or manufacture dangerous products.

Plainly, unless many-layered idiot-proof safety devices are built into plants and the Government tightens its policing of the corporate sector, Bhopal-type tragedies can and will happen again, the present brouhaha notwithstanding.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

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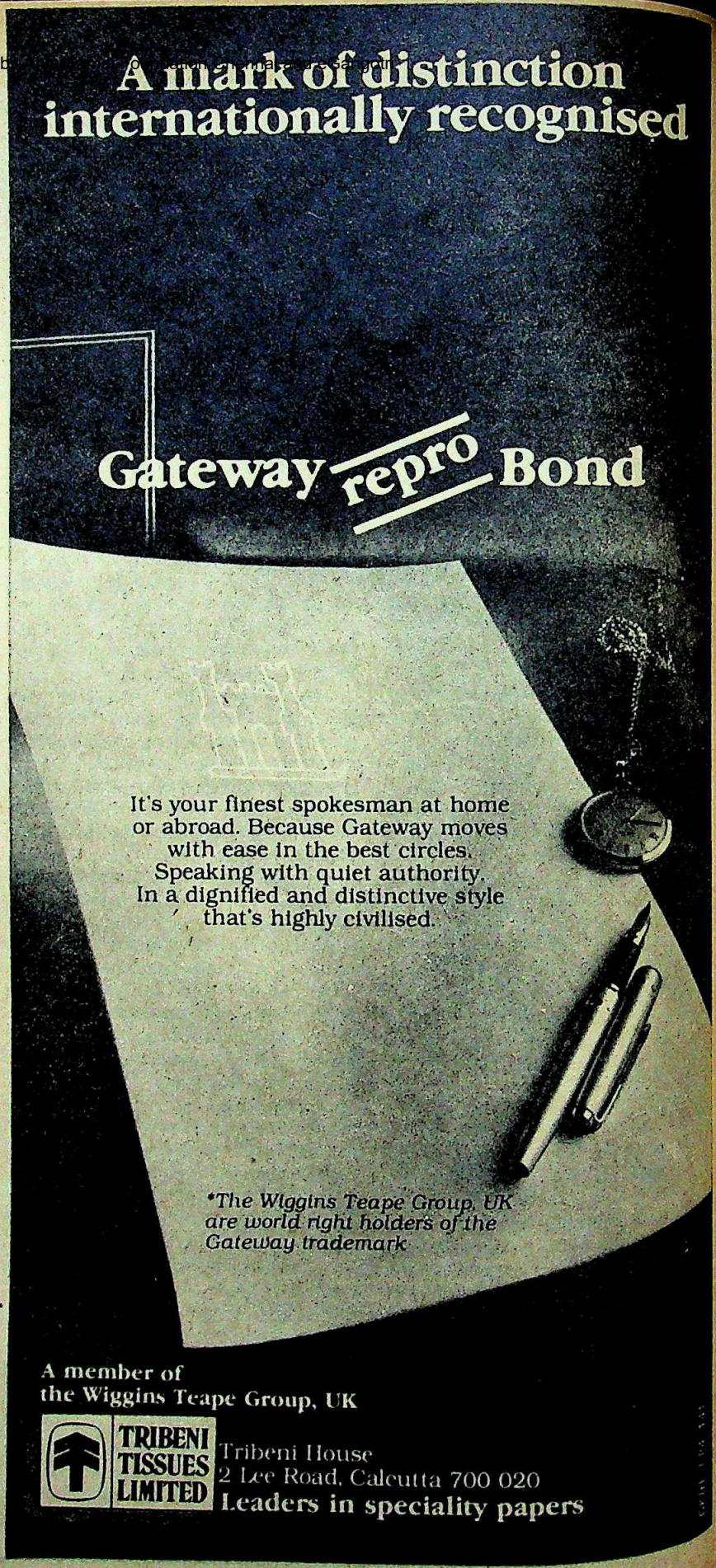

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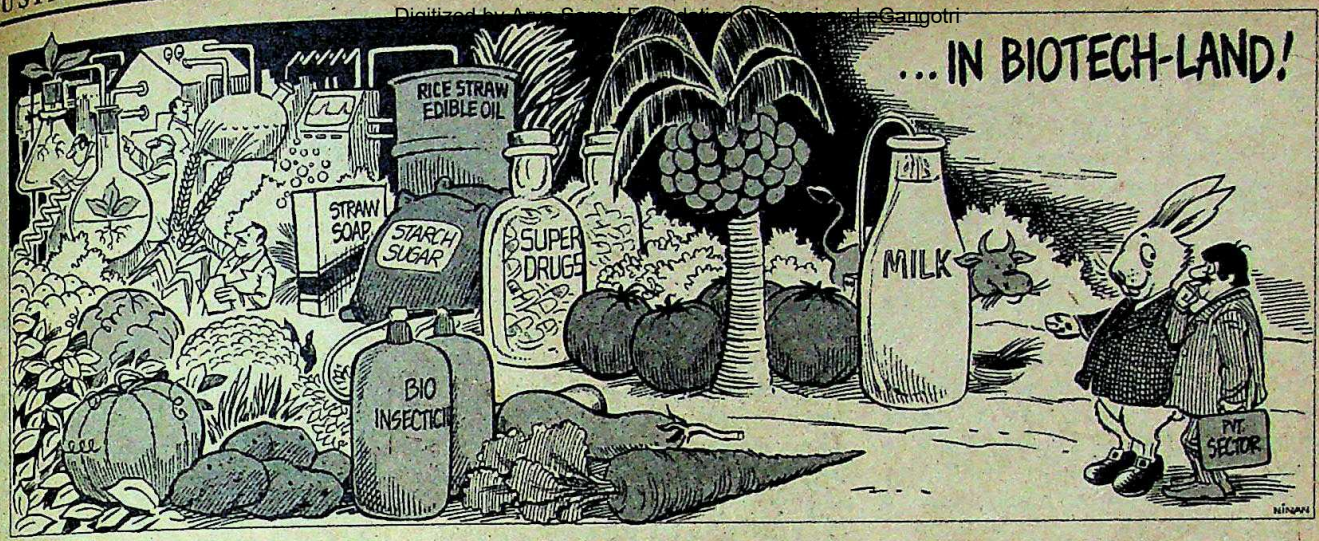

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Revolution in the Making

A PLANT growth nutrient that almost doubles some vegetable yields. Coconut trees that grow more than 10 times the number of nuts that trees now produce. Insecticides that are not harmful to humans, unlike the insect killers now on the market. Fats from molasses and even straw. Super pure drugs that are easier, cheaper and far less polluting to manufacture. Vastly increased milk yields that take the wind out of cows, literally.

Hyperbole and castles in the air? Not really. For these are some of the more dramatic products of a coming revolution: biotechnology.

These first stirrings in a frontier industry are being helped along by a massive government investment programme that will see a seven to tenfold step up from the current spending level of Rs 8 crore. The National Biotechnology Board (NBTB) has asked the Planning Commission for between Rs 300 crore and Rs 500 crore for the Seventh Five-Year Plan. On the anvil are germ plasm banks, post-graduate courses in 11 universities to turn out some 200 biotechnologists every year, and a new information system.

Private industry is chipping in with its own effort. Tata Oil Mills has sunk Rs 12 lakh into a project to produce fats from molasses, being undertaken at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, and is readying to invest another Rs 50 lakh to Rs 60 lakh in a pilot plant which will be set up this year at Ghaziabad. Max India, promoted by Ranbaxy Laboratories, is slated to launch an intermediate used to manufacture semi-synthetic penicillin. Hoechst Pharmaceuticals is looking into the genetic modification of bacterial strains and is testing a drug called Forskolin for the treatment of glaucoma. Wimco has earmarked an initial budget of Rs 3 crore for a biotechnology programme which will be launched next year in collaboration with Helleshog AB, which will provide the know-how to clone fruit trees and tomatoes with a high solid content. A host of other companies ranging from the public sector Hindustan Antibiotics to the private sector Anil Starch Products and Cadila Laboratories have on their biotech agenda products like enzymes, effluent degrading substances, kits to detect pregnancy, filariasis and jaundice, blood clotting agents, antibiotics for tuberculosis and leprosy, and hormones.

Hindustan Lever, which has sold Rs 1.5 crore worth of its plant growth nutrient over the last year, is working on a range of bio-insecticides aimed at boll worms, mosquitoes and flies, all of which are expected to be on the market in a few years. Lever is also testing out chemicals formed from bio-gas that may control the formation of methane in cows. Says K.K.G. Menon, vice-president of the Hindustan Lever Research Centre: "Fifty per cent of the carbon in cattlefeed goes as methane and only 15 per cent goes into milk production. If you can inhibit the formation of methane, you can raise milk formation."

Some of the projects may still be on paper, and many may fail to make the transition from the laboratory to the marketplace. The Government itself is not entirely happy with industry's response so far. Says S.Ramachandran, adviser to the biotechnology board: "We're talking to major private companies but their response has been lukewarm, and firms are enquiring more about the tax benefits available." But others are more hopeful. "Once the Government takes the lead, the private sector will certainly follow," feels G.M. Chopra, director of Alchemie Research Centre Pvt Ltd, the research company set up by Indian Explosives. Adds a drug manufacturer in Bombay: "When technological development is delivered by the Government on a turnkey basis, industry will jump on the bandwagon."

Certainly, there is no shortage of businessmen who do not want to be left behind if a revolution is coming, and who would therefore like to establish a presence in a greenfield area. Says industrialist L.M. Thapar, whose Ballarpur Industries has a research and development centre for biotechnology at Patiala: "This is a frontier industry and we are feeling our way. We have to be ready to move into it. We will have to buy technology from the West, and will have to know what to shop for."

A catch-all term, biotechnology includes processes such as fermentation and microbial genetics. Fermentation techniques have been known for thousands of years and are used to make bread, wine, and more recently antibiotics. But the science of biotechnology came into its own a decade ago, when ways of tinkering with deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the basic building block of life, were discovered. Engineered genes

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can be put to several industrial uses, to enormous benefit:

▶ Some yeast cells produce lipids or fats. The amount of fats to be produced can be manipulated by synthesising a specific type of protein in the yeast cell with nitrogen and other compounds. The Tata Oil Mills project looks at the viability of producing 'single cell' oil for the production of soaps, fatty acids and edible oils.

▶ Edible oils can be made from rice straw. Tarun Ghose, head of the biochemistry research centre of IIT, estimates that if 40 per cent of the rice straw produced in the country is used to produce lipids or fats, 2.52 million tonnes of lipids can be produced annually—equivalent to the annual edible oil consumption in the country.

▶ Plants can be 'fixed' to use larger quantities of the nitrogen in air so that they require less fertiliser. Work on nitrogen fixing is on the agenda of laboratories under the Indian Council for Agricultural Research.

▶ Microbial polysaccharides (sugars found in bacteria) can be used to separate oil from water, helping to raise yields in oil extraction. Genetic manipulation can help produce more polysaccharides.

▶ Paddy commonly comprises 30 to 40 per cent food, the rest being inedible. Bugs can be engineered to reverse this ratio.

▶ Sugar can be made in a factory from starch, eliminating the need for sugarcane.

IT'S LIKE a fairy-tale," says a scientist. But the big question is when will all these journey to the market? Industrialists like Parvinder Singh of Ranbaxy Laboratories see the market opening up by the end of this decade. "That is not too long a period considering that manufacturing licences take two to three years to materialise," he observes. Singh sees a Rs 20 crore to Rs 25 crore turnover for Max India's drug intermediate 6-amino penicilanic acid (6-APA) two years hence. By the turn of the century, drugs made from biotech processes will have a total turnover of more than Rs 4,000 crore. Some visualise a Rs 100 crore market for the Hindustan Lever plant growth nutrient a few years from now.

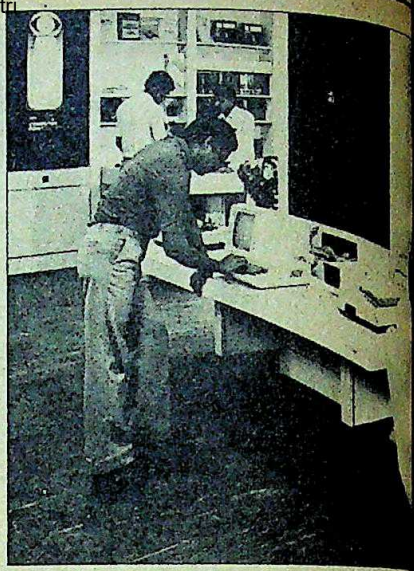
The economics of the business is as attractive as the prospective market size. Max India invested Rs 5 crore in its 60 tonne per day 6-APA project, less than what competitors using old fermentation or chemical techniques put in to make the same product. And apart from the lower investment, there are the advantages of lower energy consumption, higher product purity and no pollution. Lever's Menon in fact argues that bioprocesses can be carried on in a room and that little infrastructure is required. But this is contested by Ramachandran of the biotechnology board, who points out that in some cases firms can wind up with chunky investments if they do their own research and development. But this may be precisely the reason why few companies are in fact doing their own research. Indeed, much of private research and development investment in the field may be nothing more than an effort to gain literacy in the business, so that the company knows what technology to buy from where. Says Ghose of IIT: "Indian industry is reluctant to sink money into Indian biotechnology. So it prefers to import know-how."

Meanwhile, companies see other advantages in choosing to adopt biotechnology, including the possibility of carving out new markets and ensuring raw material supplies. Lever hopes to soon carve out niches for itself in the health and farm products markets with its pregnancy diagnostic kits, its rhizobia to convert nitrogen in the air into nitrogen compounds that legume plants can use, and its tissue culturing of coconut trees, sugarcane and cardamom. A few thousand, and later a million, high-output disease-resistant plantlets will be sold to farmers through nurseries. The company would also like to set up plantations, where the big money lies, says H.C. Srivastava, who heads the agricultural division at the Lever Research Centre.

Both Tata Oil Mills (Tomco) and Wimco are looking ahead and ensuring raw material supplies. Tomco makes animal feeds and soaps from fats, which are scarce. "The biotech process used at IIT would give the company an assured supply of fats," says Tomco's Vice-Chairman K.S. Hinge. Wimco has set its sights on doubling its present processed food exports of 15,000 tonnes a year in five years and has plans to provide farmers with genetically improved plantlets that will sharply raise crop output, notes company Managing Director Kamaljit Singh. Wimco will benefit by sewing up lower priced supplies of more fruits and vegetables for export while the farmers' income will shoot up owing to the larger volumes his land will produce.

With all this on offer, and with so many corporate heavyweights jumping into the fray, the biotech revolution may storm corporate boardrooms sooner than the Cassandras predict.

—PALAKUNNATHU G.MATHAI



COMPUTERS

Chip Shop

NOW THAT the bits and bytes are here to stay along with BASIC, ROM and two disc drives, the choice for the user—who probably thinks Pascal was a scientist and that COBOL is the name of a character in *Star Trek*—can be more than a little confusing. But there's a little help from friends, now: last month the country's first computer department store opened in Bombay. Computer Point is a one-stop shop on the lines of Computer Land of the US, for micro-micros priced up to Rs 1.5 lakh, and stocks everything to make the machines beep: paper, discs, printers, monitors, a limited collection of cassette and disc-based software and bright young things who lead the customer through the maze of computerese.

A dozen Indian computer manufacturing firms have already signed up to get their wares on show and the response can only be described as encouraging: sales even before the shop opened were Rs 5 lakh, and if the half-dozen or so people who wandered in every day and asked to take this printer or that computer home had been allowed to do so, Computer Point would have been able to ring up a hefty amount in the till even before the ribbon was cut on the last day of the year. Says General Manager R. Ramraj: "We want to tap the home computer and small business computer market. We are hoping that the people who can afford cars will come in here."

Of course, people can't just walk away with a computer, because the shop is essentially only a showroom for the ma-

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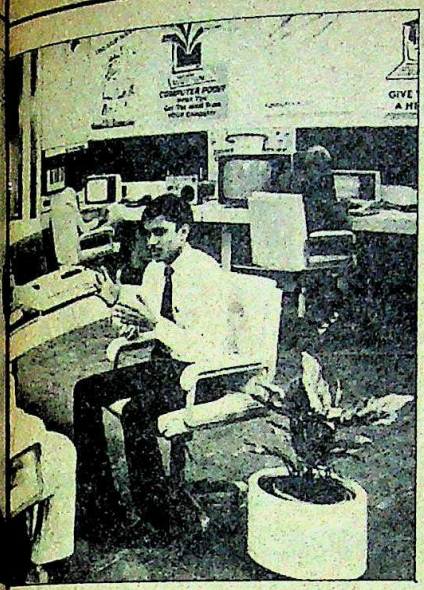

The interior of Computer Point: pioneering effort

chines. Computer Point pays the manufacturer 25 per cent of the price as a deposit, and receives 15 per cent commission on all sales. There is also a hire-purchase plan and a rental service. Says Satish Idgunji, zonal manager of Eiko Sales Pvt Ltd (turnover Rs 2 crore): "Over the next five years, computer sales and use are going to increase in geometric progression. We feel the shop concept should help us to tap bigger and bigger markets."

The question mark for the slickly-laid out department store is the new computer policy, which will reportedly slap an import duty of about 200 per cent on computers competing with local products. But even at this rate a Sinclair ZX 81, one of the best beginners' computers in the market, could be available for less than half the Computer Point tab. This computer can be bought abroad for £50 (Rs 750) or even less. With duties added on at even 300 per cent, the machine would cost Rs 3,000 altogether—but at Computer Point, it's on sale at Rs 5,500.

The other question mark is that the manufacturers may not like to display their products in one room, because this could force comparisons and bring prices down. Despite the fancy "we are different" claims, one machine is much like the other, the difference being the software fed into it. In fact, during negotiations with Computer Point, several manufacturers dropped their prices by about 5 per cent. However, a few big manufacturers are coming round to the idea. Which should make for some rather cramped shelves in the store.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

SWRAJ PAUL

"No one is above the law"

HE IS a friend of both Pranab Mukherjee and R.K. Dhawan. And he does not have the same equation with Rajiv Gandhi as was the case with Mrs Indira Gandhi. Is Swraj Paul, therefore, out in the cold? And will he now have to plough a more lonely furrow in his battle for getting his Escorts and DCM shares registered?

With his friends thrown out of office and new power centres taking charge in Delhi, there was no shortage of people willing to write off Paul's chances last fortnight. And reports did the rounds about the Government deciding to reopen old cases against him and the Apeejay group in India that his brothers run. But Paul himself remained seemingly unfazed by the sweeping changes in the capital, partly because the Government and the Reserve Bank finally decided to appeal to the Supreme Court against the Bombay High Court judgement in November declaring his investments in the two Indian companies illegal. The long-delayed decision to appeal was apparently cleared by Rajiv Gandhi after the then finance minister Pranab Mukherjee and Attorney General K. Parasaran took the matter up with him in the midst of the election campaign. Meanwhile, Paul was busy renewing contacts and rustling up new friendships, even meeting Rajiv Gandhi.

Paul: no regrets

Senior Editor T.N. NINAN *interviewed Paul shortly before he headed back to his London home. Excerpts:*

On the new government:

I think they are very determined and they will do a good job. And they are aware of the fact that if they don't produce results people will change their mind.

On the Government and Reserve Bank deciding to appeal to the Supreme Court:

I hope the Supreme Court takes all the relevant aspects of the matter into account.

On the dismissal of Pranab Mukherjee and the resignation of R.K. Dhawan:

No minister should be there for more than five years, because people run out of ideas. And when a minister is appointed, he must also take it that he will go some day.

As for Dhawan, it was a very amicable parting, and I think it was the right thing to do. Dhawan worked for Rajiv's mother for 23 years. Rajiv grew up with him, and you can't command a man with whom you have grown up. Can a personal secretary of mine work for my son? There is a human element here, and the parting has been very pleasant. The prime minister wanted to offer Dhawan some other slot, but Dhawan said he did not want anything.

On how he will be affected by the departures:

Nobody will miss Dhawan in that place more than I will. But I am also the happiest man that he has gone. Also, I don't consider my position weak or strong because of friendship. In the end, your strength is your actions.

On reports that the Government might reopen old cases against him and his brothers:

I hope they do that and find out the truth. I also hope they publish all the reports on everyone else. If Swraj Paul was so weak as to be frightened by government investigations, he would not have taken the stand that he has in the last two years.

On the tasks before the new government:

The first problem is law and order. No one should be above the law. The Government must bring back faith in the people that the law is for everybody, whether it is Swraj Paul or H.P. Nanda.

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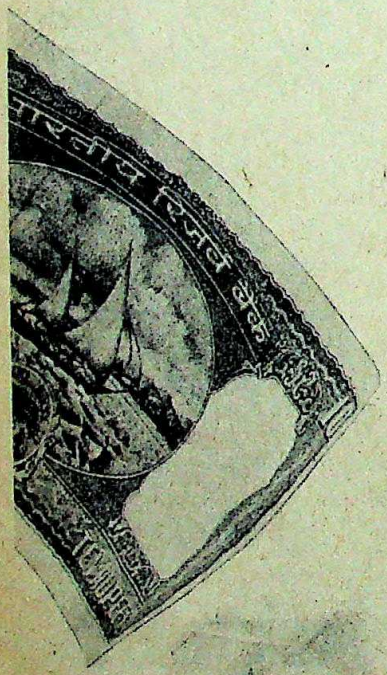

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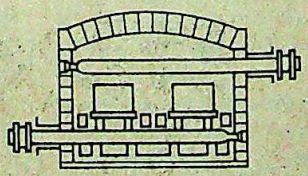

BBC Swiss Furnaces in India by

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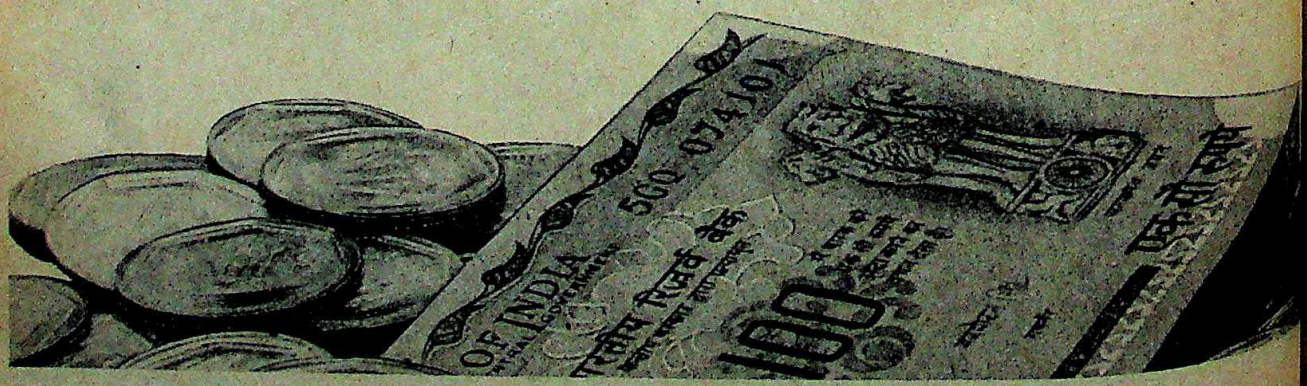

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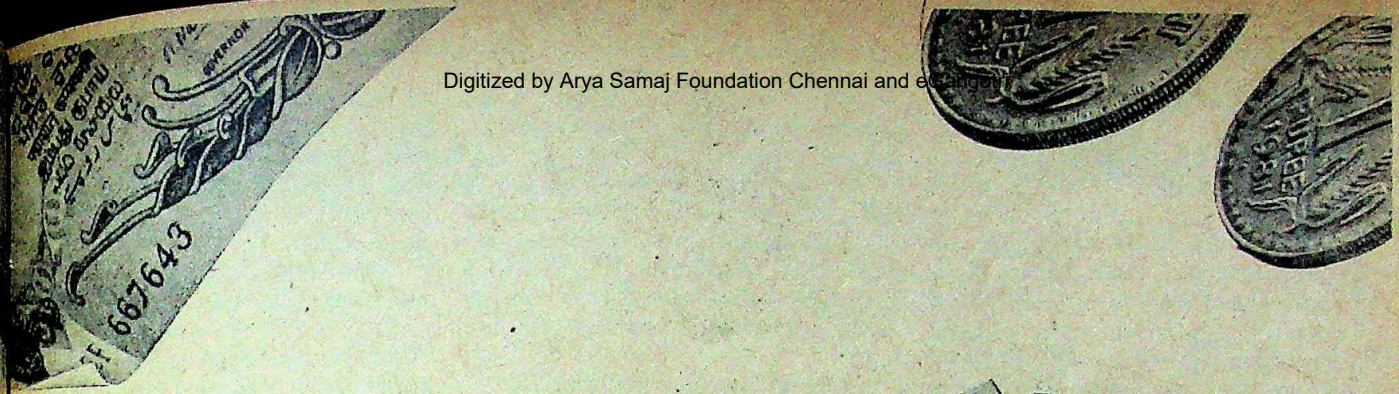

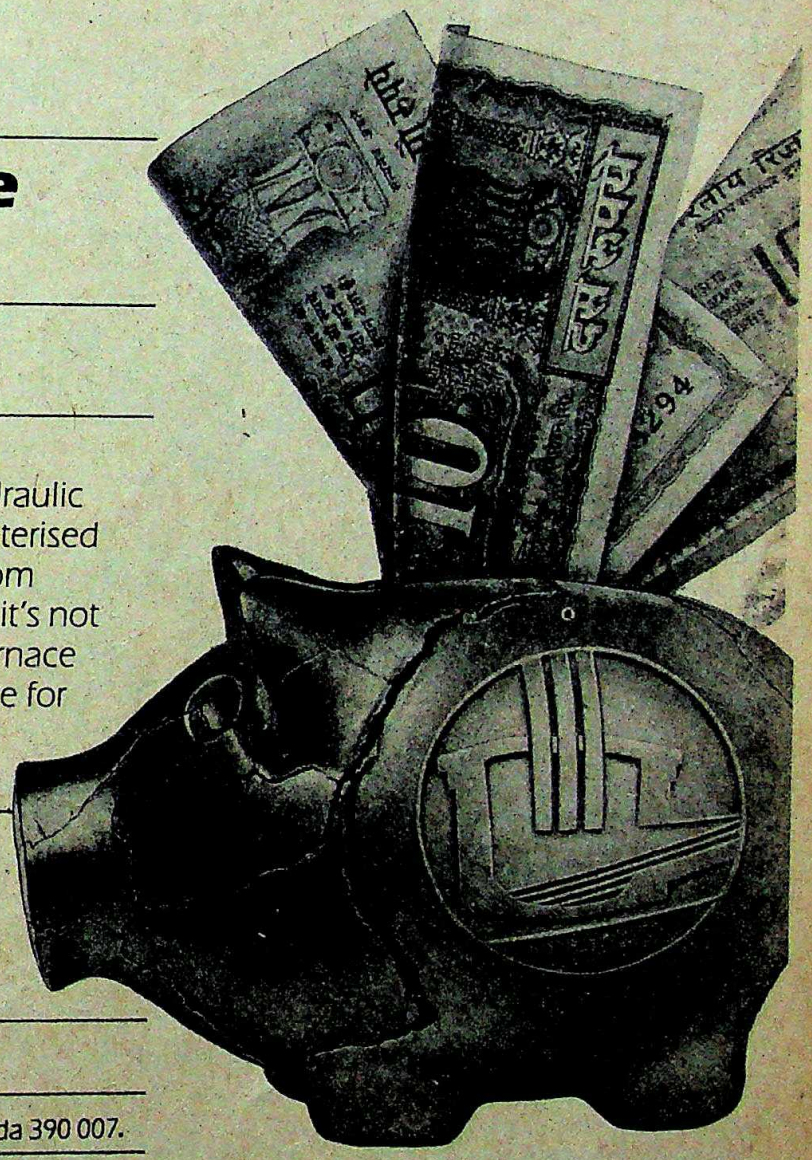

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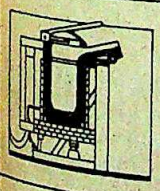

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LARSEN & TOUBRO

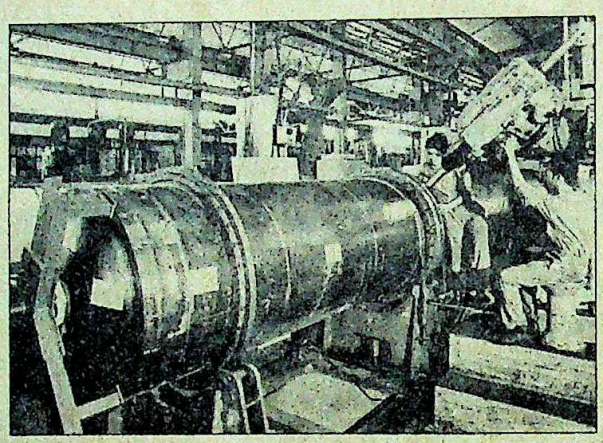
Aiming High

IT BEGAN as a one-room trading operation in Bombay's Ballard Estate. Now, half a century later, Larsen and Toubro (L&T) makes products ranging from cement to cement plants, and from earth-moving equipment to compact switchgear. And the once low-profile engineering giant, pushed into the spotlight recently by being voted the "most respected medium-sized company" in the country, is now set to blaze a host of new trails that will treble both its asset base as well as its turnover in just six years. Chairman and President N.M. Desai, who succeeded the legendary founder Henning Holck-Larsen seven years ago, says the company will invest at least Rs 500 crore in fixed assets and boost the turnover from Rs 349 crore last year to over Rs 1,000 crore in 1990. "Profits," says the quiet Desai, "should also be a nice fat figure. We're not going to put our money into anything that is a loss-maker."

The name of the game is and has been diversification, using solidly established manufacturing strength as a base. Thus, for a company which has installed 40 per cent of all the cement plants in the country, what could be more natural than building its own cement plant, an out-size monolith at Awarpur in Maharashtra which already produces 3,200 tonnes of cement a day and which is scheduled to double that in 1987. Other new projects include a heavy engineering workshop at Hazira in Gujarat to build plant equipment, modules for nuclear power plants, heavy water machinery and rocket casings for the country's fast growing space programme. If that underlines the company's already existing presence in areas of sophisticated technology, the company has also recently tied up with Bally of Switzerland for shoe exports and is setting up a plant to manufacture pollution control equipment at the sprawling Powai works in Bombay. Also on the cards is a likely "participation" in the Nagarjuna fertiliser project in Andhra Pradesh and a jack-up oil rig to be leased to the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC). But one project that has apparently been put in cold storage is a giant tyre unit that would have meant an investment of around Rs 100 crore. If and when all the projects materialise, L&T will be without question the country's leading engineering conglomerate.

Money is required for all this, and L&T will need between Rs 100 crore and Rs 150 crore annually to sustain the expansion. "We have got to the point where we can digest massive expenditure on capital assets," says a senior manager. So the company plans to raise Rs 68.5 crore through a share and debenture issues later this month, apart from drawing on suppliers' credits and foreign currency loans on an unprecedented scale. Despite spending Rs 250 crore on fixed assets in the last three years, the company's debt-equity ratio stands at an enviable 1.7:1.

Making motor casing for a satellite



"The company will invest at least Rs 500 crore in fixed assets and boost the turnover from Rs 349 crore last year to over Rs 1,000 crore in 1990."

N.M. DESAI
chairman & president, Larsen & Toubro

Money should not be a headache for another reason: post-tax profits have been increasing at an annual rate of about 25 per cent over the last five years, and last year totalled a handsome Rs 23.28 crore.

The financial health of the company is one reason why it has been able to absorb shocks like periodic labour strife. Industrial relations have never been L&T's strong point, as even the most loyal of its managers admit, and last year a strike shut down the Kansbahal, Orissa, and Bangalore plants for as much as four months. Curiously, the dispute was not over money—L&T pays some of the highest wages in the industry—but over what Chairman Desai chooses to call "the right of management to maintain discipline on the shop floor".

Another somewhat disconcerting aspect of the company is its tax planning, or the lack of it. At a time when other companies take pleasure in squeezing through loopholes and barricading themselves behind concessions to cut their tax outgo, L&T has been the darling of the taxman. In the six years ending in March 1981, it paid out over Rs 40 crore as tax on profits. In glorious contrast, the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company coughed up only Rs 91 lakh and the ever-inventive Reliance Textile Industries no more than Rs 25 lakh. However, with the present asset-adding binge and downstream depreciation write-offs, the tax liability of the company might well be reduced soon.

Asset-adding can go too far, however, and the company has reached out into the wide ocean at the wrong time. Its five recently acquired ships (the first two appropriately enough being named Holck-Larsen and Soren Toubro) have been losing heavily. Even the oil rig venture is something of a non-starter because the Government has apparently not given the company the crucial assurance that the rig will indeed be hired.

Desai clearly hopes that in the new climate of go-getting enterprise such setbacks will be temporary. Others certainly think so, especially in Bombay's imposing stock exchange tower (built by L&T's construction group). For, last fortnight the company's Rs 10 share was nudging Rs 80. With the massive expansion plans announced, and the stock-market anticipating a bonus share issue next year, the chip should turn bluer still.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT

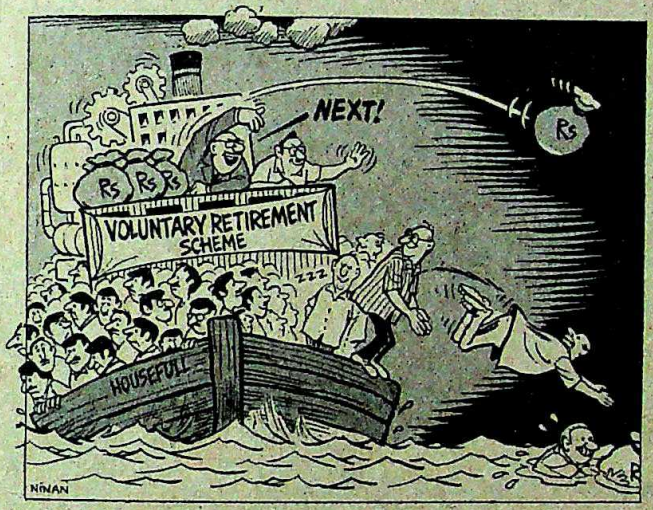
Trimming the Fat

THEY are picking up scalpels in the south. Nearly a dozen corporations have applied the knife to bloated labour forces over the last one year—and the surgery has been relatively painless. The name of the game is voluntary retirement. And when last fortnight the new management of the Madras-based Gordon Woodroffe announced that those of its employees who chose to bow out would be handed sums of up to Rs 80,000 to ease the pang of parting, it joined a clutch of companies like Premier Mills, E.I.D. Parry, Rallis India, Dunlop India, Wimco, Binny and Company Ltd and Sundaram Clayton that have speeded unwanted employees on their way with generous farewell presents.

South India's business world has clearly seized on a painless and time-saving method of trimming staff strength, easing out unproductive, older workers and other deadwood, and removing obstacles to furthering corporate goals. K.V. Ramachandran, vice-president in charge of personnel at E.I.D. Parry, questions whether Madras-based companies had a professional approach to manpower planning in the past. Explains A.V. Karnik, Gordon Woodroffe's new managing director: "The law in Tamil Nadu says that if a worker comes to work in a factory or establishment regularly for 480 days, he has to be taken in as a confirmed regular employee. This is how the labour force has been growing."

Managements also view fat severance pay offers as an easier way of dispensing with unwanted employees than treading the legally permissible but more time-consuming compulsory retrenchment route, since court cases drag on; they can also pick those they wish to hang on to from the large numbers who inevitably apply for retirement, and—an added bonus—unions cannot kick up a row since the schemes are voluntary. Finally, firms like Parry and Gordon Woodroffe which want to mechanise manufacturing operations and simplify and computerise office procedures view their lengthy employee rolls as obstacles.

Nor are voluntary retirement schemes expensive for companies: Gordon Woodroffe may wind up footing a Rs 68 lakh to Rs 1.02 crore bill, and Parry paid 1,300 departing employees no more than Rs 1.85 crore. "Finding that kind of money is not much of a problem for organisations," says a company executive. Adds a spokesman of the Employers' Federation of Southern India: "The corporate sector has picked up and done better in Tamil Nadu in the last two years. So there was some cash."



Viewed from the other side of the fence, retirement schemes are equally seductive. The prime attraction is the opportunity to obtain relatively big money at one go. Thus Parry workers walked off with sums ranging from Rs 80,000 to Rs 1.25 lakh. Gordon Woodroffe's labour has the option of quitting for Rs 40,000 to Rs 80,000, and Premier Mill employees obtained parting benefits in the Rs 9,000 to Rs 36,000 range. As Woodroffe's Karnik points out: "An average worker earning Rs 1,000 a month at our Pallavaram leather unit will be able to retire with Rs 40,000 (double that if provident fund and gratuity are included), and still get another Rs 500-a-month job in a neighbouring tannery."

Says A. Ganesan, a clerk in Parry who now looks after a chemical plant after his voluntary retirement: "I have invested the money I got in fixed deposits and make more than Rs 2,000 a month as my salary from the chemical plant." Another clerk in Parry has used a part of his golden handshake to add another storey to his house and lives on the rental.

Retirement compensation has varied from 15 to 45 days' wages for every year the employee worked or can work were he to continue in the company, the formula depending on his basic salary and dearness allowance (DA) and varying from company to company. At Parry's Madras office, for example, those whose basic pay and DA totalled less than Rs 1,500 a month received Rs 1,750 for every year put in, subject to a ceiling of Rs 35,000. Similarly, those whose pay packets fell in the Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 a month range were paid Rs 2,200 for every year of employment in the company, subject to a maximum of Rs 50,000. Rallis India offered its clerks last year half a month's salary for every year they had worked or for every year that left before normal retirement. And Woodroffe is promising a month's salary in lieu of notice, 15 per cent of the remaining salary that an employee would have earned were he to retire in the normal course, plus provident fund and gratuity.

Employee response to such bait has been gratifying from the management point of view. Premier Mills got rid of almost the entire labour force at its factory near Coimbatore (replacing them with cheaper apprentices), Shaw Wallace last year shed some 200 staffers, Parry weeded out over a third of the 1,180 clerks and lower level staff at its south Indian branches, including all the 22 office-bearers of the E.I.D. Parry Staff Association.

But such corporate slimming exercise have their seamy sides also. Some workers at least have been coerced into putting in their papers. Charges A. Padmanabhan, the new president of the E.I.D. Parry Staff Association: "Every employee who chose to retire did not do so voluntarily. There were threats of transfers and other methods of victimisation such as wage cuts." Woodroffe's Karnik concedes that he would switch from carrots to the big stick if the response to his company's retirement scheme is lukewarm. Said he: "Well, there are other ways of getting rid of people that I may be forced to use. I can terminate the services of some people on medical grounds and so on." Such confessions leave little doubt that many of the voluntary retirements have not been entirely voluntary. But equally obviously the leaders of the Madras corporate world seem now to be set on acquiring for themselves leaner, meaner identities.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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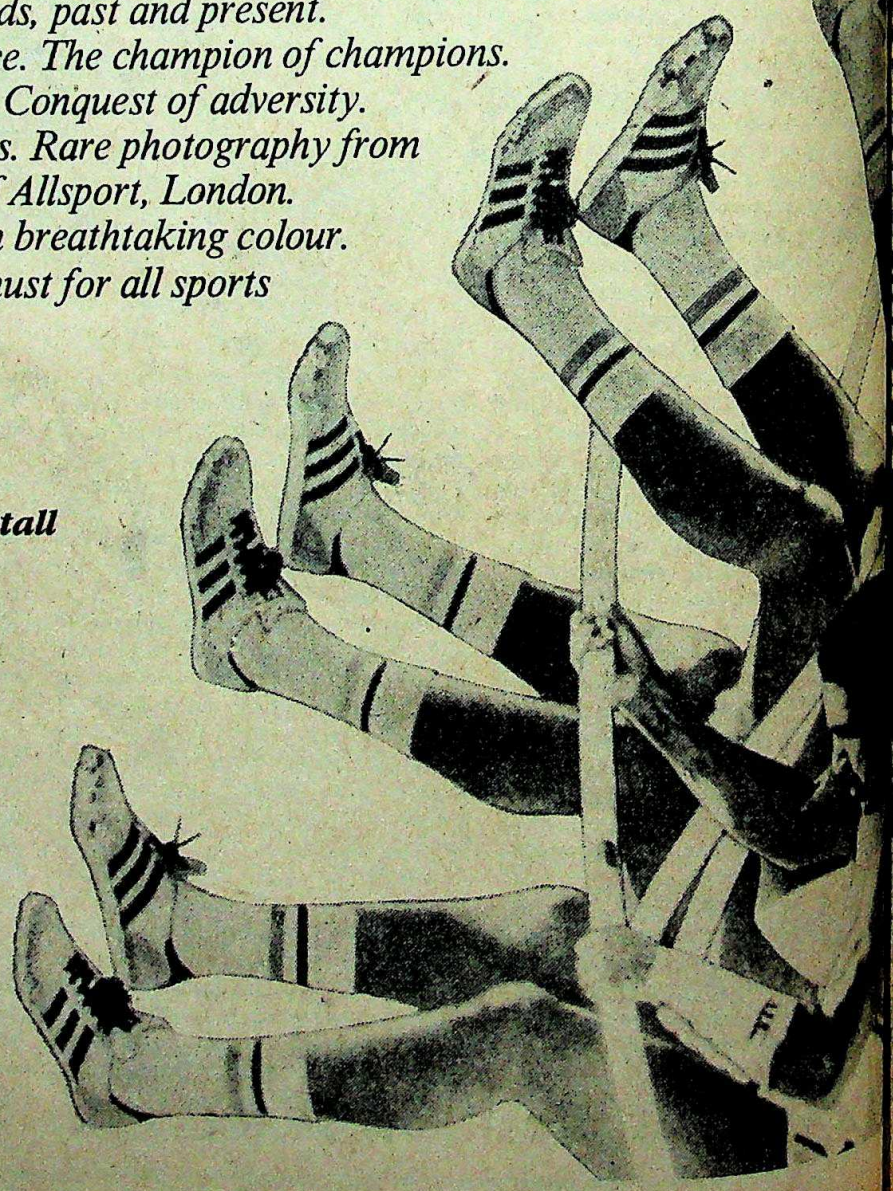

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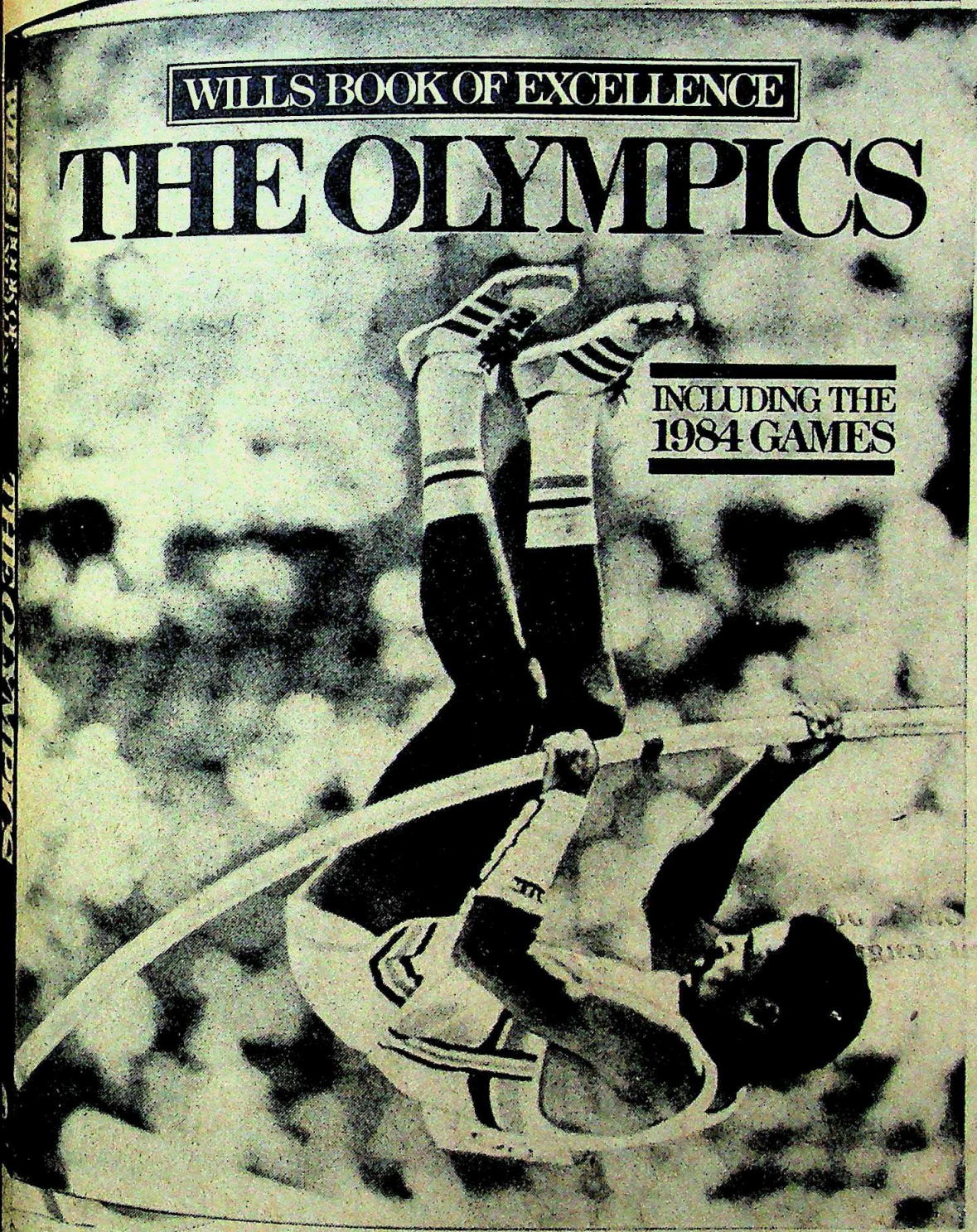

WILLS
Promoting excellence in sport

ITC-5726

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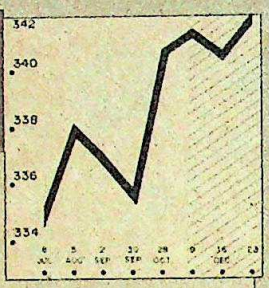
ALTHOUGH inflationary forces continued to be held in check, the performance of industry was not very encouraging. Money supply recorded another sharp spurt and bank credit to firms has accelerated. The share market is buoyant.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data, to which a regression is fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend **3.9% p.a.**

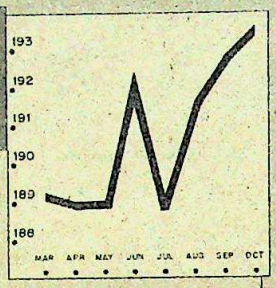


Wholesale prices rose by nearly 0.2 per cent last fortnight chiefly because of increases in the prices of manufactures.

Industrial Production Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend **4.7% p.a.**

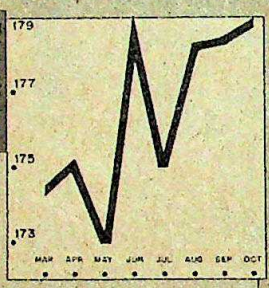


Industrial production was up 0.4 per cent in October owing to increases in manufacturing and mining, but the pace is down since September.

Manufacturing Output Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend **5.7% p.a.**

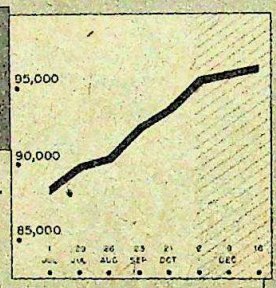


Manufacturing output rose by 0.3 per cent in October owing to increases in transport equipment, in food products and chemicals.

Money Supply (M3)

Rs Crore

Current Trend **17.25% p.a.**

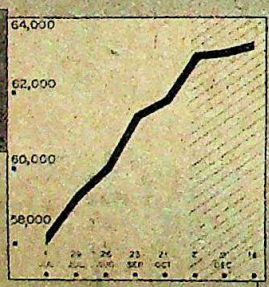


The rate of money supply accelerated to 0.8 per cent last fortnight, owing to bank credit expansion to the Government and to firms.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend **17.3% p.a.**

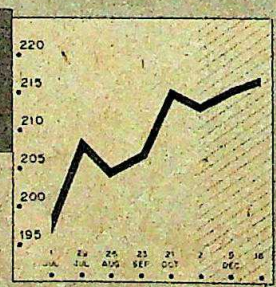


Bank credit to firms was up 0.5 per cent in the first half of December, still below trend, but with signs of some speeding up.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend **13.4% p.a.**



Share prices were buoyant in the first half of December, because of bullish tendencies in tea plantation and transport equipment securities.

Power Generation

Million kwh

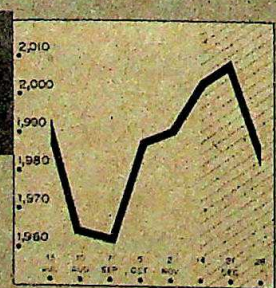
Current Trend **3.8% p.a.**

Power generation dropped 0.2 per cent in October, owing mainly to shortfalls in nuclear and hydel generation.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gms

Current Trend **0.7% p.a.**



Bullion prices declined nearly 1 per cent last fortnight in keeping with, but sharper than, the long term downward trend.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with maximum growth in August 1984

	%Growth
Salt	49.85
Sugar Factories and Refineries	39.11
Footwear	37.95
Coffee Curing Works	31.05
Beverage Industries	27.51
Dairy Products	27.27
Mining Machinery	23.58
Perfumes, Cosmetics etc	22.98
Transport Equipment	20.79
Industrial Instruments	18.56
Tea Machinery	17.68
Leather Products	17.46
Combustion Engines	16.84
Saw, Planing & Wood Mills Mills	13.44
Iron and Steel Pipes	13.18
Buses, Trucks & Jeeps	12.74
Soaps and Glycerine	12.62
Motorcycles & Bicycles	12.38
Synthetic Resins and Plastics	12.22
Hurricane Lanterns	10.99
Tea	10.20
Fertilisers	8.915
Cement (Hydraulic)	8.671
Bakery Products	8.425
Motor Cars	8.26
Drugs and Pharmaceuticals	8.083
Railway Locomotives	8.028
Scientific Instruments	7.841
Cotton Fabrics (Decentralised Sector)	7.672
Bolts, Nuts, Screws, Chainse	7.412
Photographic & Optical Goods	7.258
Synthetic Rubber	6.283
Electrical Motors	6.123
Hard Board, Fibre & Chipboard	6.040
Hollow Ware	5.168
Mathematical Drawing Instruments	5.003
Electrical Fans	4.930
Newsprint	4.235
Paints, Varnishes, Lacquers	4.132
Products of Petroleum and Coal	3.467
Tanneries & Leather Finishing Plants	3.277
Sanitary and White Ware	2.872
Hydrogenated Oil (Vanaspati)	2.671
Watches & Clocks	2.140
Tobacco Manufacture	2.071
Agricultural Machinery	1.994
Electric Light & Power	1.929

Of 119 major industries considered, 66 industries with a weight of 68.1 accelerated while 53 with a weight of 26.4 decelerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1984	1983
Crude Petroleum Thousand Tonnes, December	2534	2310
Call Money Rate (Bombay) Percentage, December	10.00	8.23
Thermal Plant, Load Factor Percentage, November	48.3	47.2
Letters of Intent Numbers, November	80	104
Industrial Licences Numbers, November	62	75

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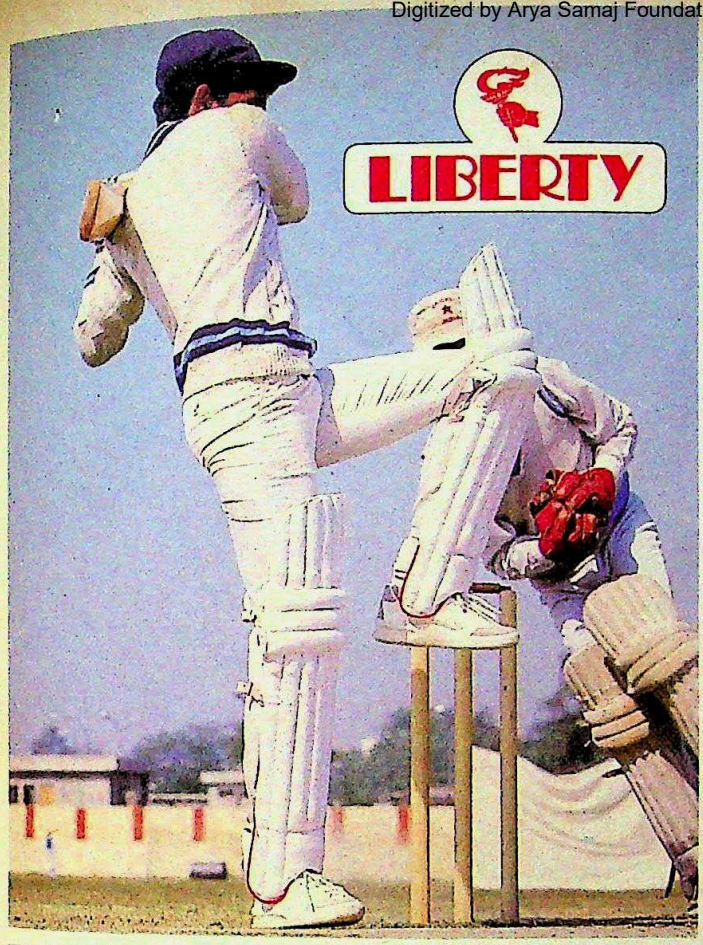

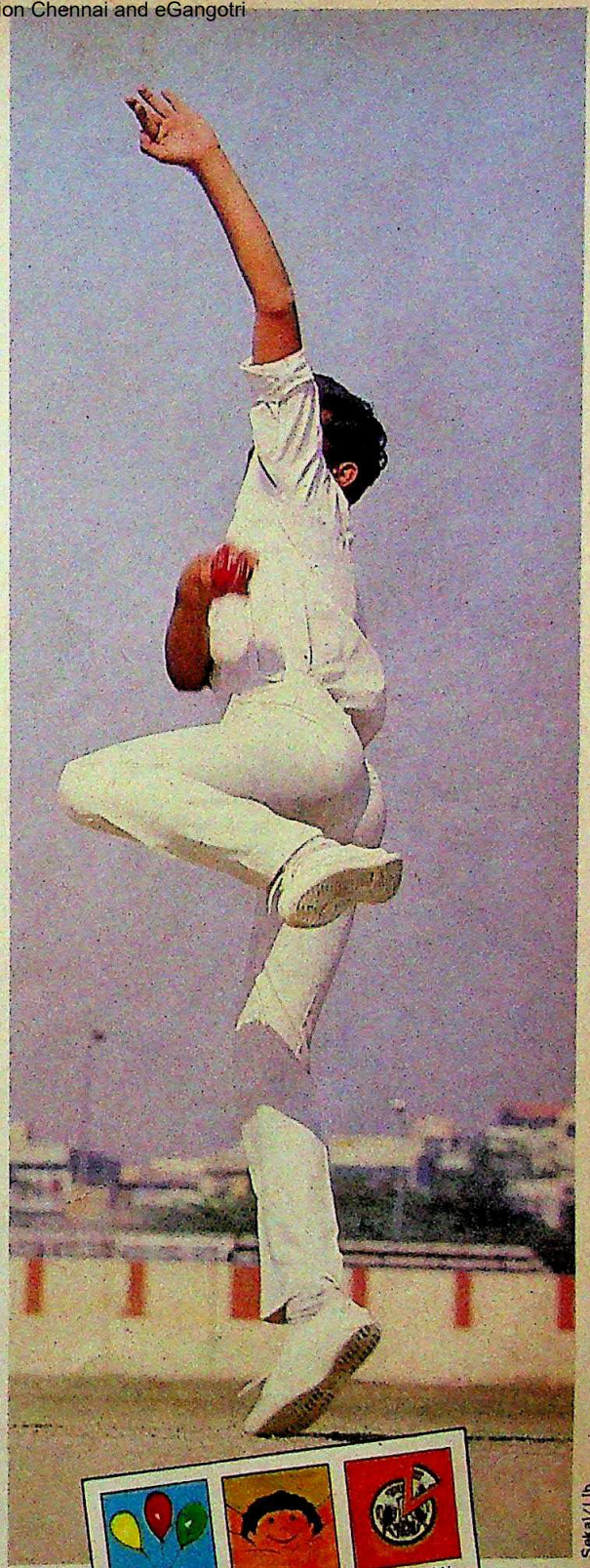

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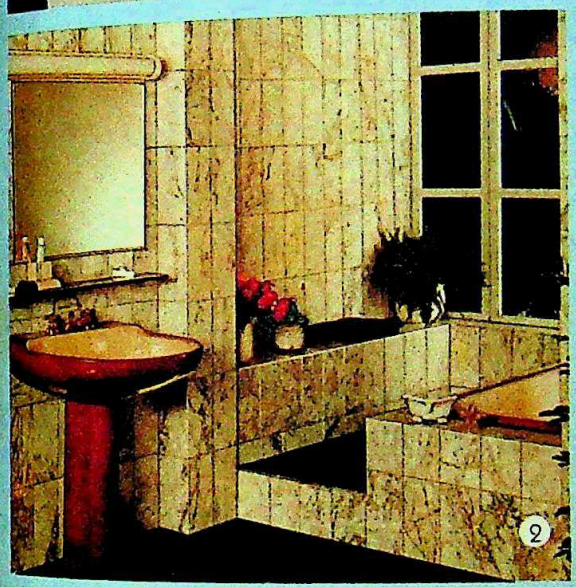

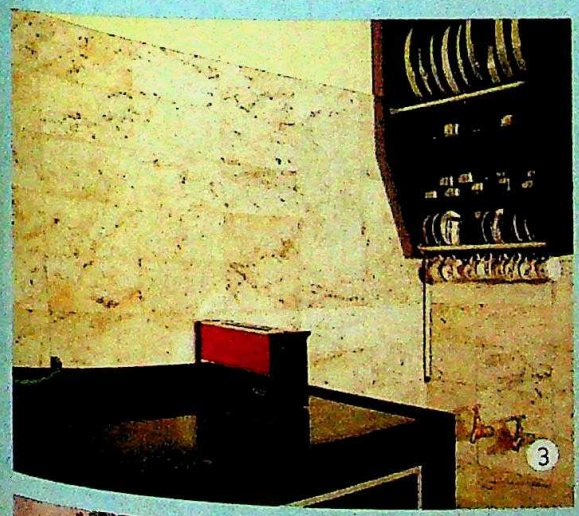

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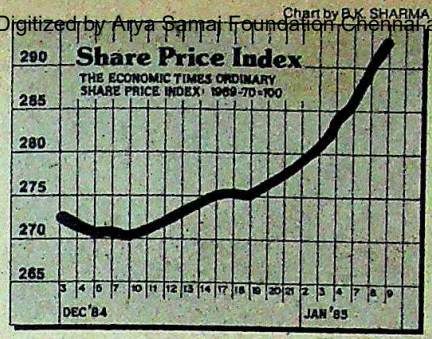
THE MARKETS

Budget Brakes

BUDGETS, or rumours about budgets, and share prices do not go together and the announcement by the new Union Finance Minister, V.P. Singh, that the Central budget would be presented as usual on February 28 has made the marketmen think twice about the recent mini-boom following the return of the ruling party to power. Prices are still high but not as high as they would have been had the budget bombshell not struck the market in the midst of its celebrations. For the next six weeks, the market will stick to its usual pattern of ups and downs, mostly downs, until the budget day, and thereafter a great deal will depend on what the taxman bringeth. Singh is not a man to be trifled with and what he bringeth may well be a load of new taxes.

Budget apart, the share market is in good shape and although prices will by and large move in a narrow groove, some scrips should do better than most. Tata Steel, Premier Automobiles and



Associated Cement have been very much in the limelight but there were others too, particularly on the Lyons Range, which did much better. Companies like Chloride India and Indian Explosives have put out excellent reports. At the Dalal Street end, Larsen & Toubro has been a star performer, with sales touching Rs 350 crore against slightly over Rs 300 crore last year and gross profit up from Rs 37 crore to Rs 47 crore. There are prospects of a bonus issue next year and the turnover figure might rise to even Rs 1,000 crore in five years.

There are apparently so many bonus issues in the pipeline that one doesn't know where to begin. To start with, there is Ingersoll-Rand which makes compressors and has a long history of steady bonus issues. There is also Raymond Woollen, with a similar history, and Colgate, which is said to be ready with an offer for a rights issue followed by a bonus issue. Other companies in the bonus pipeline are Bajaj Tempo, which on a capital base of slightly over Rs 3 crore is expected to make a profit of about six times that figure, Straw Products, and possibly, Century Rayon.

Nearer home, there is Ranbaxy Laboratories, which is rumoured to have touched a turnover of Rs 50 crore in the accounting year ended December. The company missed a bonus issue last year but cannot avoid it this time. Pharmaceuticals and drugs should be an attractive proposition, for a new policy is said to be on the anvil, whatever that means. In fact, most businessmen are expecting a brand new industrial policy that will do away with some of the irritants in the present policy. But in this country things never really work out the way one expects them to. But the winds of change are favourable for the economy as a whole as well as the corporate sector and the markets have an exciting time ahead of them.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 4.1.85	Change on Fortnight
Asea	75.00	48.00	68.00	nil
Ashok Leyland	37.50	26.50	29.00	1.50 +
Associated Cement	458.00	298.50	410.00	41.50 +
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.00	37.50	3.00 +
Ballarpur	53.30	43.00	44.25	0.75 +
Baroda Rayon	285.00	243.00	282.00	13.00 –
BASF	50.00	28.50	51.50	3.50 +
Bata India	49.00	28.50	49.00	nil
Birla Jute	62.50	51.60	52.30	0.70 +
Blow Plast	48.50	37.00	38.00	2.00 –
Blue Star	34.00	29.50	33.00	1.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	72.00	59.00	70.00	3.00 +
Britannia Industries	47.50	33.60	48.25	3.75 +
Brooke Bond	48.00	34.10	48.25	2.25 +
Century Spinning	910.00	790.00	907.50	5.00 +
Chloride India	57.50	48.25	59.00	2.50 +
Coates of India	30.87	24.00	26.00	2.00 +
Colgate	148.00	100.00	157.00	16.00 +
Cyanamid	45.50	30.50	39.00	6.00 +
DCM	78.12	47.00	49.50	0.25 –
Dunlop	27.60	20.50	22.70	1.60 +
East India Hotels	40.25	25.50	28.50	1.00 +
Escorts	78.00	50.25	50.25	0.50 –
Food Specialities	92.50	69.00	90.00	2.50 –
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	18.60	18.70	0.10 +
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	49.00	53.75	1.00 –
Herdillia Chemicals	27.00	20.50	26.00	nil
Hindustan Aluminium	53.00	44.00	53.10	3.70 +
Hindustan Cocoa	60.00	21.00	61.50	4.00 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	46.00	51.50	0.50 +
Hindustan Motors	48.00	40.40	43.04	1.64 +
Indian Aluminium	26.40	19.00	28.80	0.20 +
Indian Explosives	33.20	25.00	34.30	1.20 +
Indian Organic	51.00	31.00	52.75	2.25 +
Indian Oxygen	44.50	33.00	43.50	nil
Indian Rayon	75.50	54.50	70.00	2.00 +
J.K. Synthetics	52.80	29.00	53.50	2.20 +
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	51.00	0.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	156.00	113.00	144.50	9.50 +
Kirloskar Cummins	580.00	407.50	520.00	5.00 +
Kothari Industrial	27.00	20.80	22.00	1.40 +
Larsen & Toubro	80.00	65.00	72.50	1.00 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	74.75	45.00	48.50	nil
Modi Rubber	30.31	19.50	20.25	0.75 +
National Organic	243.00	176.50	242.50	5.00 +
Nirlon	39.00	32.00	39.50	2.25 +
Oswal Agro	95.00	51.75	58.37	1.50 +
Otis Elevator	87.00	54.00	90.00	12.00 +
Premier Automobiles	317.00	248.00	324.00	6.00 +
Ranbaxy	55.00	44.00	52.00	3.00 +
Raymond Woollen	69.50	53.00	68.00	10.50 +
Reliance Textiles	144.00	110.00	125.00	1.00 +
Shriram Fibres	38.75	30.37	35.50	2.37 –
Siemens	47.50	41.00	44.00	1.75 +
SPIC	42.00	28.08	44.44	3.60 +
Straw Products	57.00	42.20	48.00	2.70 +
Tata Chemicals	71.00	53.00	68.50	2.25 +
Tata Steel	380.00	244.50	394.50	40.00 +
Telco	433.00	385.00	427.00	8.50 +
Texmaco	69.80	49.80	62.50	0.15 +
Union Carbide	30.25	18.80	17.70	1.60 –
Unit Trust	14.35	12.60	14.00	0.15 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	10.2835	10.1543
Austria	Schilling	100	57.1620	56.5102
Bahrain	Dinar	1	31.8828	31.8128
Bangladesh	Taka	100	46.7601	45.8513
Canada	Dollar	1	9.6197	9.5135
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1230	1.1085
Egypt	Pound	1	13.2342	13.1921
France	Franc	1	1.3098	1.2949
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.8294	1.8121
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1009	1.0921
Iran	Rial	100	12.8210	12.8000
Italy	Lira	100	0.8482	0.8478
Japan	Yen	100	4.9778	4.9235
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7828	0.7827
Kuwait	Dinar	1	38.4311	38.2210
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1839	5.1250
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.7918	0.7917
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.8822	0.8818
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5522	3.5148
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7721	0.7710
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.7752	5.7115
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0725	0.0701
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4512	0.4518
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.4080	1.3888
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.8170	4.7607
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6811	0.6808
Thailand	Baht	100	44.6900	44.6760
UK	Pound	1	14.5306	14.3988
USA	Dollar	1	12.8350	12.4825
UAE	Dirham	1	3.2021	3.1709
USSR	Rouble	1	13.8520	13.6922
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.0117	3.9682

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 8.1.85.

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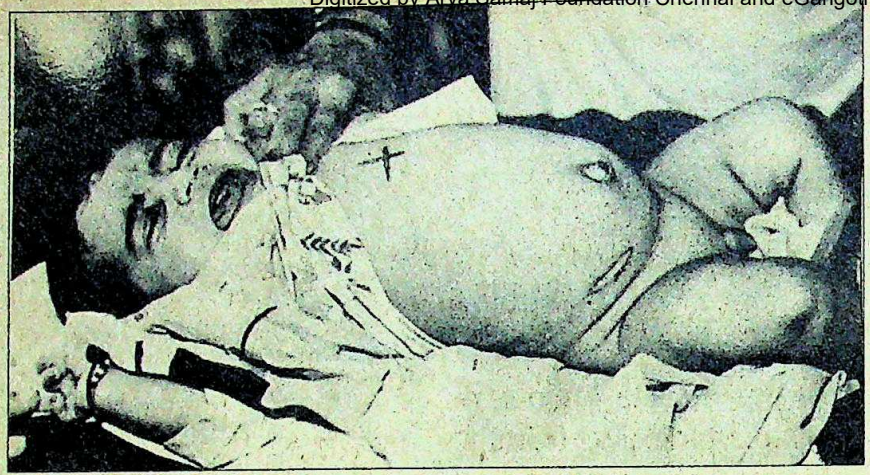

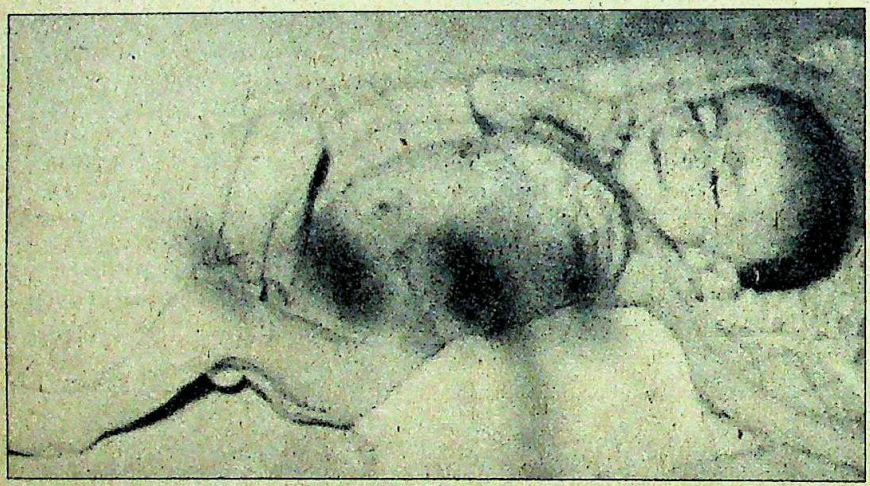

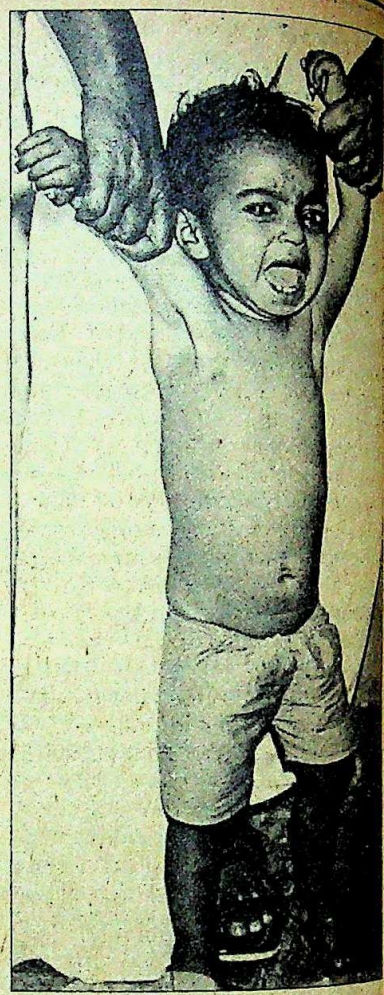

Young victims of branding: overwhelmed by superstition

SAURASHTRA

Scars of Suffering

WHEN Sukhram was born in Rajsamdhiyala village of Rajkot last year, his parents were ecstatic. After six daughters, a son had at last been born. But the little boy cried much too often. His superstitious parents believed that he was ill because he had been cursed by evil spirits, and took him to Devsi Malla, 45, a well-known brander. After a fleeting look at the child, Malla threw a thin piece of iron into a crucible of glowing coals. When it had turned red hot, he jabbed it into the stomach of the three-month-old Sukhram. As the child let out a helpless shriek, the mother respectfully filled Malla's palm with rupee coins and left. Days later, the baby's condition worsened. The raw tender flesh became infected and sepsis set in, which spread to other parts of the body. When it affected his brain, the child died.

RAMESH MENON

"I feel so helpless seeing children die. Can we allow this to continue just because it has social sanction?"

DR MANORAMA MEHTA, *superintendent, Government Children's Hospital*

Sukhram was just one of the many children to pass through the hands of Malla and die or suffer horrendously in the local Government Children's Hospital. Angered by these unnecessary deaths and the apathy of the local police and district administration who took no action, the hospital's Superintendent Dr Manorama Mehta single-handedly launched a campaign against branding. The normally soft-spoken Mehta dashed off a furious letter to A.P. Bhatt, chief judicial magistrate at Rajkot, describing the inhuman suffering caused to children by branders of Saurashtra. Acting with commendable quickness, Bhatt directed the police to arrest Malla. They did arrest him, only to release him on bail. Tragically, though his example seems to have dampened the activities of other branders, Malla himself was back in action last month. He branded a two-month-old child who was suffering from hydrocele (scrotal swelling due to collection of

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serous fluid in the testis).

In fact, though numerous children have died after branding—Malla alone was responsible for 72 serious cases in the Children's Hospital—the police have arrested just three branders in the past year. The reason is that in the superstition-ridden region of Saurashtra, branding has social sanction. It is performed as a ritual in every village. For example, in Kalipat village of Rajkot district where Malla lives, 95 per cent of the inhabitants have been branded at some point of their lives. Children proudly bare their stomachs to show off their marks. One of them, Ranabhai, has 32 branding marks on his stomach administered by Malla as a "treatment" for stomach pain. Ranabhai is luckier than most: he survived. Laments Mehta: "I feel so helpless seeing children die. Can we allow this to continue just because it has social sanction?"

RAMESH MENON

"Some children do become serious and die. But don't patients die after being treated by reputed doctors?"

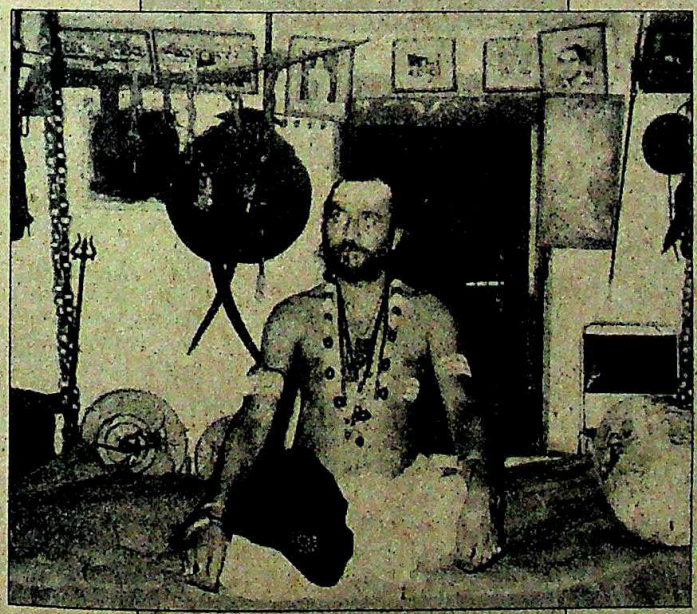
DEVSI MALLA,
a brander

THE CUSTOM of branding took firm root here mainly because of the kind of ignorance that prevails in the backward area of Saurashtra, where literacy is below 30 per cent. But surprisingly enough, even the educated get themselves branded. At Kalipat, Keshubhai, an economics graduate does not hesitate to say that branding should be allowed to continue. In Kherada village in Rajkot district, the sarpanch Karsanbhai himself was found to be branding children. And doctors were shocked to find that a health worker in Paddhari village in Rajkot district had got his child branded. The prevailing myth is that branders are blessed by the gods and have the power to cure. Branding is usually done on the lower and upper abdomen, inner thighs, chest and back. "All kinds of superstitious beliefs make even the educated irrational. Many parents do not take a child to a doctor even if the branding wound becomes septic as they believe that the gods are pleased if the wound becomes septic," explains Shantaben Desai, a social worker at Surendranagar. In many cases barren women surreptitiously branded children believing that if they did so it would please the gods, who would then bless them with a child.

One of the major reasons why branding has caught on is that in most villages in Saurashtra, medical facilities are lacking. "Doctors fleece us when we go to their city clinics. Most of them are not interested in our ailments. Why should we go to them?" asks Anantrai Vyas, a clerk. "At least branders do not demand money." Mehta lays her finger on the nub of the problem when she says: "The only way to get rid of branding is to ensure that excellent health services reach the remote areas and doctors get involved with not just sensitively treating patients but also educating them." This is no easy task as faith in branders is very deeply ingrained. For example, eight months ago, Burra, a six-day-old boy from Vejagam Vajdi was admitted to the Children's Hospital for neonatal septicaemia. A few days later he was discharged but as he kept crying, his mother got him branded. When the child developed sepsis he was rushed to hospital. It was too late. He was just 17 days old when he died.

A few centuries ago when there were no antibiotics or medical facilities, branding was probably introduced with a scientific basis. By branding the skin, the immunological system of the body got stimulated because of the infection caused by the wound. The body then reacted so violently that any minor disease or ailment got cured. The principle was the same as that of immunisation today where less virulent germs are injected in small doses into the body so that the body will be able to build up a resistance to it. Allopathic doctors feel that this could be the only explanation.

RAMESH MENON



"Branding is an ancient science, as acupuncture is a science. It has nothing to do with magical powers."

BACHUBHAI GADHVI
a tantrik

Well-known ancient Indian treatises like the Rig Veda, Atharva Veda and Aryabhishek have mentioned branding as a form of cure for various ailments. These books have detailed chapters on branding. Bachubhai Gadhvi, a prominent tantrik at Wadhwan in Surendranagar points out: "Branding is an ancient Indian science, as acupuncture is a science. But 99 per cent of the branders in Saurashtra do not know the correct technique and have not been able to study it as they cannot even read. The few who are effective have learnt of it from their forefathers. It has nothing to do with magical powers as is being widely believed."

Malla is one of those who learnt the "science" from his forefathers. For the last 400 years, his ancestors have been branding patients, and Malla himself before his arrest treated 150 cases per month on an average. Not surprisingly, many of his "patients", new-born babies, have died helpless, voiceless deaths. His curious justification is: "My family has been branding sick children for the last

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CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Excerpts from the speech at the 15th Annual General Meeting on 29.12.'84

KOTHARI INDUSTRIAL CORPORATION LIMITED

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Records Satisfactory Performance

Dr. D.C. Kothari Chairman

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS Rs. in lacs

	Ten years before (1974/75)	Year ended 1982/83	Year ended 1983/84
Total Revenue	2199	5394	6228
Profit after Taxes	42	115	166
Dividends	35	83	85
Net Worth	470	3386 *	6422 **
Net Block	446	5565 *	8123 **
Loan Funds	661	3935	3893
Capital Employed	1131	7322 *	10316 **

* includes Rs. 1536 lacs on revaluation
** includes Rs. 4113 lacs on revaluation

INDIAN ECONOMY DURING 1983-84

Achieved 8% growth rate against 1.8% the previous year. Foodgrains production touched new heights; infrastructure and certain key industries registered sustained growth. However high inflation, imperfect demand inhibiting capacity utilisation, industrial sickness due to high taxes, shortages and high cost of electricity persisted.

YOUR COMPANY'S PERFORMANCE : TEXTILES

Textile industry is in the grip of rising costs and recessionary demand for the fourth successive year. Adverse weather in 1983 caused shortfall in cotton production leading to 50% price hike, especially in short and medium staple cotton. Liquidity and working capital problems made manufacture of blended yarn and fabrics infeasible. Poor demand even during festive seasons, strikes and communal disturbances caused curtailment or even stoppage of operations. Our Coimbatore mills faced 50% powercut throughout the year; Adoni experienced 25% cut in the latter half. Shortfall was met through stand-by generators, though at higher costs.

PLANTATIONS

Phenomenal performance with record tea crop due to remunerative prices. Our tea estates harvested 3.09 m kg-36% higher than last year's level. Seventh Plan will see incentives flowing to tea industry, providing excellent long term prospects. With Rs.900 crores outlay, production proposed to be raised to 766 m kg (against Rs.300 crores, 600 m kg respectively in Sixth Plan). Our tea estates implemented statutory labour benefits. Availing Tea Board and NABARD facilities, we are modernising tea factories, undertaking massive infilling and consolidation of fields and establishing permanent, elaborate irrigation to achieve stable high production level. For the benefit of workers' children, a Vocational Training Centre, first of its kind in plantations, started in Waterfall Estate. 1984 Coffee crop - lowest on record. Sale to Quota countries was remunerative, but neutralised by heavy discounts given to non-quota countries and by heavy export duty. Present internal consumption is only one-third of production - it needs strengthening through aggressive propaganda so that reliance on unpredictable export market be minimised. With sophisticated machinery, our Curing Works processed record level coffee, even in a lean year.

FERTILISERS

Favourable weather and reduced prices enabled 12% increase in fertiliser application causing record food production. Our Ennore factory maintained profitability with better turnover of NPK mixtures; produced 33,699 tonnes of SSP despite labour unrest lasting 120 days.

CHEMICALS

Reduced demand and surfeit market supplies forced a set-back in our Chemicals Division eroding into other Divisions' profits. Power rates in Tamil Nadu hiked by 20% and a differential 5p per unit charged on our unit, making it less competitive. I hope both demand and price situations improve gradually. Our expanded plant is equipped with titanium anodes under energy conservation programme.

Our corporate philosophy of diversified expansion continues. Letter of Intent has been received for propylene based chemicals project. It would enable better chlorine utilisation, remunerative prices and stabilized operations.

CURRENT YEAR

Prospects are brighter for Chemicals Division with better offtake and prices for Caustic Soda and for Textiles with falling cotton prices. Tea prices are expected to harden further due to global shortage, higher home consumption.

Product	Unit of measure	1-7-84 to 31-10-84	1-7-83 to 31-10-83	For the year ending 30-6-84	30-6-85 (Estimate)
Tea	Lac kgs	8.50	7.71	30.89	31.00
Coffee	Tonnes	31	–	937	1300
Superphosphate	Tonnes	14559	14246	33699	40000
Caustic Soda	Tonnes	11082	5596	25722	41000
Textiles – Yarn	Lac kgs	16.01	18.01	51.56	57.00
–Cloth	Lac Mtrs	18.51	18.63	54.02	58.00

CONCLUSION

I acknowledge the co-operation, and constructive work of the Executives, Staff and Workers at all levels. Our gratitude to our bankers and financial institutions. I am obliged to my colleagues on the Board for their support and guidance.

Madras
16th November, 1984

This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

FAMEK/1077

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seven generations. Some do become serious and die. But don't patients die after being treated by reputed doctors?" With this argument he seeks to absolve himself of the blame. Unfortunately, responsible people seem to support this kind of logic. The Kalipal Sarpanch, M.D. Jadeja has gone so far as to demand that the police and the district administration permit Malla to brand as it is an age-old practice.

AND INDEED, though the arrest of Malla scared off some of the quacks operating in the remote backward areas of Saurashtra, it has made no significant impact on the number of cases of branding. Apart from the stubborn faith that the local people have in the efficacy of branding, Mehta has to contend with the scepticism of officials. A senior IPS officer once asked the indefatigable campaigner why she was bent on kicking up so much dust over an issue that had undoubted social sanction. Pulling up his sleeves, he showed her the mark he himself had received from a branding done years ago in his childhood.

In his own house, Limbabhai, a brander, has rows of allopathic drugs for his use. He suffers from lung infection and chest pain. But he dares not brand himself.

What was still stranger was that Rajkot Police Commissioner Hiralal told her quite blandly that he was unaware of this phenomenon, as far as he was aware it didn't occur within the city limits. But Limbabhai, a brander who lives in the heart of Rajkot city has been plying his trade for 20 years now. Buddhiben, a woman, has been branding children for over 50 years in Rajkot. Whatever faith people like the IPS officer, the Kalipat sarpanch or the poor, ignorant villagers of Saurashtra may have in them, the branders themselves evidently have no illusions about their trade. In his own house, Limbabhai has rows upon rows of allopathic drugs for his use. He suffers from a chronic cough, lung infection and chest pain. But he dares not brand himself.

—RAMESH MENON in Rajkot

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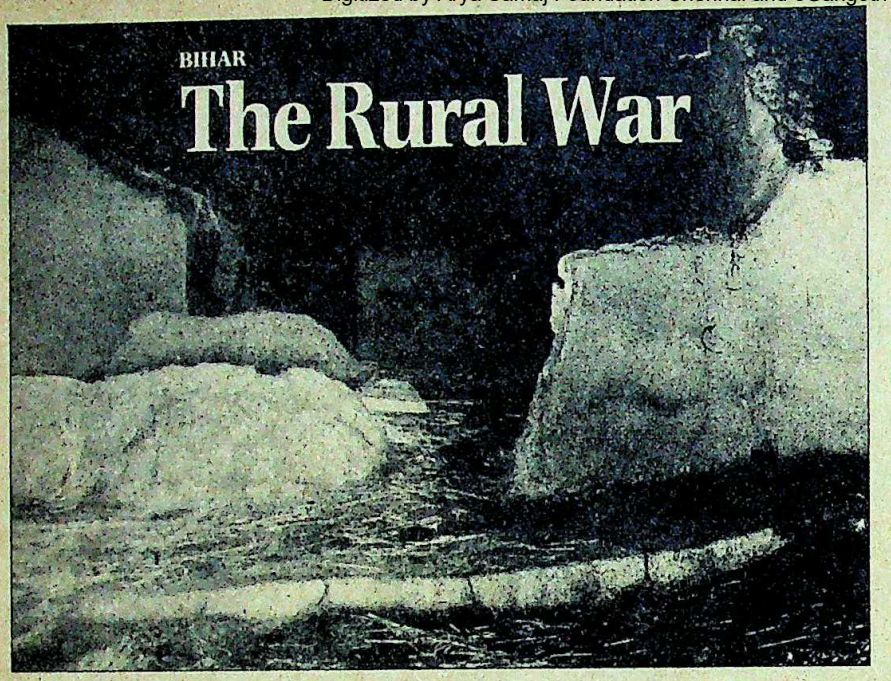
BIHAR

The Rural War



A row of houses in Kaitha-Bigha destroyed by the fire

FOR THE Harijan settlement of Kaitha-Bigha in Bihar's Aurangabad district, it was a bloody start to 1985. On New Year's eve, a police patrol surrounded one of the village huts demanding that the inmates surrender. The inmates refused saying: "We are not criminals, we are social workers and revolutionaries." The angry exchanges were soon punctuated by a hail of bullets that gunned down one of the constables. Immediately thereafter, A.K.Pandey, deputy inspector general of police at Gaya, received an unusual wireless message: "Rush army reinforcements to Kaitha-Bigha with mortars and grenade launchers."

The army was not eventually called but the ensuing battle was bloody enough.By the end of new year's day, 12 people lay dead—10 'extremists' and two policemen—and Kaitha-Bigha itself was little more than a heap of ashes. The killing and destruction of the Harijan hamlet spread terror and panic for miles around and immediately raised agonising questions regarding the age-old and often deadly friction between the landless and the powerful landlord-police nexus.

According to the villagers, at least five of those killed by the police were actually taken alive, paraded before the village and then shot at pointblank range. Though the official version is naturally contrary, more evidence of the "encounter" has not been forthcoming for the simple reason that all the inhabitants of the village who witnessed the entire episode have fled in fear of police reprisals.

But the Kaitha-Bigha incident contains all the classic ingredients of earlier "encounters":caste and social tensions, rural poverty aggravated by the yawning economic disparities (14 big landlords control most of the land in the area) and rising Harijan militancy being fuelled by Naxalite organisations. Locals say that on the evening of December 31, Harijans led by militants belonging to two extremist organisations, the Indian People's Front (IPF) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) had assembled in the village to discuss how to avenge the rape of a Harijan girl by the son of a powerful local landlord. The anger of the Harijans was further aroused by a similar incident in which another girl from the village, Satia, daughter of Nanku Ram, had been kidnapped and brutally raped by the son of another landlord. The villagers say that when the landlord clique failed to prevent the Harijans from holding the meeting they sent a messenger to the Obra police station with the warning that "armed extremists were planning to annihilate landlords".

Other eyewitness accounts claim that during the "encounter" that followed, the landlords doused the village huts with kerosene and set them on fire. The landlords had been further incensed by the fact that the Harijans, inspired by the militant groups, had been agitating for a hike in their minimum wages and had also been resisting attempts to evict them from their settlement.That fateful December night provided the perfect excuse for the landlords to settle scores with the help of the police.

Police Superintendent D.S.Prasad, who took personal command of the police action, however, has a different version to relate. According to him, the Obra police had been "tipped off" about the presence of armed criminals in Nanku Ram's house and a police party had been dispatched to apprehend the criminals and recover the arms. "Till then we did not know that there were extremists in the hut," he says.When the police party arrived, they were refused permission to enter and soon after. a hail of bullets gunned down one of the constables.His story is that some of the extremists escaped and in doing so, set fire to some of the huts. The police also claim to have recovered three of a batch of five rifles stolen from a Home Guard detachment last August.

The facts, however, speak for themselves. Those who benefitted most from the encounter and the destruction of the Harijan settlement were the local upper-caste landlords who, villagers claim, were present in large numbers during the "encounter". District Magistrate B.K.Sinha says that "Kaitha-Bigha was never suspected as an extremist stronghold.The extremist problem has been romanticised by the press and misunderstood by the administration."

However, there is no denying that the Naxalite cult has infiltrated many districts from Nalanda to Aurangabad and places like Patna, Gaya, Bhojpur and Rohtas ever since the '60s.To counter this, the landlords had formed their own caste 'senas' or private armies which, according to estimates, have accounted for over 250 extremists between 1980 and 1984 (INDIA TODAY March 15, 1984).So far the landlords have had the upper hand but the Naxalites have succeeded in infusing the poor and exploited Harijan labourers with a new militancy and a new awareness of their dignity and rights.

But the "rural war" has also led to a splintering in the ranks of the Naxalite groups with the IPF, the most moderate of the groups, having a large following in the interiors of Bihar with the MCC confined to Aurangabad and other factions in control of scattered pockets. However, officials say that the Naxalite groups have been running a "parallel administration" in the area.Landlords admit that the MCC realises tolls from the people and carries out summary executions from landlords who have earned their wrath.

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But latest indications are that despite incidents like the Kaitha-Bigha killings, the war is gradually being won by the militants. Many landlords have moved to safer sanctuaries leaving an estimated 10,000 acres of fallow land. Sinha has been suggesting that instead of providing cattle and money to the poor and landless under the Integrated Rural Development Programme, the administration should buy up the fallow land and distribute it to the landless. His argument is that once the people have land, not only would they have an assured income but would be less prone to incitement by extremist groups. So far, however, Sinha's appeal has fallen on deaf ears.

The result is that the influence of the Naxalite groups has expanded rapidly leading to greater tensions and attempts at periodic crackdown by the landlords and the police, of which Kaitha-Bigha was yet another bloody manifestation.

—FARZAND AHMED

UTTAR PRADESH

Fiery Feuds

THE TROUBLED state of Uttar Pradesh has by now got relatively immune to reports of mass killings. It was hardly surprising that with the ruling party still celebrating its electoral triumph in the state, the massacre of 26 people in one district, including six women and children, in two separate incidents left behind few ripples. Even Chief Minister Narain Dutt Tewari merely pleaded: "Do not compare these killings with Behmai and other massacres. These are just personal family feuds."

Tewari did have a point. There were no signs of any caste feuds or gang warfare in the two cases of mass killings in the state's Sitapur district. In the first, at the Yadav-dominated Mohiddunipur village, a squabble between relations led to the massacre of 21 people in which women and children were burnt alive after they barricaded themselves inside their homes. In Maholi village, less than a week later, six people were gunned down in their sleep in what was another case of local rivalry.

Sitapur is one of the 10 most criminally-prone districts in the state and the incidents were brushed aside as local quarrels. Family feuds, in any event, are not uncommon in Uttar Pradesh. But the magnitude of the tragedy was clearly a cause for concern and administration officials were worried that it could herald the start of a new trend where traditional enmity between families would increasingly result in mass murder. Part confirmation came from the action of the state Government in reviewing the issue of gun licences in the districts. Tewari also ordered law enforcement officials to keep a closer watch on traditional family feuds in their areas.

The background to the Mohiddunipur massacre indicates that the steps were long overdue. The rivalry between the two families of Chandrika Singh Yadav and his brother-in-law Shivlal Yadav, started, incongruously enough, over a dispute over ownership of a mango tree last August. Three weeks later, Chandrika's son, Bhagwan Deen and another relative, Bharati Lal, were shot dead. Shivlal Yadav was arrested along with nine others and charged with murder but released on bail. A key witness in the case was Bhagwati's son. But on January 1, barely a few days before he was due to appear in court to record his statement, Bhagwati himself was kidnapped. His body was discovered the next day in a field.

The Chandrika group lost no time in taking revenge. Within an hour of the body being found, Chandrika and his relations armed themselves and attacked Shivlal's house. Recalls Ram Lal, Shivlal's brother: "When we heard gunshots we locked ourselves up. I managed to run away before our houses were set on fire." Others were not so lucky. Shivlal himself was badly burnt and miraculously escaped death. His wife and 14-year-old son were burnt alive as were three other children.

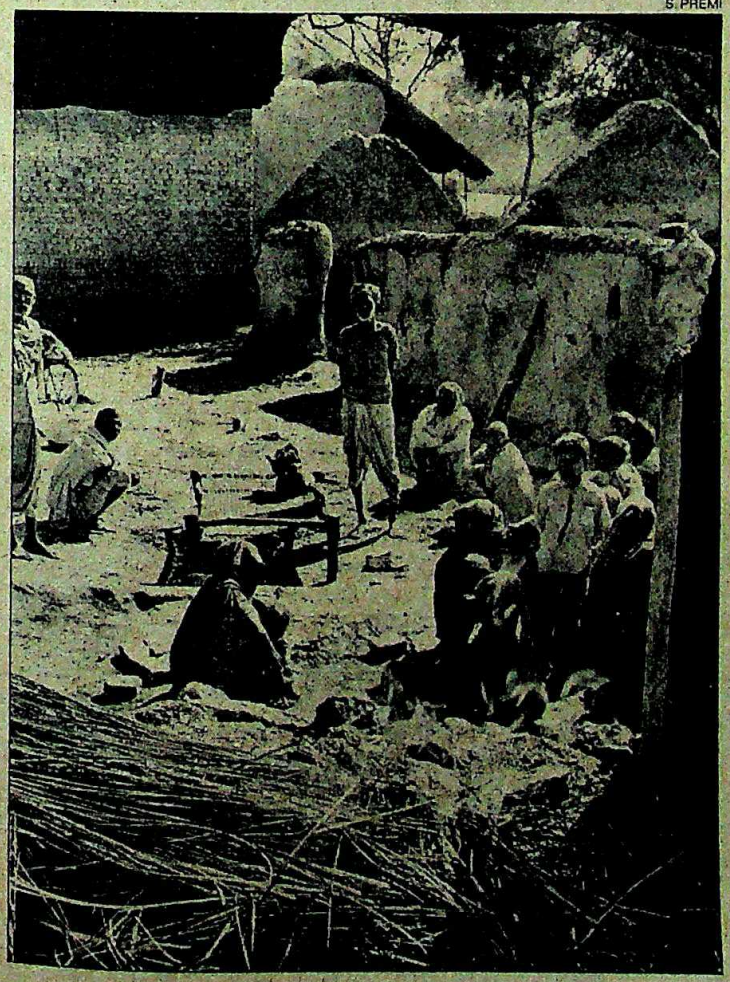
Barely five days later, the story was tragically repeated in Mahili village where rivalry over property was the root cause of the massacre. The only difference was the victims, members of the family of Gaya Bax Singh, an affluent landowner, were shot one by one at pointblank range while they were asleep. Once again, a festering family feud was the ostensible cause.

According to Pritam Pal Singh, superintendent of police in Sitapur, both the massacres were "freak cases" resulting out of family feuds. Other senior police officials admit that so far the efforts of law enforcement agencies have been designed to counter dacoits. But, says one: "It is a sign of the times that we will now have to look carefully into personal disputes to ensure that such incidents are not repeated." But that is in no way an easy task, as even Chief Minister Tewari admitted last week as the state prepared to face up to what appears to be a new pattern in family disputes—mass murder.

—RAJU SANTHANAM
in Sitapur

Dazed victims beside their wrecked houses at Mohiddunipur

S. PREMI



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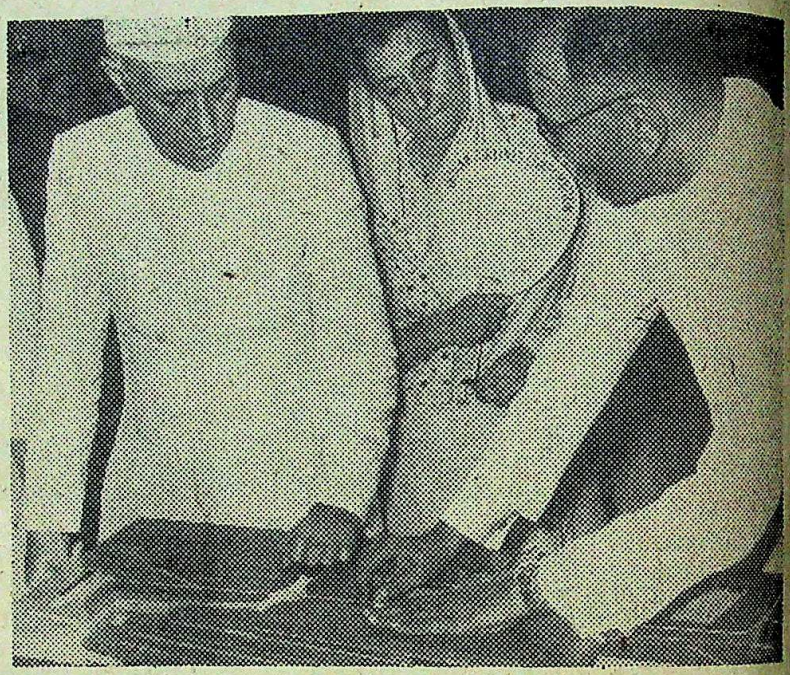

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Products	1979-80 (Last year of V Plan)	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85 (April to Oct. 1984)
		←	VI Plan		→	
Lignite (Lakh Tonnes)	28.97	48.01	58.76	64.01	66.35	41.2
Power Generation Gross (MU)	2,370	3,175	3,391	3,833	3,909	2,369
Power Exported (MU)	1,768	2,454	2,686	3,073	3,027	1,816
Urea (Tonnes)	1,04,908	1,34,334	98,940	1,01,211	1,24,447	63,470
Coke (Tonnes)	42,948	1,19,411	1,88,419	1,72,111	1,73,603	1,15,146

Performance		1979-80 (Last year of V Plan)	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84
			←	VI Plan		→
Profit Rs. in crores		0.50	17.06	37.92	47.44	62.97
Internal Generation of funds Rs. in crores		14.85	30.54	56.65	76.47	85.54
Capacity Utilisation (%)	Mine-I	44.60	73.90	90.40	98.50	102.10
	Thermal Power Station-I	69.40	92.90	99.30	112.20	114.37
Load Factor in Thermal Power Station-I (%)		44.95	60.40	64.51	72.91	74.17

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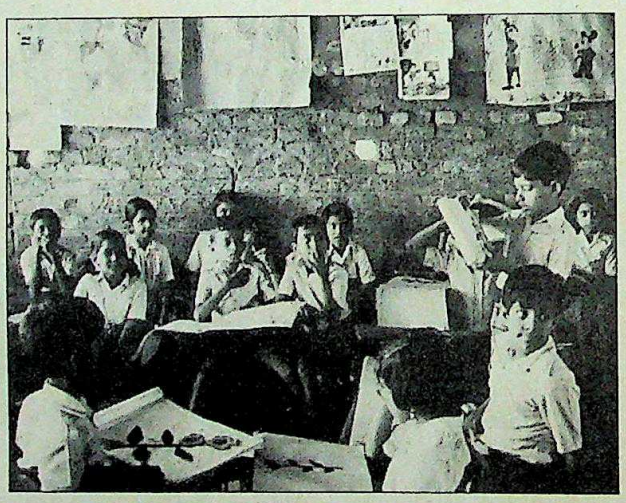
HYDERABAD

A Practical Project

THEY are classes without textbooks. For one hour every week, the 350-odd students of Sri Vidhya Secondary School at Tilak Nagar in suburban Hyderabad are left to themselves to explore and understand the phenomena that passes off as everyday science. Blackboards, flip charts, sketch paper on the walls, personal notebooks and a system of work charts for guidance, all go into making the work study hour, as it is known among the students, an hour they eagerly look forward to. This ongoing experiment to stimulate interest in the study of scientific phenomena in familiar situations gained international recognition in December 1983 when the school founder and principal Indira Seshagiri Rao, 48, and the mathematics teacher, Asha Bhide, 33, got the first prize in the Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators Award at a ceremony in London. The prize was for their project paper on developing materials for teaching science and mathematics so as to develop technical and social skills among schoolgoers. "Writing the paper was easier as we have tried out the concepts and suggestions at the school ever since it was started in 1975," said Rao.

At first glance, all that goes on seems commonplace—a discussion on the use of the neem tree, twigs and leaves, why sponge absorbs more water than cotton cloth, the making of tea or even the drawings of the circuits for the traffic signal at a crossroad. But as Rao points out: "This is the scientific approach to make sure that students realise that most things happening around are no longer mundane, unfathomable everyday occurrences." To make these classes in self-study more meaningful, the teachers have devised projects for interlinked understanding of several subjects for all classes. "We have devised process-based instruction of science through work cards. The work card carries a series of compact learning steps to make it easy for students to learn on their own. And as they work with simple materials of daily life, they pick up several abstract concepts by interweaving disciplines," explained Bhide.

A popular example with teachers and students is the elaborate tea-making project. It begins as a lesson on matter, leading to the study of boiling point, home accounts in the costing for tea and sugar, then an extension into geography when discussing the climate in which tea grows, and also a composition exercise on making tea as part of the language class. The importance of weaving together such diverse subjects is clearly understood by the teachers, for as Bhide says, "this is a mind-opening exercise and should have little to do with the teaching of the syllabus or preparing the students for exams." Introduced as a class outside the regular curriculum, no tests or examinations are held. Due to constraints of time the teachers cannot take up more than one project a class per week without disturbing academic schedules but as Bhide explains; "We can claim what is lost in academic facts and the systematic development of the subject is more than balanced by training in initiative, and the development of a scientific enquiry in students."



Rao (left) and Bhide; (below) a work study class: innovative scheme

The students are clearly enthusiastic about learning so much on their own. "Whether it is making tea, using a solar cooker or trying to prove the Archimedes Principle, the fact that we are able to do it ourselves instead of staring at textbooks if not at the teacher makes us feel better," says one student, Venkatram Shastri 13, of class nine. Manish Kothari, another student felt that activity-oriented learning "answered questions convincingly and raised new questions which we try to solve". Added S. Sushmita 12, a class eight student: "It makes us feel knowledge is ever-expanding and we will have to try to constantly catch up with the latest. That is why we ask the principal to invite somebody to speak to us about computers and space probes."

The role of the teacher in this experiment has also undergone changes. Admitted R. Janaki: "We are tongue-tied as instructional supervisors and have only to oversee and organise what the students are doing. Some turn out to be more talented than the teachers in abstract reasoning and it is sometimes difficult to match student capabilities." To improve their skills the teachers attend workshops on better teaching techniques and aids held in different parts of the country. As Nalini Tanneru, another teacher admitted: "The hold of chalk and talk is slowly going down. Teaching of science must be approached as a tentative search. It is better to look out of the class window when talking about climates and temperatures in a geography class instead of at weather charts and maps."

The Hyderabad school experiment is not restricted to just within the premises of the school. "Even guests who come home are not spared the flood of questions of the curious child," said Ramani Sundaram, an obviously proud mother. The greater challenge is to help those who cannot come to school for various reasons. But even so, the project to make learning an enjoyable experience seems to have become the prime concern of educators in at least this one school.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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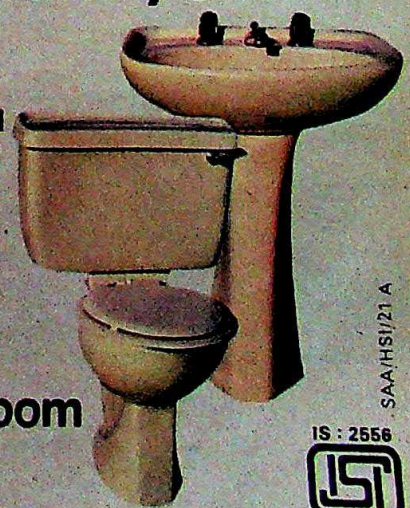

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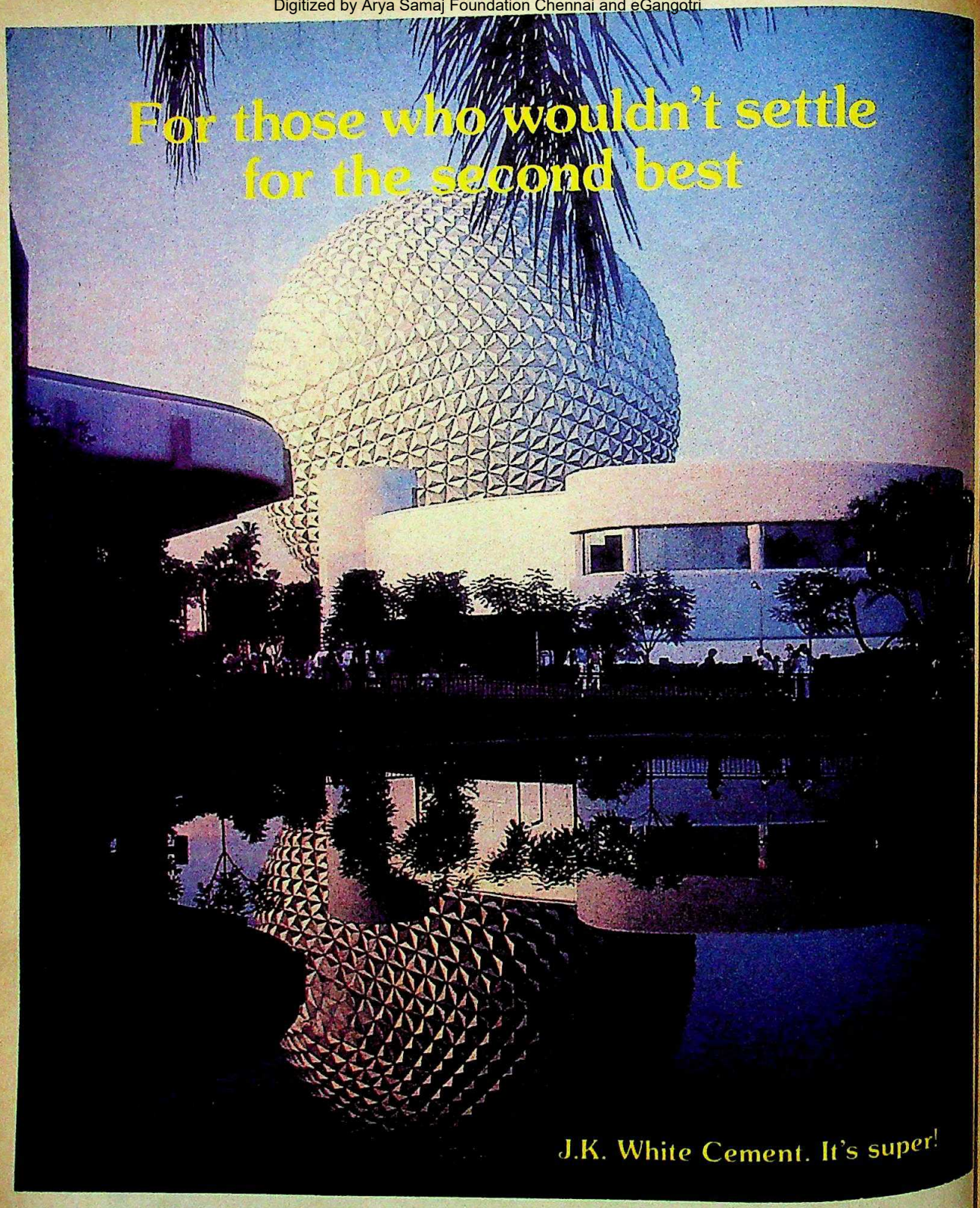

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Different Strokes

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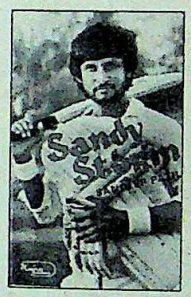

IF INDIAN cricketers were as prolific with their bats as they are with their pens, the psychological menace of Marshall, Holding and Imran would hardly exist at the kind of exaggerated level it does. At no other time have Indian cricketers shown such a proclivity for print as they have in the recent past, whether for various publications during the cricket season or churning out turgid tomes on their various triumphs and failures.

Much of the rather dubious credit for that situation must necessarily go to Rupa & Co, the publishers of the three books on cricket that filled the stands last fortnight. Rupa pioneered the trend with Gavaskar's *Sunny Days* back in 1976 and have more or less monopolised the field since.

Like the Indian cricket team, however, Rupa also seems to overly depend on Gavaskar for the big score. *Runs'n Ruins* is Gavaskar's third book, following closely on the heels of *Idols*, published last year. The second Rupa offering is more of a surprise, authored as it is by Sandeep Patil whose cricketing career has sputtered along like a defective firecracker. But like Pakistan's Imran Khan, Patil has long sported a glamour boy image which will certainly do no harm to the sales of the book. The third book, *Great Feats of Indian Cricket* is by veteran cricket scribe Partab Ramchand and its attraction would be limited to nostalgia buffs who remember Vijay Hazare, Polly Umrigar and Jasu Patel.

In a sense, however, all three authors have something in common. Both Patil and Gavaskar moonlight as journalists of a kind: Gavaskar as editor of *Indian Cricketer* and Patil of a Marathi sports magazine. But there, unfortunately, the resemblance ends. The difference between Gavaskar's book and Patil's is like the difference in their batting. Gavaskar in *Runs'n Ruins* is cautious in his approach, no wild swings or edges, merely setting the records straight on certain issues and unsparing in his self-criticism as would befit a batsman of his stature. The book covers what was perhaps the most frustrating period in his career (hence the 'ruins' in the title) when he was wilting under the pressure of equalling and overtaking the great Sir Don Bradman's record of 29 test centuries during the 1983-84 season.

However, there were other irritants that Gavaskar outlines which did not augur well for Indian cricket. One was the fact that for the first time Indian cricketers like Kapil and Mohinder Amarnath had started writing for publications during a series despite a ban by the board. It was brushed under the carpet but symbolised the fact that cricketers were determined to exploit their professional status to the full and challenge the board's authority in no uncertain terms. Kapil and Amarnath were, however, soon embroiled in another controversy, this one involving prize money. The normal practice had been that any player who wins prize money for Man of the Match or Man of the Series shared it with the rest of the team members. Kapil had won the Man of the Series award for the English tour in 1982 and Amarnath for the Pakistan and West Indies tours that followed. While Kapil had a legitimate excuse in that he was still to receive the money, Amarnath refused to part with his booty on one flimsy excuse after another. According to Gavaskar, Kapil did part with his prize money when he received it later but Amarnath had set a bad precedent and when Anshuman Gaekwad was awarded Man of the Series for the Pakistan series, he promptly refused on the grounds that he would do so only if Amarnath did.

There were other precedents that clearly trouble Gavaskar the cricketer and Gavaskar the former captain. Kapil's tenancy as captain, for one. He expresses astonishment at the casual approach to cricket that Kapil ushered in. There were for example, no team discussions on strategy before most of the matches, no effort to analyse the opposing team's strengths and weaknesses and decide on how to counter them. "We just drifted along and played."

He takes the opportunity in this book to give vent to his pent-up anger at the cricketing pundits who sit in the press box, two of whom celebrated his dismissal during the Ahmedabad Test when he was on 98 by offering to send a case of rum to Mike Holding, the man responsible for his dismissal.

Gavaskar is a much-mellowed man and it shows in his writing. The same, unfortunately, cannot be said for Sandeep Patil. *Sandy Storm* is at the outset, a misnomer. Sandy is, of course, the anglicised version of his first name which is what his team-mates call him. But the storm is more of a breeze. Patil is undoubtedly a man of many parts, cricketer, playboy, film star, magazine editor, hotel director, singer, model entrepreneur and now, author.

Unfortunately, his debut in the last is hardly as successful as in 1981 when he burst onto the cricketing arena in a blaze of glory with a maiden test century of 174 runs against the fury of Dennis Lillee and Len Pascoe at the Adelaide Oval. Patil is no writer and it shows painfully. His is a career as varied and colourful as any in the history of the game but *Sandy Storm* hardly does it justice.

He does, however, clear up certain controversies, especially those that existed in 1982 when his batting was bedevilled by his personal problems which included an impending divorce and his commitments to the film industry. He had, according to his version, seriously considered giving up cricket and was only dissuaded from doing so by Gavaskar, Milind Rege and Ashok Mankad.

For the rest, it is a book that does no credit to the author or the publishers. It is badly written and badly edited and the only possible plus point is that it does offer some clues to Patil's psychological profile which has some bearing on his wildly fluctuating cricketing fortunes. It is obvious that Patil has a casual approach to life and lacks the kind of dedication, ambition and commitment that separates the men from the boys. Patil certainly has a long way to go before he can take the liberty of penning his memoirs with such unseemly dispatch.

—DILIP BOBB

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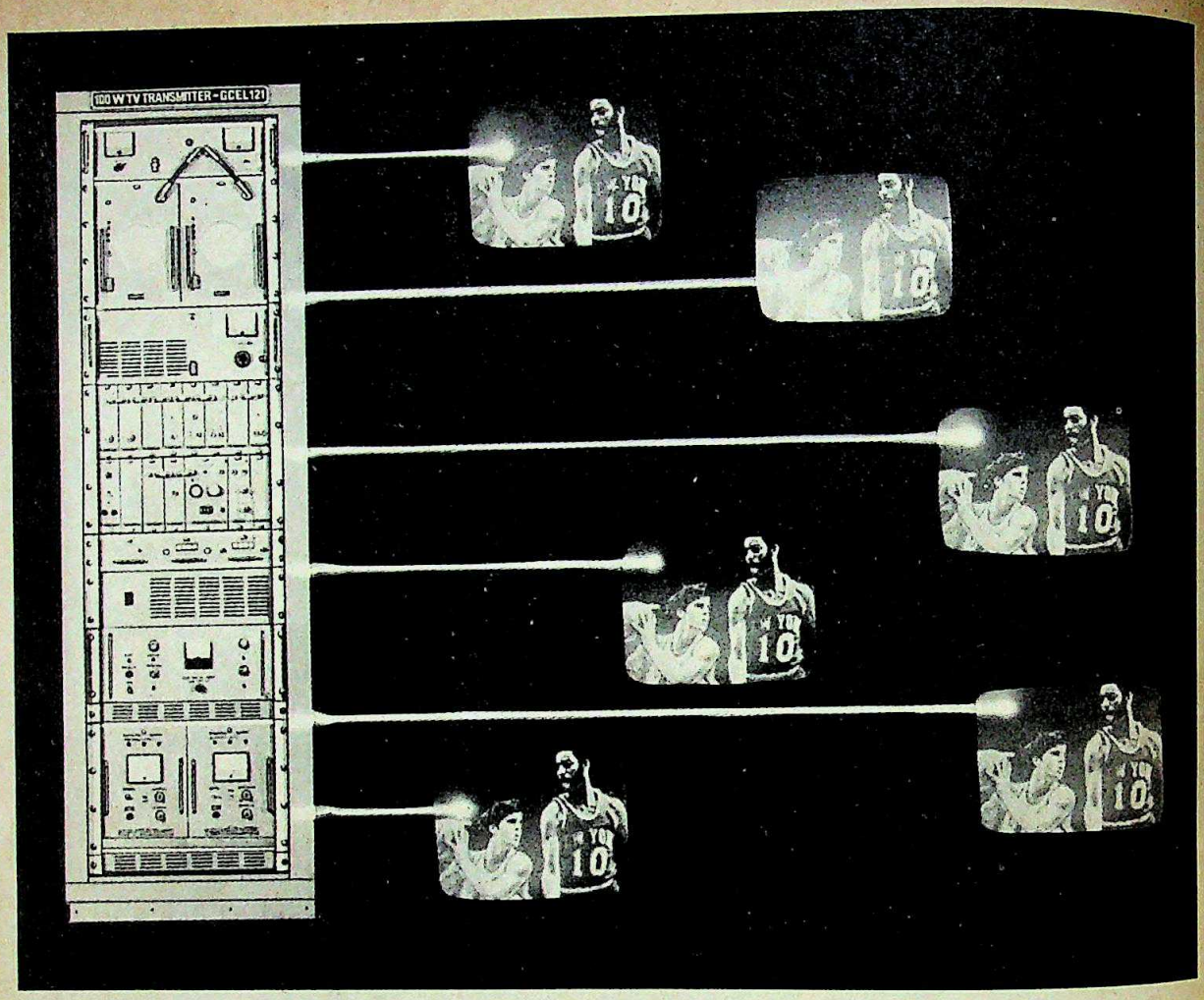

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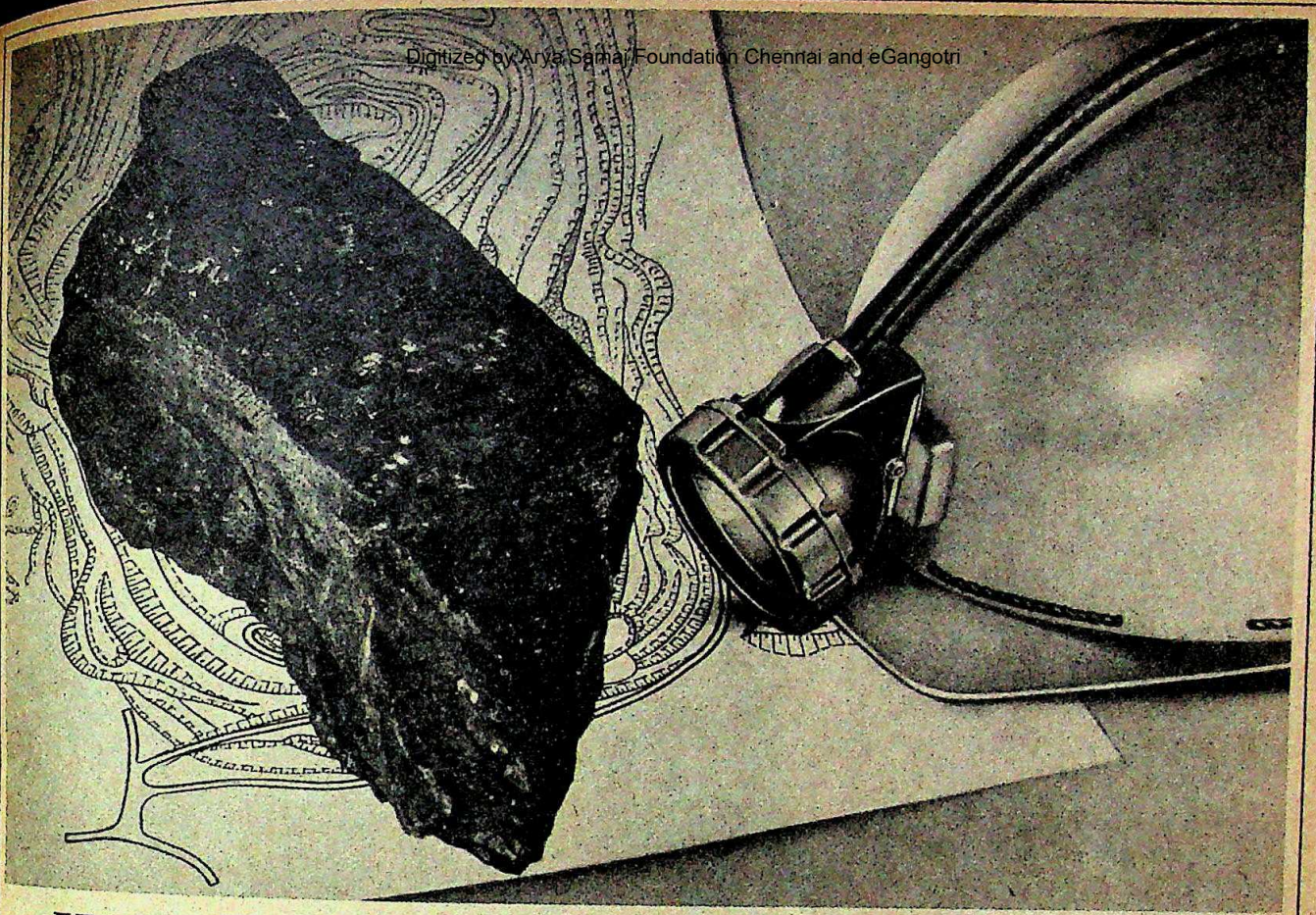

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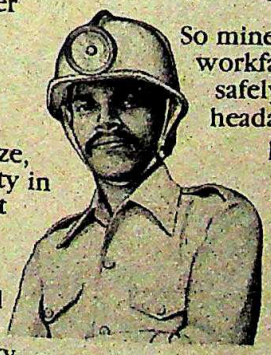

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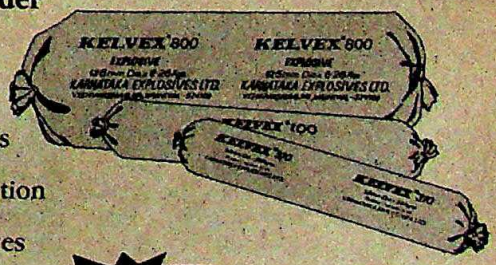

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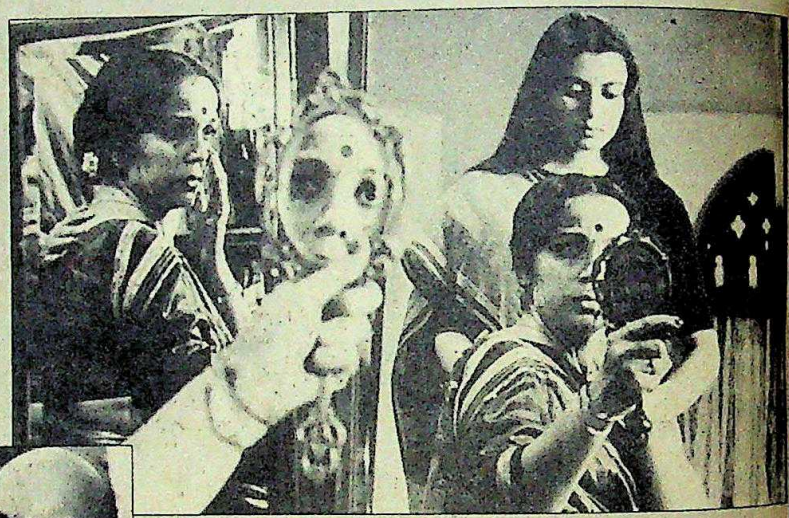
TENTH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

An Indifferent Effort

A CHAOTIC inaugural, a marked snub by the American film industry to participate and an information section made up of an indifferent choice of films—these were some of the favourite grouses against the just over Tenth International Film Festival of India. There was, admittedly, a good, strong section of films from Latin America backed by a colourful Brazilian delegation; and the tempestuous Jeanne Moreau turned up as chairperson of the jury, her gorgeous, droopy mouth dropping enough witticisms to raise an otherwise drab, unwieldy and scattered show from the dregs. "Ma'am," someone asked her, at her press conference, "why haven't you written your autobiography yet?" "Ah," replied Moreau, with a toss of head and shrug of shoulder inimitably Gallic, "I started to write the story of my life in 1979. I wrote about 600 pages. But I was only twelve years old then, so I gave up."

Less flip, and considerably less stylist, were the contributions to a segment of the festival that in recent years has come to be regarded as its strongest. The Indian Panorama, devoted to showing the best new Indian films of the year, has been an excellent exercise since its inception at the Madras Filmotsav in 1978. Young feature film makers have found their voices here, regional films have found new audiences, new markets have opened up and distributors been persuaded to loosen their belts and take a risk. The excitement of the unknown—discovering a new director, seeing a different kind of movie—was perceptibly missing this time; the 20-film Panorama seemed a bit like the film festival itself: a curious rag bag of the has-beens and also-rans. At least three of the films (Mahesh Bhatt's *Saaransh*, Prakash Jha's *Hip Hip Hurray* and Saeed Mirza's *Mohan Joshi Haazir Ho)* had been commercially released in 1984, the last only in Bombay city. Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Mukhamukham* and Girish Karnad's *Utsav* have already been widely previewed. And after the picturesque charm of the first feature film ever made in Khasi had been digested, and a few other would-be miracles turned out to be elusive entities, only four films stood out on merit.

All four are in Hindi, all are by film makers whose earlier work has been recognised; and though far from achieving greatness, they afford a breath of originality, a growing concern for social and political realities, and remarkably, make a concerted effort to expose the root of the malaise. Bound by strong narrative themes, all four films exist on one level as personal statements; yet the statements are further defined in each case, so that whether it is a caste war in Bihar or a strike in a city college in which a boy is heckled to death, we are told not merely



Govind Nihalani

As the key characters in *Party* resolve the crises of their inner lives, it exposes the commitment of those who bandy about phrases like "social commitment" the most.

Saeed Mirza

The idea behind *Mohan Joshi* is fine: Bombay's insurmountable housing problem and the trauma of surviving in the litigation jungle. But the film's rambling structure tells on the viewer.

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how it came about but why. They may seem sentimental, sometimes overwrought by the weight of the subject, and technically imperfect, but they force an audience to take sides.

PAAR: This is Bengali director Gautam Ghose's third feature, but the first in Hindi. Based on a two-page short story by Samaresh Basu, it is solidly constructed, powerfully performed and tells a gripping story of a Harijan couple who are forced, in the face of starvation, to ferry a head of swine across a swollen river in the monsoon. Shown at the Venice Film Festival last year (where it won Naseeruddin Shah the Best Actor award) the Italians hailed the last twelve minutes of the film, the actual river crossing, as great cinema. Perhaps it is; but its great merit as an Indian film lies in the way it traces the flight of the Harijan couple from their village after a massacre by upper caste landlords. What led to the atrocity? What was the origin and gradual incitement that first led the Harijans to kill the landlord's brother? Here, astonishingly, are the answers to those agonising headlines that, now and then, appear in newspapers and then fade away.

Holi, despite the lack of an original theme, has remarkable raw energy and flavour; the authenticity of college life comes through despite technical imperfections.

Ketan Mehta

Paar is easily the best Hindi film of 1984, it is solidly constructed, powerfully performed and tells a gripping story of a young Harijan couple fighting starvation in the city.

Gautam Ghose

Ghose, 34, a Calcutta University graduate and former film buff, supports himself between features by making anything from documentaries to radio jingles and television commercials. His stirring 1982 Bengali feature *Dakhal*, about a confrontation between farmers and gypsy tribals in rural Bengal, won him a National Award. *Paar* was financed privately after he persuaded a businessman friend of his to put up the money. And though it has received widespread acclaim as probably the strongest film of 1984, it is still awaiting commercial release. "Being shown at Venice and Cannes isn't, unfortunately, good enough for commercial Indian distributors," says Ghose, who finds the exercise of hustling his films doubly humiliating because, as in the case of *Paar*, a friend sunk the money to help him make it. Still, his pursuit is continuous; he sees film making as his own voyage of discovery: "I want to find out for myself, and then I want to share. I want to make films for my own reality and milieu. In the process, I hope to discover more of this country and draw a vision of it."

PARTY: Many foreign journalists walked out of this film, and it is not hard to reason why. For one, it isn't the kind of movie they were looking for—or hoping to find—in India. For another, the film's theme of cerebral soul-searching and emotional self-flagellation among a group of gathered intellectuals has been so often seen in the West that it left them understandably cold. But in India, it is the first of its kind: a heavy, turgid, slow-moving film, with dialogues in impossibly high-flown Hindi, it is Govind Nihalani's fourth feature. And a far cry from his earlier films (*Aakrosh*, *Ardh Satya*) that established his reputation. A middle-aged socialite, daughter of a well-known politician, decides to throw a party in honour of a recent award her old friend, playwright Barve (Manohar Singh) has received. The guest list is carefully chosen: the powerful lady editor with a weakness for young men, the director of commercial plays, Barve's unfulfilled mistress, Mohini (Rohini Hattangady), young poets, armchair Marxists and an assortment of the urban intel-

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lectual elite land up. Many of them are at a point of crisis; most are dreadfully confused. As the evening progresses, the air becomes heavy with despair: jagged ambition, phoney ideology, uncontained emotion come pouring. As many of the key characters try and resolve the crisis of their inner lives, Nihalani turns the film into an expose of sorts, showing up the individual commitment of people who bandy about phrases like "social commitment" the most.

Frankly, who cares? If the director does, then had he dealt with his characters with greater sympathy and perception rather than patronise them, the film would have been saved from becoming an inadvertent parody of itself. And who is such convoluted film for anyway? "For the kind of people who are in it," says the lead actor Manohar Singh. At any rate, Nihalani would be advised to keep the English sub-titles during commercial runs: the Hindi, unfortunately lies beyond the reach of ordinary audiences.

HOLI: Ketan Mehta is best remembered for his first feature, *Bhavni Bhavai* (1981), an ebullient musical based on a Gujarati folk-tale that won him acclaim on the art cinema circuit. His second feature is in sombre mood: the story of a life in the day of a college, it has, despite the lack of an original theme, a remarkable ring of authenticity about it. Mehta, 32, uses a group of 28 actual college students to establish their escalating frustrations: a workers' strike, postponement of examinations, a fight in the canteen and a confrontation between the students and the faculty, all lead to the ultimate conflagration. The boys turn upon one of their own group—the squealer—and heckle him mercilessly into commiting suicide. The film moves slowly, and is patchy in parts, but it achieves an energy and a flavour that lingers. "It's not merely about one day in the life of a college but the kind of spontaneous, unchannelised violence that breaks with alarming frequency everywhere," explains the small-built, bearded Mehta, whose next film tackles the same subject in a rural environment.

Made within a budget of Rs 10 lakh, culled from private sources as well as a well-intentioned producer, the entire film is composed of long single shots and designed, in the director's word, as an improvisation. "By eliminating the need for too much editing and studio dubbing, and placing the mike and camera as if they were part of the moving group of students, I was trying to achieve unity of technique. As if the camera itself was a participant, both the victim and the victimiser." The ballet-like effect comes through effectively in the film's climax; elsewhere, it becomes a major handicap. And Mehta, fired by the innovation, gets carried away by technique repeatedly to the point of losing control. But the improvisation works excellently in the dialogue: the students' repartee, the crudity and wit of campus language, have a verve that is memorable.

MOHAN JOSHI HAAZIR HO: Director Saeed Mirza, whose third feature this is, is known for the long titles he gives his movies and the "socially relevant" ideas he picks up. The idea here is fine: Bombay's insurmountable housing problem and the trauma of surviving the litigation jungle.

Mohan Joshi is a retired civil servant, resident of a chawl in a Bombay suburb. He has lived there as far as he can remember with his wife, two sons, daughter-in-law and a grandchild. Instead of sitting back and watching his building disintegrate, he decides to request his landlord to initiate repairs. The landlord, a fat cat real estate millionaire played by Amjad Khan, has other designs: he wants the chawl demolished to be able to build a block of luxury flats.

Mohan Joshi sues the landlord; the landlord sues him back. The cases drag on for years, in and out of court, with Joshi, a hapless victim of a pair of loony young lawyers. Mirza's idea is interesting; only its implementation is so long-winded that it takes a heavy toll of the viewer. In retrospect, the director himself concedes that the film's major fault "comes from having too many structures." There is the difficulty of length, aggravated by an attempt at parodying popular B-movie humour that doesn't work. The subject lacks crisp handling, and the comic aspects further slacken its pace.

Like Nihalini, Mirza, 41, received funding from the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) which assured his film a 15-week run at the NFDC's Akashvani theatre in Bombay.

Having finished with this, Mirza has already embarked upon his next feature—a study of isolation and despair of being part of a minority group in India. Called *Karim Langde Pe Mat Ro*, "it's a film," says Mirza, "that comes from my own experience. And it also comes from situations like the Bhiwandi riots and the alienation of the Sikhs in Punjab."

—SUNIL SETHI

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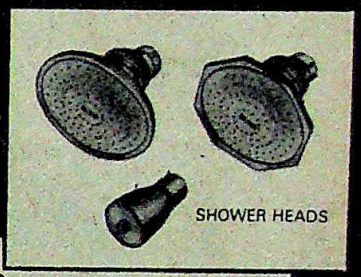
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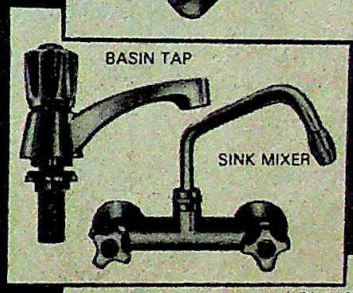
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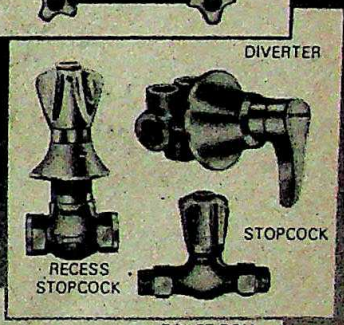
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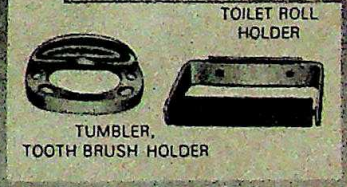
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OLD FILMS

Western Boom

FIRST Rudolf Nureyev, then Jeanne Moreau. No one could complain about a paucity of French stars in India, but what does India have to offer France in return? Nargis and Raj Kapoor? Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman? They may sound old hat and overexposed in the 1980s but popular Indian cinema of the 1950s is just beginning to catch up in the West.

Since last November Guru Dutt's 1959 classic *Kaagaz Ke Phool* has been running to full houses in four theatres in Paris. At the Nantes Film Festival a few weeks ago, *Mother India*, *Awara* and *Shri 420* went down so well that Raj Kapoor, when he arrived, was mobbed on the streets. And at the prestigious Pompidou Centre in Paris, a 120 film package including retrospectives of popular directors of the 1950s generated so much enthusiasm in the summer of 1983, that the Centre has built a spanking new theatre to double the seating capacity. The queues for Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor movies have never stopped growing since. This summer, as part of the Festival of India in France, the Pompidou Centre will be back in action with a new three-month season.

Significantly, the emphasis has shifted from directors to stars, from new cinema to popular hits of the 1940s and 1950s. Of the 12 stars selected for retrospectives, seven belong to the popular cinema and, with the exception of Amitabh Bachchan, all represent the golden age of Bombay movies. Dilip Kumar, Balraj Sahni, K.L. Saigal, Waheeda Rehman, Nargis and Meena Kumari movies are all set, it seems, to steal the show from the likes of Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, Soumitra Chatterjee and Om Puri. While the retrospectives on the stars will add up to about 60 films, another section of retrospectives called the "One Man Industries" will feature yet more films by Hindi film directors of the 1950s. The Indian parallel cinema gets short shrift, with Shantaram, Bimal Roy, Dev Anand, Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor taking over completely.

Who has caused this revival of the golden oldies, and how does it manage to grow and glow? Interestingly, it's a small but fiercely dedicated band of people who've opened up popular 1950s Indian cinema to British and French audiences and, if they are to be believed, there are good reasons for such movies to generate interest. "People in the West are getting tired of the standardised, assembly-line Hollywood movies or monotonous TV serials. They want something new. Most people in France aren't even aware that India made movies in the 1950s. It's the novelty of it, and the discovery of hitting upon not just one of the largest but also the oldest film industries in the world," says Alain Jalladeau, director of the Nantes Film Festival.

Waheeda Rehman in *Pyaasa* (top); Jalladeau and Kabir: nostalgia

Back in 1979, Jalladeau and his brother Phillipe, excited by their discoveries of films in Asia, Africa and Latin America, started a film festival in their hometown 350 km south-west of Paris. Called the "Festival des 3 Continents", the annual show in Nantes every November has become an important and prestigious exposition for discovering new talent. And while movies from low-budget new cinema in India have always had a fair representation, last year Jalladeau took the plunge and showed eight popular films from the 1950s. The response to the selection, ranging from the powerful *Do Bigha Zamin* to the frothy *Mr and Mrs 55*, was tremendous. "It's a beginning," says Jalladeau, "but I'm convinced old Indian movies could become big business in the West."

Another promoter who has been convinced of the unutilised potential of 1950s Hindi movies in the West, is a short, dark-haired, Indian girl who's lived in Paris for 16 years and is an avowed Hindi movie freak. Nasreen Kabir eats movies for breakfast, and chases them as if she were on castors. She began by taking a master's degree in cinema, worked as a production assistant in Paris, and then began her doctoral thesis on popular 1950s Indian cinema at the Sorbonne. Her unwavering passion for Hindi movies of that period combined with her encyclopaedic knowledge, has led her to find forums for them in the unlikeliest of places. Her first coup was to persuade Britain's Channel 4 television network to air popular Indian films. The first package of six in 1982 was so successful that the network now regularly shows two seasons of six Indian films each, one of popular movies and the other of new cinema. Kabir followed up the Channel 4 success by convincing the Pompidou Centre in Paris to launch a major Indian cinema season in 1983. The response was so unexpected that Kabir is back in India choosing films for both Channel 4's new season in February as well as the Pompidou Centre's 100-movie selection starting in September this year.

Kabir admits that after Satyajit Ray, the only Indian film makers to receive this kind of attention are Guru Dutt and Ritwick Ghatak. But she thinks that "they have glamour, stars, and good stories. They evoke nostalgia of the great days of movie-making."

Indian officials connected with films concede Kabir's point. "The market for Indian films in France is excellent, there's no doubt about it," says Malati Tambay Vaidya, managing director of the National Film Development Corporation. And even the chairperson of the Tenth Film Festival jury, French actress Jeanne Moreau, admits that what is required of India is "to get in touch with French distributors and the money people" to extend its domain, presently restricted only to intellectuals or film buffs.

In Paris this spring, there are signs that such a breakthrough could be made with sustained backing from the Government and the Indian film industry. After the major success of *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, underground train stations are plastered with posters advertising the new masterpiece of 1985: *Pyaasa* by Guru Dutt, made in 1957. —SUNIL SETHI

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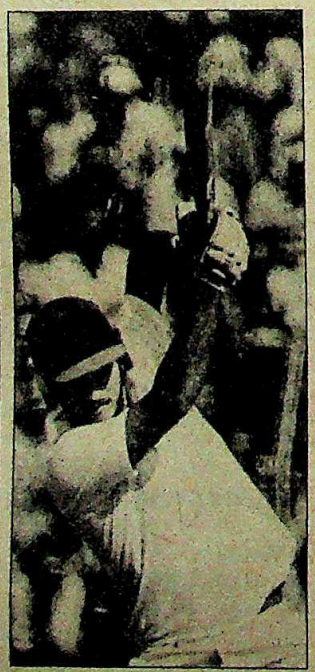
Shabana and Javed: love songs

◆ Everything seems to be happening all at once in **Shabana Azmi**'s life. December, she married poet Javed Akhtar in a quiet, romantic 2 a.m. ceremony. January, she moved to Delhi as a jury member of the 10th International Film Festival. But the surprising Shabana has managed to fit at least one other interesting thing into her packed life. She has sung—not one, but four songs—for Muzaffar Ali's latest film *Anjuman* that should pitch her one up on fellow film warbler Rekha. But Shabana, the poised and confident actress of the Indian screen was anything but that when she went to record the album. "I was petrified," she says. "I thought I was going to die." She survived—and if the enthusiastic first reports are true—will live to sing again. And marriage, what's that like? "Who knows," said the new bride, "I've hardly seen my husband since we got married."

Smita: political offers

◆ Arch-rival **Smita Patil** doesn't seem to be doing too badly for herself either. No, she hasn't got a marriage proposal, but she is getting the come-hither looks as well—from the glamour-hungry world of Indian politics. While the older, sager stars were given Congress(I) parliamentary tickets, the lesser ones in the firmament are now being offered assembly tickets. That includes our girl Smita who has been offered a ticket from Maharashtra. But, as for accepting it, Papa Patil has strict views. A Congressman and former minister himself, he feels that the cinema is a more stable profession. Said he: "Smita has had several offers from assembly constituencies, including Dhule but she can't accept. Her film commitments come first."

Shastri: hit record



◆ Last week, in the Bombay-Baroda Ranji Trophy match, the 22-year-old all-rounder **Ravi Shastri** gave such a smashing performance that the cricketing world forgot, for a while, to *tut-tut* over the recent Sunil Gavaskar-Kapil Dev ego clashes. One after another after another came Shastri's sixes, six sixes in one over, making the kind of history cricket fans dream of. Shastri created one record for the world's fastest double century ever, and equalled another 16-year-old record set by the mighty Garfield Sobers who also hit six sixes in one striking over. Quite a show by a man poised to be—if rumours are true—India's next skipper.

◆ Bombay Police Commissioner **Julio Ribeiro** is one of those good guys who has become extremely popular in his city by simply doing what he does best—hunting out the bad guys. So, when Doordarshan cameraman B.P. Singh decided to film a murder mystery called *Sirf Char Din* and was scouting around for someone to play an upright policeman, he thought of good old Ribeiro. No problem, smiled the cop, who was filmed without any retakes. Modestly he explains his debut: "The producers phoned up to ask if they could come across since it was a low-budget film and they didn't have money for too many actors, so I said certainly, come today." Now, how many people from dull, grey officialdom get a chance to act in films?

Ribeiro: acting debut

◆ It was the biggest line-up of Indian film stars ever—but, alas, right in front of the prestigious jury of the 10th International Film Festival? But that was not the only blooper that marked the launching of the festival in the capital last fortnight. When a confused official tried to correct the disrespectful formation, the stars—Raj Kapoor, Raj Kumar and so on—simply turned around and bowed to the jury presenting the hysterical audience, now, with their rear view. Said an outraged Adoor Gopalakrishnan: "I walked out not because I was not invited to the stage but because of the whole thing—lining up of stars on the stage with their backs to the jury members. As a film maker I am ashamed."

—compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

Bombay stars line up at the Film Festival: backfiring

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IN FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT

The Spy Sensation

As the sensational arrests of people involved in the country's biggest spy scandal continued, the magnitude of the security breach appeared to have reached frightening levels. Investigating authorities fear this case may be only the tip of the iceberg.

COVER STORY 22

"People's expectations are scary"

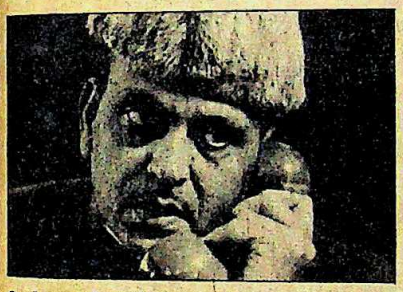
In what is his first interview to an Indian publication since the elections, the new prime minister Rajiv Gandhi spoke to INDIA TODAY last fortnight on a wide range of crucial issues of immediate importance and also spelled out some of his plans for the future.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT 18

Crash Landing

His familiar face has vanished from sight and so has Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari's political clout, a process that has run parallel with Rajiv Gandhi's ascendancy.But the swami has lost none of his confidence as an exclusive interview indicates.

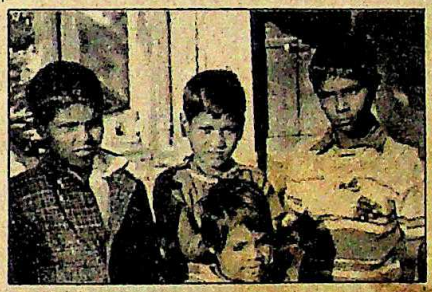
CURRENT EVENTS 38



Style and Substance

Rajiv Gandhi's new ministerial choices are an intriguing blend of the old and the new.A special report profiles the new entrants, takes note of their style in office and details their individual plans and objectives for their respective ministries.

SPECIAL REPORT 84



Survivors' Struggle

For those who survived the fatal gas leak at the Bhopal Union Carbide plant, the nightmare is just beginning.A report details the current condition of a cross-section of survivors as the delayed medical and psychological fall-out makes itself felt.

SPECIAL FEATURE 122

Passing the Mantle

Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity seem more active than ever before.But the organisation is currently in the throes of an internal crisis with the rapidly failing health of its founder throwing up the key question of who will succeed her.

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Cover photography by RAGHU RAI

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HERE ARE TWO POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT HOW INDIA'S LARGEST COMPUTER COMPANY GOT TO BE TWICE AS LARGE AS ITS CLOSEST COMPETITOR.

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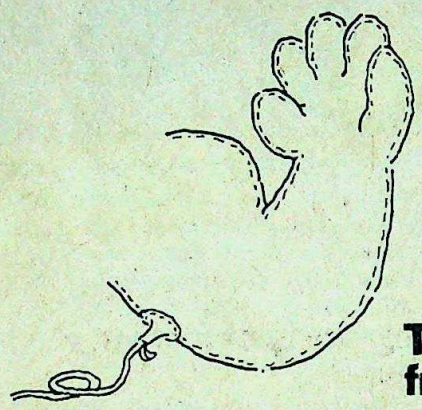

The green-eyed point of view from our competitors

They've got clients who don't mind waiting ages to get the ultimate solutio to a problem. That's a sure-fire tribute to the clients' patience and faith.

They had the unfair advantage of being the first company to manufactu computers in India. And they pioneered all four generations.

In a Third World situation where most companies have to get by on han me-down technology, they unsportingly use the latest international techno ogy to make a whole range of mini and mainframe computers that are wor class and upgradeable.

All their software packages are tested on installations all over the wor This is hardly necessary.

Considering the size of their operation, we'd be surprised if they did have a highly professional, very experienced staff.

They've got 83 fully equipped service centres spread all over the countr their product was good in the first place, why would they need such overwhelming after-sales set-up!

They've discouraged healthy competition by developing the ability to de esoteric services such as Networking.

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The clear-sighted point of view from ourselves

We always work till we have the ultimate solution to a problem. Our clients appreciate this, as our relationships with them are long-term.

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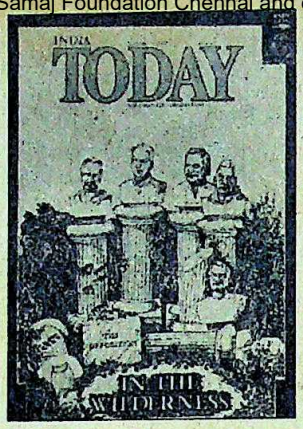

PITIFUL STATE

The cover illustration ("The Opposition: In the Wilderness", January 31) was very expressive. It was, in fact, an exact and revealing depiction of the pitiable condition the Opposition finds itself in.

However, the Opposition appears to still disagree about all they disagree. The severely depleted and the greatly demoralised numbers of the opposition ranks should now set out (of the wilderness) to prove that they do not oppose the Government or even the Congress(I)—they oppose the ills like corruption and bureaucratic red tapism. It is only then that this fragmented group will be worthy of the designation of a national alternative to the Congress(I).

Meerut RASHME ROSHAN LALL

■ Your cover story gave balanced reasons for the total rout of the Opposition. The recent hustings have clearly proved that public memory is not as short-lived as political leaders think. The politics of "coalition" opposition leaders so fervently advocated fell on deaf ears.

Bombay C.S. SAMPATH KUMAR

CLEANING UP

Rajiv Gandhi's move to revamp the ministries so that the new Government can function well and fulfil the expectations of the people is a welcome move ("Rajiv Gets Going", January 31). But how far he will be successful remains to be seen unless a radical change is effected in the entire bureaucratic structure of the country. Our bureaucracy is based on the colonial system which is now outdated. All those in the administrative services never stay in one department long enough to be actually able to understand its problems and therefore remain apathetic to their subordinates by whom the actual work is done. A day will come when the system will collapse like a house of cards.

Calcutta S.K. BANERJEE

REAL TREAT

It was a treat to read Swraj Paul's interview ("No one is above the law", January 31) and quite heartening to note that the corporate champ has not lost heart.

New Delhi RAJEEV KUMAR JAIN

HEAVY BURDEN

The huge tricoloured garland presented to Rajiv Gandhi on the massive mandate won at the hustings symbolises the victory, and also the heavy burden that rests on the "shoulders" of the Congress(I), in whom the voters have reposed their absolute confidence ("Historic Mandate", January 15).

Coorg C.P. BELLIAPPA

■ A historic mandate—yes; a massive mandate—agreed; but a popular vote—certainly not. The large percentage of voting that went the Opposition way belies this. The number of votes bought through sympathy and constant projection of the late prime minister through posters, speeches and also on television and gimmicks like loan melas—all these take away from the popularity of the vote, to say nothing of the attacks on the Opposition apropos the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The electorate did not even vote intelligently except in Andhra Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.

Bangalore A. BRUTO

■ The mandate was nothing but a massive publicity stunt. The ruling party won the elections by exploiting the innocence of the illiterate and the immature electorate, basing strategy on the question of unity and the Hindu backlash. Besides the vast resources, men and machinery at its command, as well as large public funds, more than contributed to the win.

New Delhi ROSHAN LAL

■ The 1984 general elections definitely proved one point—the Indian voter can no longer be taken for granted. He has become shrewd. He has shown that he is totally dissatisfied with the Opposition. I hope the new year will herald a new era in the history of Indian politics.

Bombay CRISHNA S. KUMAR

ZEROING IN

In the photo feature "Election '84" (January 15) Amitabh Bachchan

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quoted to have said that he is a zero in politics but when the zero hits the right place it expands ten times. But he seems to have missed the basic mathematical rule that zero multiplied by any number will still remain a zero. Bachchan's expectations will not materialise as he will still remain a zero.

Calcutta — JAIDEV SINGH

NO WAVE

Your Comment ("The Dangers of Arrogance", January 15) reflected the thoughts of a majority of right thinking people. The electorate has done its job and it is now for the ruling party and the Opposition to play their respective roles for the good of the country.

It was not the sympathy wave, the Rajiv wave or even the Punjab wave that paved the way for the massive mandate for the Congress(I). The basic fact was that we were left with no choice after Mrs Gandhi's assassination.

Calcutta — SUBIR KUMAR LAHIRI

■ Congratulations for predicting the election results so accurately. Your comment in the editorial that people have accused INDIA TODAY of having influenced the election with its forecast is very surprising because not more than 10 per cent of India's population read the magazine. INDIA TODAY is targeted at a different segment of the society.

Ahmedabad — SANIL NARANG

NOT CRICKET

In the article "Superstar Wars" (January 15) it was stated that the selection committee was perfectly justified in its decision to drop Kapil Dev and the hard-hitting middle order batsman Sandeep Patil as a "disciplinary measure". I agree with the fact that an undisciplined man should be punished but where is the justification in dropping Kapil and weakening the team? For his undisciplined behaviour Kapil could have been given a more personal kind of punishment, maybe in the form of smaller fine.

Purnia — R.C. MISTRY

■ It is really surprising that a person of N.K.P Salve's calibre should make utterly irresponsible statements like "if Kapil was dropped, he was dropped on grounds of indiscipline. The selection committee has erred". Mr Salve, would you put the morale of the team first and foremost or the interest of an individual who is behaving in an irresponsible manner?

After having made this statement, regarding Kapil's inclusion in the team, he goes on to say that it is solely the selectors discretion. Two absolutely contradictory statements.

Bangalore — H. RAJSHEKHAR

■ The selectors too seemed to have joined the rat race—with success. Your story, however, ignored the series of gaffes committed by them. The only right decision they took was the rejection of Salve's obnoxious proposal. One hopes that having suddenly woken up to realise the urgent need to enforce discipline in the team, they will stick to this principle with impartiality and within the norms.

Varanasi — PANKAJ KUMAR

■ I would like to point out that Kapil Dev has not been on the Test scene for a decade unless the span of six years (1978-1984) is a decade. Nor has Kapil been sacked for the "remaining bouts of the series" but was only dropped for an international and a Test. Kapil was only playing a "natural game" and what else but an aggressive game is Kapil's natural game. Even when he plays a longer innings he is always on the offensive. The only difference is that that innings is dubbed a "responsible innings" by the media, but this particular innings though typical, was short and thus criticised.

Gavaskar has often played rash shots in the past—under Kapil's captaincy—and got away with lame excuses like he was just trying to enjoy cricket. Surely a Test match cannot be treated so lightly. It is very clear that Gavaskar has an overbloated ego and cannot tolerate any other player of the same stature in the Indian side. The unconditional recall of Kapil for the fourth Test proves beyond doubt that he had been dropped for causes other than the breach of discipline.

Ajmer — PARITOSH JAIN

■ The story portrayed a well-balanced picture of the prevailing state of affairs in the Indian dressing-room. Cricket has ceased to be gentlemen's game and has become a full-fledged business proposition where players resort to all tactics to secure financial benefits. Money and fame appear to be the only concern, even on the playing fields, glorious nuances of the game have sadly taken the back seat. Added to this are ego problems which weigh heavily on players' behaviour and attitude which, in turn, show adverse results in the game itself. And Kapil's case, unfortunately vindicates this tragic view.

Bombay — VINOD S. MUZUMDAR

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The Other Half

PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi represents a new ethos in Indian politics. He is young, has shown some dynamism in recent weeks, and talks a new language of modernity, technocracy and efficiency. The prime minister is also surrounded by aides and advisors who symbolise a management culture and who represent the aspirations of a growing and increasingly assertive middle class. But amidst all the talk of computers, industrial policy liberalisation, technology imports, globally competitive scales of production, centres of excellence and much else, the prime minister and his aides must be careful about not forgetting some basic Indian realities. The talk of readying for the twenty-first century is all very well, but the poor are still with us and will remain with us for a long time.

Half the population still lives below the poverty line, and most of them do not get the minimum required intake of 2,000 calories a day. Despite bursting granaries and record food stocks, per capita cereal consumption has gone up precious little in the last three decades: from 350 g a day to 400 g. There are more illiterate Indians today than in 1947, and there is enormous pressure on the land. The last two decades have seen a virtual explosion in the numbers of the landless, and of tiny agricultural holdings that cannot support a farming family. The basic shift from agricultural to industrial and service occupations is taking place much too slowly, so the battle against unemployment has been a losing one. Three decades ago, a little more than 70 per cent of the population was engaged in agricultural and related operations; the figure today is only slightly under 70 per cent. Yet the urban unemployed have multiplied manifold.

Rajiv Gandhi did mention poverty in his national broadcast soon after assuming office, but in an almost passing fashion. And the flurry of activity since then has been on streamlining, liberalising, modernising, computerising. The promise of a refashioned 20-point programme has not materialised as yet, and there is no mention of such earthy problems as rural indebtedness, bondage, malnutrition, and land reforms.

With large numbers still caught in the poverty trap, and with six five-year plans having failed to pull them out into the sunshine, it would be folly for the new government to forget the poor and focus its attention on the better placed of the two sectors of a dual economy and society. While the needs of the economy's increasingly sophisticated industrial superstructure cannot and should not be ignored, the talk of entering a new millennium must be tempered by a constant awareness of basic problems that have remained the same since 1947.

Education provides an excellent example of the way in which priorities can get skewed because of a focussing of attention on modernisation, on creating centres of excellence, and on bringing the communications revolution into the classroom. For the Government has shown no awareness yet of the fact that more than half the five lakh primary schools in the country lack proper buildings, 40 per cent have no blackboards, 70 per cent have no children's books, and over 80 per cent have no lavatories. This is a shocking state of affairs, and it should be the primary objective of the new education policy that is being worked out to remedy this situation.

The thinking in and around New Delhi's South Block also betrays a rather naive fascination with capital-intensive technology that ignores the capital-scarce nature of the economy. A more realistic approach must focus on less capital-intensive but equally 'efficient' technologies. Apart from being more employment-intensive, these will also help disperse industrial activity across the country instead of focussing it in and around increasingly claustrophobic urban megalopolises. There are no easy solutions here, and this should not be a temptation to plump for the seemingly ready-made solutions offered by foreign collaborations. Innovative and enterprising solutions and approaches must be sought out and pursued.

Malnutrition is another priority area that has not received enough attention in the last month, as is primary health care. India leads the world in such unwanted areas as blindness because of vitamin A deficiency, leprosy and tuberculosis, and the state of the primary health centres is often no better than that of the primary schools. The infant mortality rate, at 94 per 1,000 births, is admittedly lower than in many countries with comparable levels of per capita income, but is much higher than China's 67, not to speak of Vietnam's 53 and Sri Lanka's 32 per 1,000. The vast majority of the country's children are malnourished, and suffer impaired physical and mental abilities. It is not that the solutions to many of these problems are not known, and some of them are in fact quite cheap: it costs little to distribute vitamin A tablets, or to have a major oral rehydration programme that prevents deaths from diarrhoea. But neither of these programmes is being carried out on a large enough scale.

Growth and modernisation will not automatically solve these and other similar problems. And Mrs Gandhi's 'direct attack on poverty' through such tools as the Integrated Rural Development Programme, the National Rural Employment Programme and the Minimum Needs Programme were vulnerable to both leakages and poor implementation—as Rajiv Gandhi has himself pointed out. So it will now be a key test for the Government as to how well it works out new solutions or implements the old solutions with better effect. Right now, however, it must begin to show an awareness of the need for paying attention to the other half.

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The Profit Boosters

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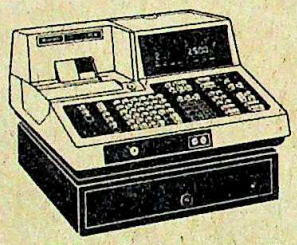

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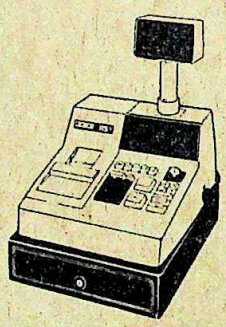
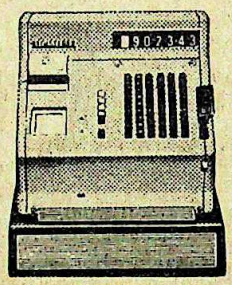


Seven transaction totals for sales and monetory management.



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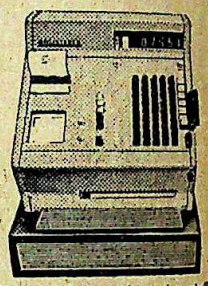

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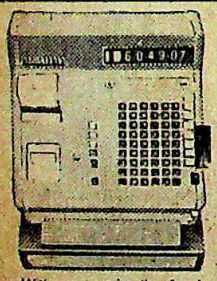
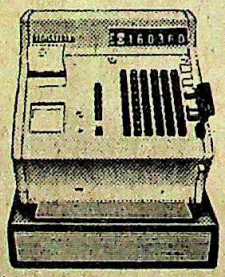


With progressive line feed.



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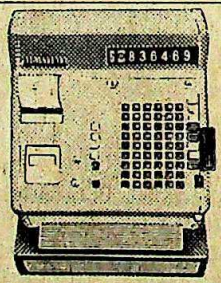
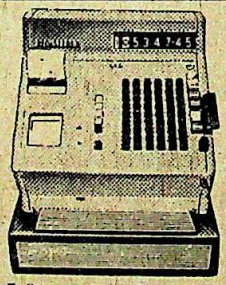
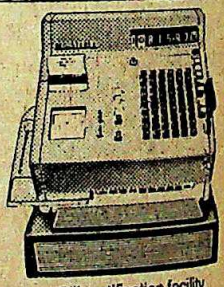


An audit roll that talks business.



Built around a memory system.



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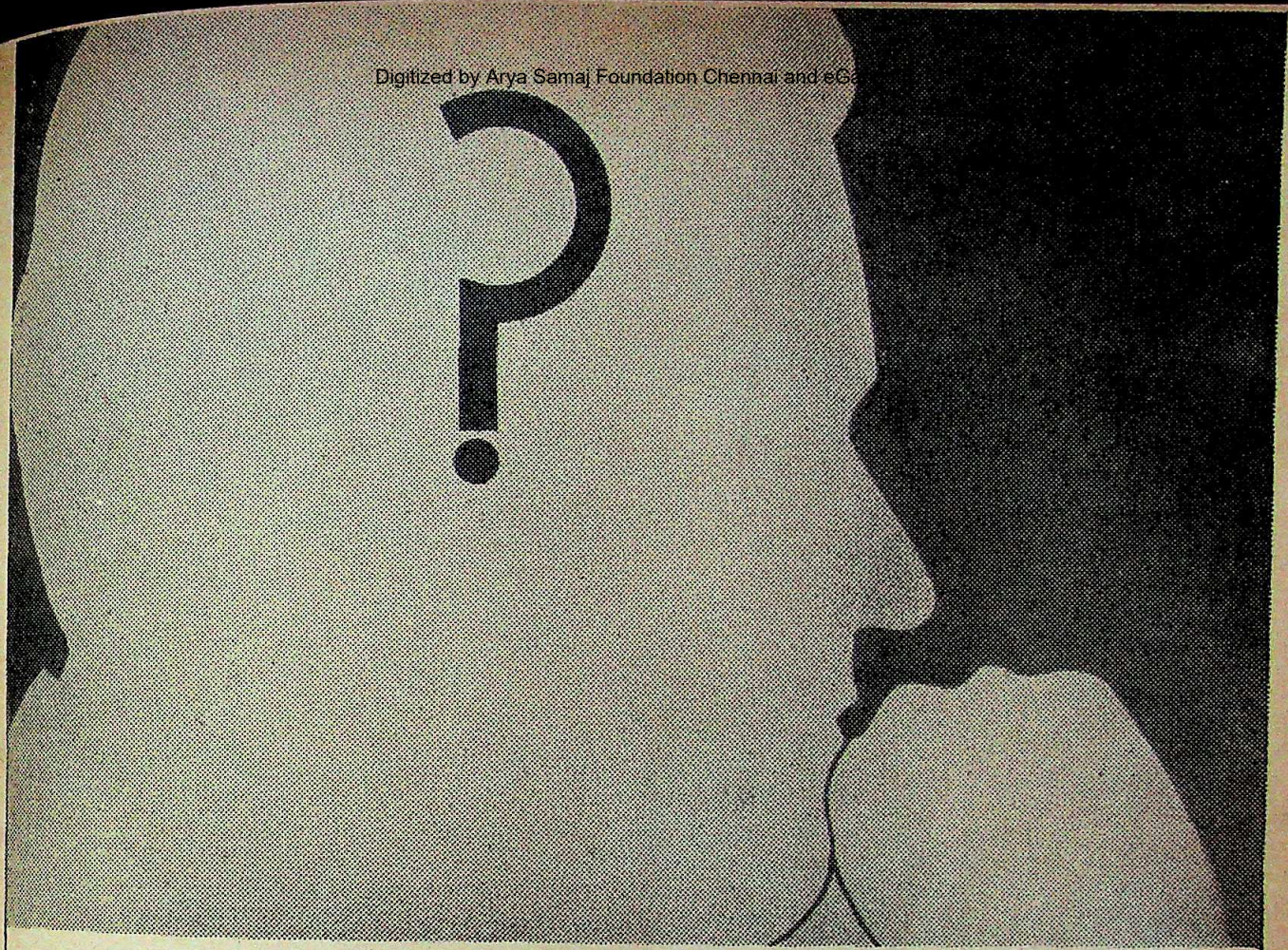

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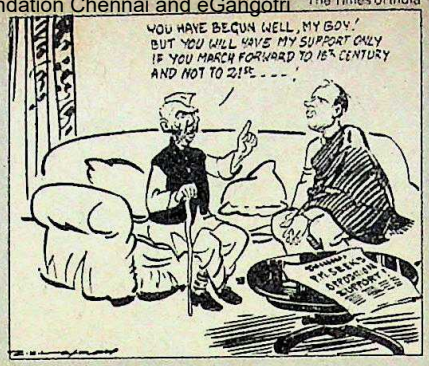
The Times of India



● *It seems that the young prime minister, in his zest to cut everyone down to size, has also cut you down.*

■ MADHU DANDAVATE to Balram Jakhar after Rajiv Gandhi called him "Mr Balram" in Parliament

● *He (V.R. Nedunchezhiyan) is the only individual who claims that he has met and spoken to Mr Ramachandran in New York... At present the entire nation has to take one man's word for everything.*

■ JAYALALITHA to the press in New Delhi

● *Flying is really coordinating, monitoring a lot of different things happening while thinking of other things. In many ways it's similar if you imagine India as a huge aircraft, but with a much longer response time.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI in *Newsweek*

● *Being a 25-year-old student in the Lok Sabha is like being short-haired in a group of long-haired people.*

■ MUKUL WASNIK, the youngest MP in Parliament

● *Though Rajiv Gandhi is himself no Mr Clean despite his manner, he is no thorough-going Kali either, fanged for destruction.*

■ DAVID SELBOURNE in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *At the start of the election campaign people said: Give Rajiv a chance. Now I ask: Will Rajiv give us a chance?*

■ IQBAL MASUD in the *Express Magazine*

● *There has never been anyone like him (Amitabh Bachchan) anywhere — Valentino, Redford, Newman — all pale when compared to this celebrity.*

■ A commentator on America's CBS TV

● *In Bombay (films) where money is the dominant factor, it is very difficult for anyone to operate one's brain reasonably...*

■ MRINAL SEN in *Weekend Review*

● *She's (Moon Moon Sen) dangerous dynamite. The kind that explodes at the sight of anything that even slightly resembles a pair of trousers.*

■ HABI VERMA about his wife, quoted in *Filmfare*

● *My house is in the middle of a forest. I have trees for neighbours and the birds for music... I am not in politics, not in business, just a simple retired government servant.*

■ GENERAL CARIAPPA the first Indian C-in-C of the Army in *The Statesman*

● *God is certainly not an Indian. He is an Englishman.*

■ SUNIL GAVASKAR on India's performance in the second innings in Madras

Compiled by ANITA KAUL BASU

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HERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT ARE NOT CHANGING AT THE VAZIR SULTAN TOBACCO COMPANY.

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AND HERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT ARE.

Perhaps nothing quite expresses the uniqueness of the Vazir Sultan Tobacco Company as the mystique of 'Charminar', the name that has meant a unique and special experience to generations of smokers.

This is the 'Charminar' tradition.

And though the company is constantly adapting itself to contemporary needs and preparing for the future, it preserves and nurtures this long and unique tradition.

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These visible external changes have been possible because of the changes that are taking place internally.

At the heart of this change is the process of modernising our plant and equipment, our skills, and our organisational processes which encourage people to work together.

To crystallise all these changes, the Vazir Sultan Tobacco Company Limited is making one more change.

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A few things, however, will never change.

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The Charminar tradition is here to s

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VST Industries Limited

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Location courtesy The Taj Mahal Inter-Continental Bombay

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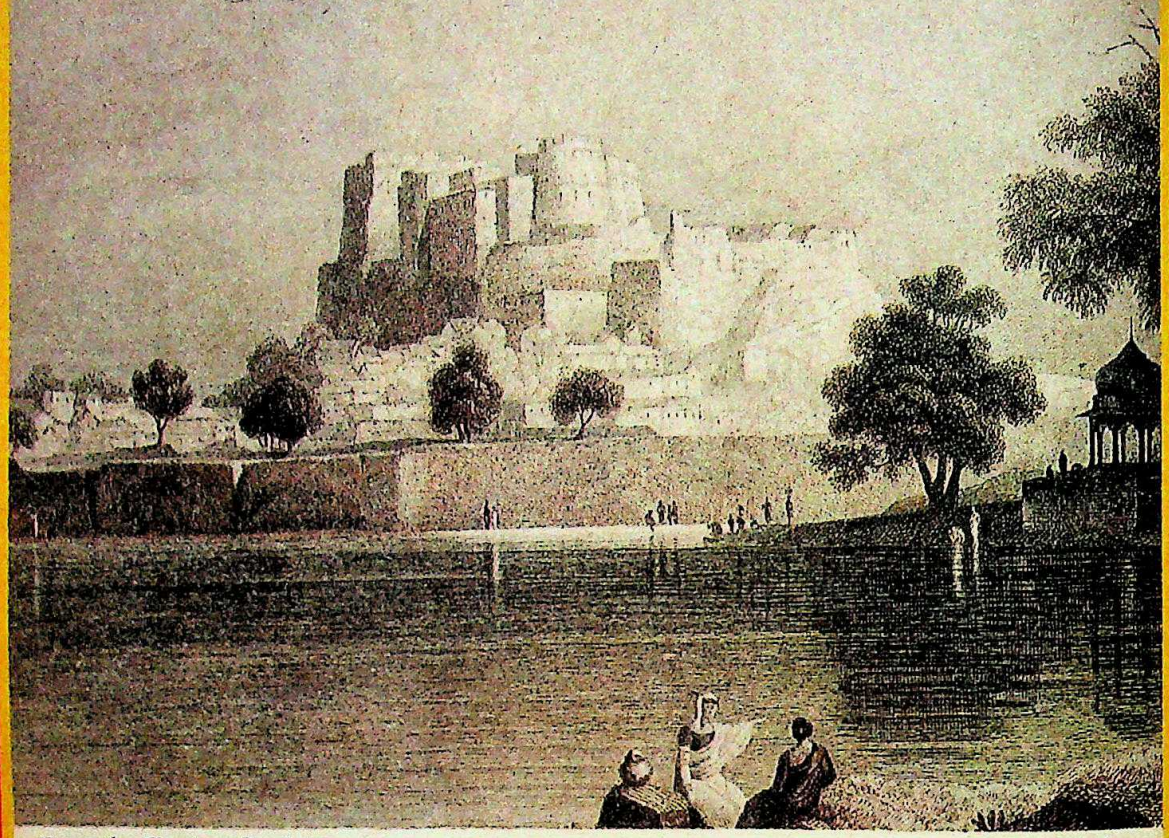
For those who value taste



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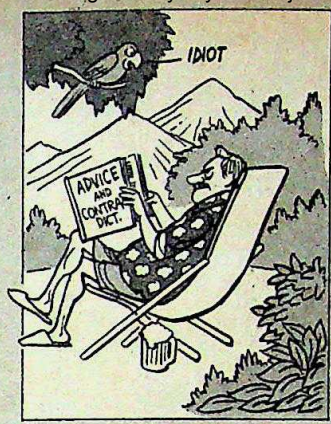
TALKING GREEK



■ There lives, in Bombay, an editor of a weekly and a daily who considers himself —and has been saying so with particular stridency in the last few days—God's gift to journalism and mankind. On December 24, 1984, the day Bombay went to the polls in the elections to the eighth Lok Sabha this gentleman's paper carried, just under the picture of the trade-mark canine, a photograph of a banner which usually flutters on Marine Drive. The banner said: "Greek dictionary meaning of 'Idiot'—man who did not vote." Underneath the newspaper had captioned: "Exercise your franchise: Nana Chudasama's self-explanatory message to voters currently on display at Marine Drive..."

Anyone would have expected the free, frank and fearless editor to follow the advice he was splashing all over his daily. However, advice given is not always taken. On polling day, 62.70 per cent of Bombay's voters exercised their franchise. The editor, by all accounts, was not one of them. According to reports, he was away in the cool environs of Khandala, having gone there on Friday, December 21, 1984 and returned on Wednesday, December 26, 1984. What was that Greek dictionary saying?

BRIDLED GROOM

■ So black is the image of the police in India that they are often clubbed together with the thieves and robbers they are supposed to be hunting. But a family in Bangalore has good cause to think in kindlier terms of them.

In Bharatinagar, a wedding was under way. Drums beat and pipes wailed and the bride and the groom were just about to strangle each other with garlands when the boy's parents put on the famous this-is-not-enough-and-you-promised-us-more-act and walked out. As the girl's parents discovered soon afterwards, they left with some jewellery which had been given to them earlier.

This is where the police come in. They came promptly, collared the escaping horde and retrieved the

family jewels. But there was still the question of the bride with one garland and no one around to garrot it with. So they looked around, saw a presentable looking chap in the background and pushed him, blushing and bewildered, into the limelight. Whereupon the girl collapsed in his arms, the father and mother swooned with joy, and the police strutted out with smug and satisfied looks.

BALL BULLIES

■ On Sundays at least half of Bombay's vehicles get off the roads to give aching crankshafts and paralysed shock absorbers a rest. And the cricketers come out in droves. They bring with them battered bats, scuffed balls, moth-eaten wickets and two bricks, which are used to prop up the stumps.

Last fortnight, a match

was in progress near Nariman Point, which on Sundays looks like a set for *Before the Martians Landed*. Unfortunately, just as the bowler delivered a viciously spinning ball, two policemen whizzed up on a motorcycle parked on the pitch and, after a few well-chosen words, grabbed the bat and the ball and whizzed away.

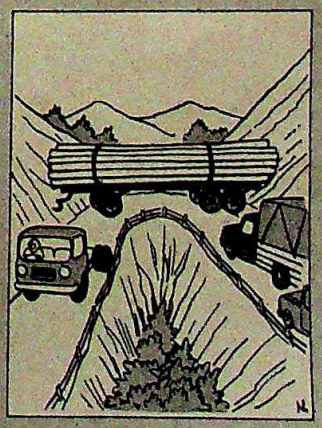
The match resumed after a few minutes with a spare bat. Well into the second over, the policemen came whizzing in again, obviously on another smash and grab raid. The sub-inspector's dark glasses glinted with pleasure as he brought the bike to halt with a flourish—and promptly tumbled off as the wheel ran over the ball which had innocently rolled up. By the time he and his acolyte picked themselves up, the Indian second eleven had vanished.

TRAILER TROUBLE

■ Roads, as the policeman just found out, can be very dangerous things to trifle with. And roads which twist and turn as if they thought they were Machiavelli are the worst of all. A particularly deceptive stretch is the one which leads to Khandala from Bombay on the Bombay-Pune road.

Last month a trailer was crawling up what the warning signs graphically display as a 'steep hill'. It was an unusually long trailer, carrying very long steel pipes. At one of the hairpin bends it got stuck. The cab turned the corner, but the trailer's sides caught on the mountainside.

Pushing and pulling and prodding and swearing made no difference. Meanwhile, a long line of cars and trucks with overheated engines lined up behind. Finally, everybody had had enough.



The trailer was unhooked and shunted to one side. The cab rolled on down and returned with a cable which was attached to the trailer. A stone at the bend of the hairpin acted as the pulley. Then there was the curious sight of the cab halfway down the slope, the cable disappearing round the curve, and the trailer inching up the slope on the other side. Talk of ingenuity.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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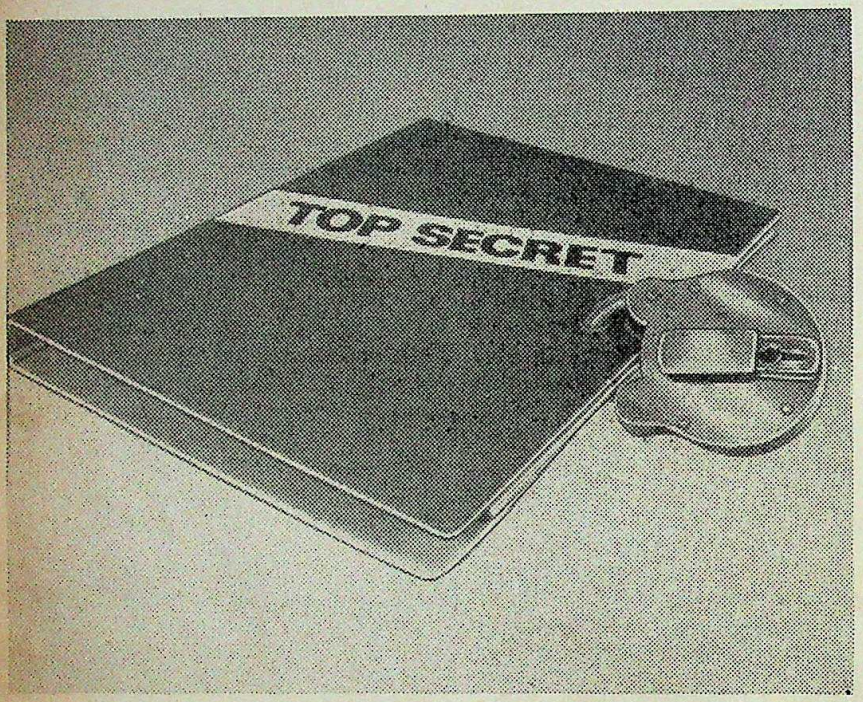
Breaking into the secret world of film-making



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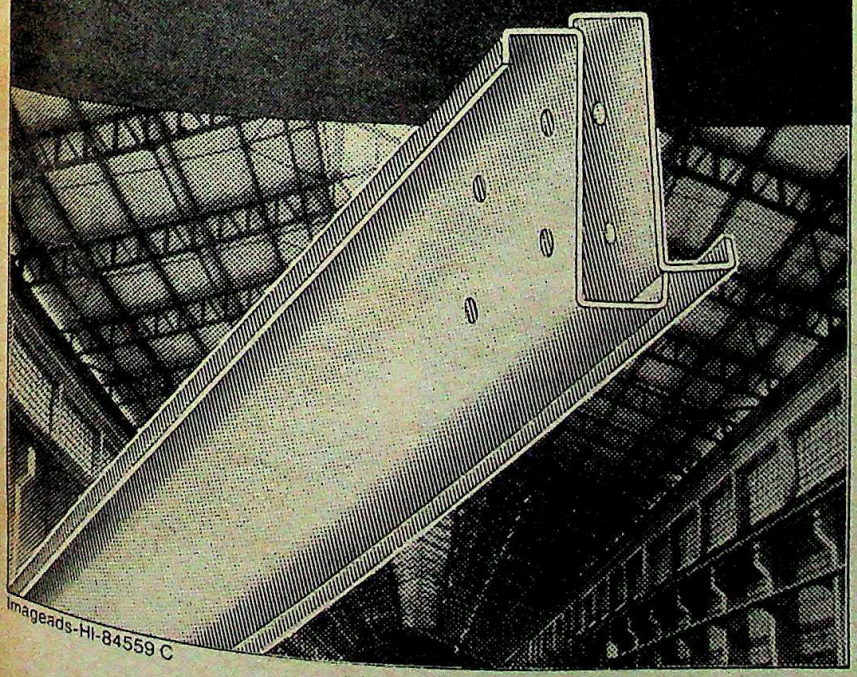

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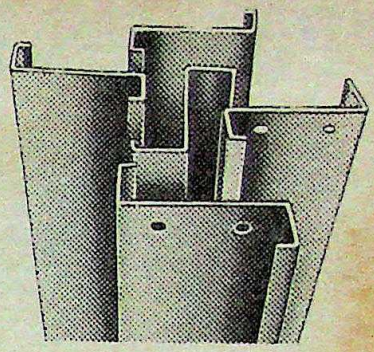

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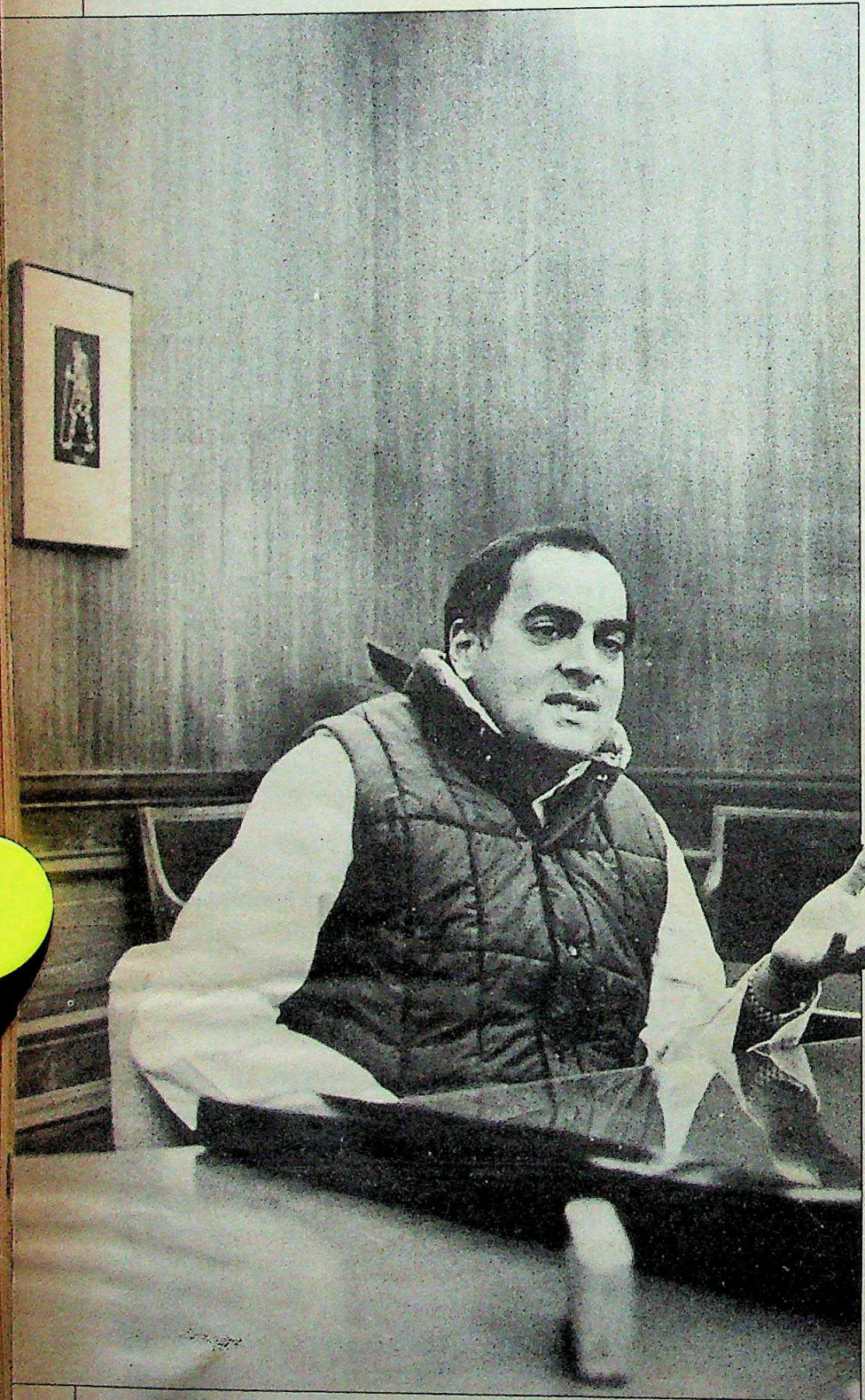
RAJIV GANDHI

"People's Expectations Are Scary"



RAGHU RAI

HE HAS a firm handshake, and looks you straight in the eye. Power seems to rest lightly on him as he sits in his South Block office, clad in a smartly cut kurta-pyjama and a mildly incongruous green quilted sleeveless jacket. Despite being heavily pressed for time (the Sri Lankan Ambassador was waiting outside, to be followed in short order by seven others before a dinner engagement four hours later), Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi answered questions in an unruffled, measured monotone. He smiled easily, but the affability did not extend to parting with too much hard information, and a number of questions were parried without giving offence.

There were no grand visions, no spelling out of a Nehruvian world view. Instead, there was a matter-of-fact approach to problems. If he had not decided what precise policy options he would choose in a number of areas, he seemed to have abundant confidence in his own ability to choose the right one once the options were placed before him. And if something had to get done, why, sure it would get done. No question.

And yet, despite all the evidence of a young prime minister in a hurry, he was relaxed, the basic underlying personality trait of caution surfacing every once in a while.

He has learnt some things quickly. That a prime minister should speak carefully, for instance. Talking of rationalising taxes, he spoke about not needing chartered accountants to file returns, then quickly added "It may seem I am against chartered accountants, but I am not." Yet he would not be deterred from speaking his mind on sensitive issues despite the presence of a cautioning advisor.

He promised hard decisions in a number of areas, said the Government would pull out of some activities in which it is currently engaged, indicated that action would be taken against managements that made companies sick, promised a more aggressive family planning programme, and held out hope of a quick solution to the Assam problem. On Punjab, however, the mood was not so easily hopeful. He also spoke out against subsidies, and declared that a "point of no return" would be reached if Pakistan made an atomic bomb. The message was clear: if Pakistan made the bomb, India would too.

The interview, the first to an Indian publication after his electoral victory, was conducted by Editor AROON PURIE *and Senior Editor* T.N. NINAN. *Excerpts:*

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Q. You have interpreted the massive mandate that you have got as a mandate for change. Do you find it ironical that a ruling party has been returned with a massive mandate for change? Why wasn't a lot of what you are doing now not done before?

A. The mandate is not just for change. I think it's both a continuity of certain ideals, certain ideologies, of certain policies, but a change in implementation. We have been making changes continuously. You cannot expect everything to be perfect the minute it is made. Things change, they are dynamic as you progress, the requirements change, demands change. So you change with that.

Q. Recently there has been a tremendous flurry of activity with change in personnel, restructuring of departments, new policies. This in a sense is the easy bit, now you have to get down to specifics. What is the next phase?

A. You'll see.

Q. You have laid a lot of emphasis on accountability of government servants. One of the key things necessary for accountability is that you should be able to sack people. Would you be able to do that?

A. No, I do not think we want to sack government servants. I don't think it is going to be necessary to sack them.

Q. Then what is the option?

A. There are infinite methods of punishment not as severe as sacking, but if you introduce sacking I think you will leave it wide open to abuse by somebody who would want to abuse it.

Q. When you talk about streamlining do you envisage the fact that you may be cutting off certain roles that the Government is playing, like it shouldn't be in certain activities?

A. I agree it shouldn't be in certain areas.

Q. Then what areas do you have in mind?

A. I cannot tell you all that, but yes, we will have to make some hard decisions. We have been taking the soft line for a little too long, not so much the Centre as the states have been taking the soft line. This includes our states also. I am not differentiating between the Opposition and the Congress. We have been subsidising too many things.

Q. When you talk of soft options, there is the recent case of casual workers in the Eastern Railway, first being dismissed and then being reinstated. Isn't that taking the soft line?

A. The decision was taken when the ministers were changing over. So it was a political decision to sack them and it was wrong. They should have consulted the minister in charge. As soon as the minister took over they consulted him.

"HARD DECISIONS WILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN EVERYWHERE IN EVERY SECTION AND I CAN TELL YOU THAT IF TODAY WE DO NOT TAKE HARD DECISIONS THEN IT IS GOING TO BE A LONG TIME BEFORE ANYBODY IS GOING TO GET A CHANCE."

Q. So the people were actually needed?

A. So he says. Yes. They were ticket collectors and their induction has increased the revenue of the railways.

Q. Did you have to intervene in this case?

A. No. The complaint came to me. I said don't come to me, go to the railway minister.

Q. Do you see the need for such ticket collectors in all the railways in all the states?

A. I am not the railway minister. You'll have to ask Mr Bansi Lal.

Q. Do you intend to change the labour laws in order to promote the efficiency which you are so keen about?

A. Hard decisions will have to be taken everywhere in every section and I can tell you that if today we do not take hard decisions then it is going to be a long time before anybody is going to get the chance.

Q. What kind of hard decisions are you talking about?

A. Difficult to specify. I'll get into trouble if you print them.

Q. You speak of decentralising decision-making in the government departments, but the Prime Minister's Secretariat continues to play a pivotal role in the decision process. Do you see it becoming less so when you decentralise?

A. The secretariat will play a pivotal role in decision-making above a certain level, where basic policies are involved, but below that we will have to leave the implementation to whoever is in charge. We just follow up the implementation, which does not mean that we go to see whether people are sitting in their offices at 9 o' clock.

Q. But the general feeling is that the Prime Minister's Secretariat plays a far bigger role than that.

A. I don't think so. They have come to me with certain things and I have thrown it back to them, the various ministries.

Q. You want them to make their own decisions?

A. Yes. It is their problem.

Q. What do you mean by certain level?

A. Well, policy decisions. Money decisions will of course have to be done sitting together, certain decisions are made at the Cabinet Committee of Political Affairs level and some which have to go to a full Cabinet.

Q. What time frame do you have for working out a solution for Punjab?

A. It is very difficult to put a time frame on Punjab. Let us understand where we are. We have the Akalis as one group, we have the Government as another group. We have a large amount of Sikhs, and Hindus and Muslims and Christians and other religions in Punjab who are neither Akali nor Congress and when the Akalis say that this is a Sikh problem, we must understand that they are talking about a group within Punjab which is not representative of Punjab. The Akalis are not even representative of the Sikhs. They represent some Sikhs in Punjab. So when we look at this problem it has to be much wider than that. What we need is that some Sikhs either from the Akali Dal or from outside or from any group must come up and positively speak up against the extremists and terrorists. We are

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going to sort this problem anyway, but this would help a lot.

Q. *Can you solve the problem without the Akalis?*

A. Depends on the Sikhs.

Q. *Do you see any change in the Akali attitude since you last spoke to them?*

A. Well, I have not spoken to them. I do not know about the senior leaders, but the next level of leadership which is speaking up now has certain parts which are positive, but one or two people are still tied up in knots.

Q. *Besides the political demands, there still seems to be a certain sense of insecurity amongst the Sikhs.*

A. We have done a lot. The major insecurity was in Delhi after the beginning of November. Most of the people who left have started coming back. People from Alwar have started coming back, some people from Punjab have started coming back. We have taken steps for their protection and rehabilitation in Delhi.

Q. *What about the judicial inquiry?*

A. We don't think it will help at the moment. It would raise issues which are really dead.

Q. *How do you react to Bhajan Lal's proposal to merge Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh?*

A. It is a huge question and I do not think we have discussed it enough to just react to it. No, I don't object to it. It is something we could look into provided it does satisfy the people in Punjab. They are part of the solution, we cannot push something like this on them.

Q. *Do you see the state going to elections in March?*

A. I think it would be difficult. We have not got a critical report from Punjab. Well, the army is back in the barracks and there is not much more army in Punjab now than there normally is, being a border state and front area.

Q. *Do you think the Anandpur Sahib Resolution is secessionist?*

A. In some parts, yes.

Q. *But hasn't it been watered down in 1978?*

A. They have not clarified what they have watered down and we have suggested that they take it to the Sarkaria Commission within the terms of reference of the commission, and let Justice Sarkaria look at it, but the Akalis are not keen on doing it for some reason. They want the Government to take it, they don't want to take it, and we don't want to be party to take such a resolution as the Anandpur Sahib to the Sarkaria Commission. Let them take it and let it be evaluated on its merits.

Q. *What about elections in Assam?*

A. Assam elections are different to Punjab, because in Punjab it is a law and order problem and in Assam it is enumeration. It is not that we cannot hold elections in Assam tomorrow, but we do not have the electoral rolls. As soon as this is done, we could have elections.

"THE AKALIS ARE NOT EVEN REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SIKHS. THEY REPRESENT SOME SIKHS IN PUNJAB. SO WHEN WE LOOK AT THIS PROBLEM IT HAS TO BE MUCH WIDER THAN THAT."

Q. *What are the prospects of settling the other outstanding issues in Assam?*

A. I think the boys are in a much better mood for settlement. Some people that I have met and some feedback that we have got about their own meetings is that they also feel we understand their problems and that we are trying to do whatever can be done, and they understand our constraints.

Q. *Why do you think the Congress fared so badly in Andhra Pradesh in the recent general elections?*

A. Maybe the Government being toppled , yes, and other such things. The main thing is that we were not in touch with the people, and also bad organisation.

Q. *Do you think regionalism weakens national unity? Or is it something which has to be accommodated?*

A. It depends on the regionalism. In Tamil Nadu, for example, we have regional parties, but they have always been pro-India. Let us say they have not tried to pull apart. What is more dangerous about regional parties is that they do not really have a national perspective, they see things in a very short-term perspective, which really brings you back to soft options—subsidise this, subsidise that, because it gives them popularity. But somebody has to pay for it. It's not free. Something that is being subsidised in Andhra, subsidised in Bengal, is being paid for.

Q. *Do you think NTR is anti-Indian?*

A. No. I don't think that NTR is anti-Indian.

Q. *If you were in the state of the Opposition, what would you do?*

A. I think I would have a good think about what I've done and why I have been cut to shreds by the people.

Q. *But does the lack of an opposition worry you?*

A. No. Not at all, because I know I won't lose my head.

Q. *Now regarding the economy you have spoken extensively about streamlining the public sector, but the growth of the public sector has been mainly due to the taking over of sick units. Will you stop this?*

A. I think we really have to have a hard look at the policy. We might change it. We have to also be tougher on the managements that make these units go sick.

Q. *How do you mean tougher?*

A. We'll find a way. Everybody says that what I have suggested is much too tough. That is the problem.

Q. *Do you think the taxes in this country are too high?*

A. Although the taxes look high, if you start taking all the deductions then they can actually come down to very low taxes.

Q. *Are you saying that by getting rid of some of the deductions and concessions, you can then reduce taxes?*

A. We would like to clean it up. Don't have too many boxes, make the whole thing simpler so that people can do it themselves, instead of having to get chartered accountants. I don't think we can make it as simple as I've earned so

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much, the deductions are so much, and here is my cheque. But we should move in that direction.

Q. Taxes like gift tax and estate duties yield little revenue but create opportunities for corruption. Have you thought of abolishing them?

A. They need to be rationalised.

Q. You keep talking about taking India into the 21st century. What do you mean? What century do you think we are in now, economically?

A. It is a mixed picture. It is our way of thinking which we have to change. We are still very backward in that way. We are really pushing everything on a day-to-day basis. We are short of something we need, another 5 per cent. Okay, we give another 5 per cent, but we never think of what we need in 10 years or 15 years from now, not only in quantity, but also in quality. And unless we start switching over now we will not be able to make it in the next 15 years. For example, roads. Are we going to keep making these little pot-holed roads ? Okay, we cannot afford to make motorways, but if we have to have these pot-holed roads, 15 years from now we will be in a total mess. I said roads because they are something we keep bumping on. Maybe we should cut back and have fewer roads but better roads where they are needed.

Q. Basically you are talking about a change in approach.

A. There should be a change in approach in education. Not just churning out what I feel are literate but uneducated people.

Q. What do you hope to achieve by de-linking degrees and jobs?

A. De-linking degrees is only reducing a demand for the B.A. degree, because the Government says you should have a degree.

Q. But then with lower qualification requirements, you would probably have more people applying for the same job.

A. Yes, but you need to weed them out from there. You can have a proper test, which can be fairly independent, objective and fast and you need not have numerous B.A.s who are jobless.

Q. But if you don't have enough jobs anyway, then what do you do?

A. That is where the education system comes in because you have to reorient it so that the jobs are different. We cannot in today's world possibly employ the number of people who we have unemployed, in industries. They have to come into information handling, they have to come into services, so the education must be such that there is a demand for that. There should be a shift in approach.

Q. All the Government's plans for development can be negated if family planning is not given proper attention. Does your government plan to be more aggressive about this than in the past? Do you still consider it a sensitive issue?

A. Yes, it is very sensitive, but we must make headway on it. We are not going to be hesitant about it, if we did, it is going to sink us. But yes, voluntarily, absolutely. Have more incentives than disincentives. It really comes back to education. It is the educated families who are having less children.

Q. You have said that if Pakistan made the atomic bomb, it will change things completely. How will it change things?

A. It will be a point of no return on the subcontinent if someone has nuclear weapons. We will have to review our policy to see how we are going to counter that imbalance.

Q. What are you going to do about the Tamil militants from Sri Lanka who are in Tamil Nadu?

A. We do not have any hard information on this. They've presented me some pamphlets and leaflets that the Tamils—the refugees—are printing. There is nothing we can do about that. Anybody is allowed to print whatever. We've checked it out, yes, people are printing them but there is no training to my knowledge. What we want in Sri Lanka is a settlement which will enable the refugees to go back. We cannot have 40,000 people here, maybe there are even more now. We cannot have people who have relatives closely related in Sri Lanka. What is going on there is really terrible. We feel that no military or enforced settlement would be conducive to the refugees going back so they must come to some sort of political settlement. We must create an atmosphere where these poor chaps can go back.

"IT WILL BE A POINT OF NO RETURN ON THE SUBCONTINENT IF SOMEONE HAS NUCLEAR WEAPONS. WE WILL HAVE TO REVIEW OUR POLICY TO SEE HOW WE ARE GOING TO COUNTER THAT IMBALANCE."

Q. But it seems more and more difficult—this political settlement. What is your attitude towards a new state?

A. I don't think we have come to that point yet. But it needs statesmanship and I hope that the people of Sri Lanka will rise to it.

Q. You started out into politics very hesitantly, but now that you are at the pinnacle, what are your personal goals?

A. I didn't have any personal goals when I came, but after being in politics, after seeing people, their difficulties, their wants, I think our goal has to be to eliminate poverty from India. I don't say that in five years we can do it, but in 10 to 15 years, we can make a major dent in things.

Q. Before you came into politics, you had a quiet life, in that you did not make any public statements about any public policies. There is an element of surprise about the range of initiatives you have taken. Were you thinking about all these matters earlier?

A. Yes, one thought of them, but I never thought that I should do this and why haven't you been doing it, but yes, it has always been at the back of my mind.

Q. Are you pleased that you are in a position to do something about it?

A. Yes. I am pleased that I am in a position to do something about it, and with support, I think we will be able to do something about it, but what is scary is the expectations people have.

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ESPIONAGE

THE SPY SENSATION

JANUARY 15 is Army Day and the high point of the occasion is the traditional reception on the lawns of Army House, the residence of the chief of the Indian Army. This year's guest list, in painful retrospect, could not have been chosen with more macabre irony. Apart from the President, the prime minister and senior members of their staff were the top brass of the armed forces, defence attaches of all the foreign legations in New Delhi, the defence minister and his senior staff, and the country's top-ranking bureaucrats. That exclusive nucleus also happened to represent the cast that, the very next day, was to make screaming headlines in the most sensational spy drama in Indian history.

Some of the dramatis personae, in an even more ironical twist, were actually present. Among the diplomats, one in particular was the target of some good-natured banter on his newly-acquired beard: Colonel Alain Bolley, 53, the deputy military, naval and air attache at the French Embassy. Bolley was a popular man, witty and urbane, and after four-and-a-half years in New Delhi, a familiar face in that kind of circle.

Another nearby knot of guests were also destined to figure prominently in the impending drama. P.C. Alexander, the tall and solemn principal secretary to the prime minister and the seniormost bureaucrat in the Government, was engaged in convivial conversation with the defence secretary and the secretary, defence production. They, along with Bolley, were blissfully unaware that they were the focus of unusual attention that evening. For the last two months, in what was the biggest surveillance operation ever mounted by the country's counter-intelligence agencies Bolley, along with at least 30 bureaucrats and their personal staff had been constantly shadowed in an attempt to define the contours of what appeared to be an extensive espionage ring operating in the most sensitive offices of the Indian Government.

Narain, the only non-official member of the ring and the suspected main link in the espionage chain, was hardly a James Bond type. Yet he was in possession of documents that contained vital and sensitive information that will be crucial to the case against him.

Just how extensive the ring was, and how serious their crime, was quickly apparent. On the night of January 16, special squads of the Intelligence Bureau moved in simultaneously on different locations

Coomar Narain being taken to court under heavy guard

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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in the capital in a sweep that was to net them a sensational catch. The key raid was in a dilapidated building at 16, Hailey Road where two men were whisked away from their drinks in the offices of SLM-Maneklal, a Bombay-based company representing West European industrial equipment manufacturers.

One of them was Coomar Narain, the firm's liaision officer and the man who eventually was to be branded as the mastermind behind the operation. His drinking companion that night and a frequent visitor to the office was P. Gopalan, a personal assistant in the office of the principal secretary, P. C. Alexander, and a man with access to some of the Government's most sensitive files.

By the time Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, pre-empting parliamentary probing, made a terse announcement to incredulous members in both houses of parliament on January 18 that some persons holding "sensitive positions" had been arrested for indulging in "anti-national activities", the lid had been blown. Bolley was asked to leave the country by the first available flight, giving immediate rise to intense speculation over what exactly the French connection had been. But the Indian connections were more frightening. The list included T.N. Kher, private secretary to P.C. Alexander; S.Shankaran, senior assistant to the President's press secretary; A.K. Malhotra and Uday Chand, both assistants in the prime minister's secretariat; Jagdish Tiwari, senior assistant in the department of economic affairs and J.C. Arora, personal assistant in the office of the secretary for defence production. At least 15 others were picked up for questioning, all government employees working in key ministries.

Bolley was a popular man, witty and urbane, and a familiar face in Delhi's diplomatic circles. But for the last two months he had been constantly shadowed in an attempt to define the contours of an extensive espionage ring operating in the most sensitive offices of the Indian Government.

More spice was added to the sensation with Alexander handing in his resignation "on moral grounds" much like his colleague and close friend R. N.Kao, India's spymaster, had done in the wake of Mrs Gandhi's assassination. Unlike Kao, Alexander is unlikely to be reassigned any advisory post. It was from his office that a majority of the top secret documents, copies of which were found in the raids, had been leaked and two members of his personal staff, Kher and Gopalan, are believed by investigating authorities to be the key members of the ring.

However sensational the cast of characters, individually they hardly qualified for the popular image of espionage agents or even moles. They were something out of John Le Carre, faceless, unassuming men who, except for the sensitive nature of their positions, were easily lost in the anonymity of the impersonal bureaucratic machine. Kher is an elderly

THE SPY CLUSTER

Rashtrapati Bhavan
S. Shankaran
Personal Assistant
to the President's Press Secretary

PM's Secretariat
Office of Dr P.C. Alexander
T.N. Kher, Private Secretary
P. Gopalan & K. Malhotra
PAs to Dr P.C. Alexander

Coomar Narain

Finance Ministry
J.M. Tiwari
Personal Assistant to the
Additional Secretary, Economic Affairs

Defence Ministry
Jagdish Chander Arora
Private Secretary to the
Secretary, Defence Production
Amrik Lal*
Private Secretary
to the Secretary, Defence

*Since transferred to another ministry

Colonel Alain Bolley
Deputy Military, Air & Naval Attache
French Embassy

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man of medium height and built whom his colleagues describe as a plodder. He has an unblemished record in his 15 years of government service and his only apparent weakness is that he is a heavy smoker and is partial to liquor. He has two sons and a daughter. One of his sons works in the Gulf and the other is an engineer in a private firm. He used to commute to work on his two-wheeled scooter from his modest house in Pamposh Enclave and had a limited social life. However, in the last two months, surveillance teams had on several occasions photographed him with long-range infra-red cameras on his increasing visits to the Hailey Road office of Coomar Narain. The most intriguing element is that Kher's life-style, like most of the others involved, showed no dramatic changes even though investigating sleuths say that the network had been in active operation since 1982. Apart from incriminating documents, none of the government servants arrested were in possession of any large sums of cash or had abnormal bank accounts.

Gopalan, the other key figure, lived in equally modest surroundings in a government flat in R.K. Puram. His family expressed genuine disbelief at the thought of him being a spy but refused to speak any further. Neighbours say he lived a quiet, anonymous life. "All we knew was that he worked in the PM's secretariat and carried some influence," said one.

SIMILAR sentiments were expressed by neighbours of Jagdish Chand Arora, personal assistant to M.C. Sarin, the secretary, defence production. His wife, their two school-going children, an elderly mother and two brothers, who all live together, are still in a state of shock. Arora, they say, was woken up at 12.30 in the early hours of January 17 and taken away by men in mufti. They presumed he was required for official business till they read the screaming headlines in the papers the next day.

Narain, the suspected main link in the espionage chain, was hardly a James Bond type either (*see box*). The only non-official member of the ring, he has a double-storeyed house in Defence Colony where he lives on the top floor with a Japanese tenant occupying the lower half. He also has a farmhouse in Mehrauli on the outskirts of the city where his wife and two daughters live. Both places, say investigating officials, are legitimately acquired and were within his means to afford. He was earning around Rs 7,000 a month, including perks, from Maneklal. The raids conducted on his houses produced a total of Rs 30,000 in cash which was actually the rent he collected from his tenant. However, a sum of Rs 1.10 lakh was seized from the Hailey Road office and Narain is believed to have told his interrogators that the money was given to him by the company for entertaining, though company spokesmen have denied it. Narain's tax consultant, P. Thomas, expressed amazement at his client's involvement in the spy ring. "It seems impossible that a simple and quiet man like Narain could be involved in something like this," he says.

P.C. ALEXANDER

Heavy Price

SOME lessons must be learnt the hard way, and this one on the dangers of over-centralising government functioning had a particularly heavy price on it. With the espionage network penetrating right into the prime minister's secretariat and into the office of the principal secretary to the prime minister, attention was focused as never before on what exactly went through that office.

The chastening answer was: practically everything. Given his job definition, it was P.C. Alexander's job to coordinate the activities of the Government's various arms, prepare daily briefs for the prime minister, be the staging point for the periodic reports from intelligence agencies of every hue, vet proposals for international agreements, commercial deals, defence purchases, industrial licences and collaborations, and key appointments.

As if that were not enough, Alexander was also on the Atomic Energy Commission and the Space Commission, and therefore had with him in his office papers relating to two of the country's most sensitive departments. Also, in the four years that he had worked in South Block, Alexander had chaired the meetings of over 50 inter-ministerial committees or secretaries' committees appointed to submit reports on such specific issues as the Punjab and Assam problems, to review public sector undertakings, to improve the country's telecommunications system, and much else. For any spy who got in there, Alexander's office could theoretically provide enough information to keep a whole department busy analysing it back at home-base.

On top of everything else, the prime minister's secretariat handled papers relating to a dozen departments directly under the prime minister's charge. These included: science and technology, environment, external affairs, electronics, ocean development and the cabinet secretariat itself, apart from atomic energy and space. Even though proposals on most of these subjects were frequently referred to South Block for

P.C. Alexander: moral motives

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Gopalan (left) and Kher arriving in court: key conspirators

Narain, however, was in possession of evidence that will be crucial to the case against him—documents stamped Top Secret that contain vital and sensitive information. Investigators have established that Narain was the key to the entire operation and that the Hailey Road office was its nerve-centre. Narain, according to intelligence sources, had recruited most of the key members of the ring through Gopalan, whom he had known earlier, having worked with him in the commerce ministry in the '50s. They used to pay frequent visits to Narain's office which was ideally located. Hailey Road is a quiet street with mainly residential buildings. Narain's office consisted of three rooms located on one side of the building which was not visible from the main road. Says S.M.Aggarwal, the building's owner: "I used to observe vehicles coming to and fro till all hours of the night but I never paid any real attention." The documents brought by the visitors were photocopied at a shop in the basement of Rohit House in nearby Tolstoy Marg. The shop owner, a Mr Sharma, refused to comment beyond saying: "I have given my statement to the police". But his is just one of the many photostat shops that have sprung up in the area which stay open till late at night.

However, the documents seized—almost 600 in number according to one source —would seem to indicate that the spy ring was operating on the wafer-thin line that separates the acquisition of a nation's secrets for straight espionage and inside knowledge acquired for business dealings and the selling of expensive and

nothing more than a formal okay, there were also the odd occasions when the prime minister's office questioned or reversed proposals that came in. And clearly it would provide the vital inside track for anyone who had access to information that revealed the thought processes of the people in South Block. One illustrative case where Alexander played a key role concerned the Oil and Natural Gas Commission's controversial contract with Ferranti for installing computerised monitoring terminals at some of its installations. It was Alexander who persuaded Mrs Gandhi to order a fresh inquiry into the subject before making a final decision.

Alexander had also become a key advisor on matters that were not directly related to secretarial functioning, as had P.N.Haksar before him. Thus, he and Cabinet Secretary C.R.Krishnaswamy Rao Saheb were consulted by Rajiv Gandhi about the composition of the new Council of Ministers.

Not surprisingly, then, the biggest shock of last fortnight was the fact that Alexander's private secretary, T.N. Kher, and his two personal assistants had been nabbed on espionage charges. While hard information available on what exactly had leaked out was still patchy, the possibilities boggled the mind. And it seemed almost natural that Alexander should promptly resign on moral grounds. Indeed, the resignation upheld the highest traditions of public service in a country where those at the helm habitually failed to accept the responsibility for misdeeds and mishaps and did not resign. Nevertheless, the Alexander episode took on intriguing aspects as the days wore on, and quickly gained the status of a side-show to the main drama.

FOR ONE thing, why had only Alexander resigned, and not the Secretary for Defence Production, M.C. Sarin, or the Additional Secretary in the Finance Ministry, J.S.Baijal, or any of the other officers whose personal staff had been implicated in the spy scandal? For another, why was it that only Alexander had not been informed in advance about the impending arrests, while several others down to middle-level rungs had been warned in advance? It seemed almost ignoble that a civil servant with 36 years of distinguished service behind him should be attending a cabinet committee meeting on the anti-defection bill while the police were registering a case against his aides at the Tilak Marg police station a couple of kilometres from South Block.

And finally, why did a veiled campaign of insinuation against Alexander start shortly after he resigned? While no firm answers were forthcoming, the indications pointed to in-house intrigue and the settling of past scores.

The sequence of events indicated that while it was Alexander himself who had warned the various agencies about the objectionable activities of quite a few people in his secretariat and in other offices, he was not informed about the action taken subsequently. Indeed, some intelligence agency sources indicated that Alexander himself had been under close surveillance, even though it should have been obvious that he was in the clear.

While Alexander put a brave face on events, refusing to show any signs of hurt when a few secretaries to the Government called on him individually, there was little doubt that he was unhappy at the manner in which his name was sought to be dragged into the espionage question. Rajiv Gandhi's issuing of a clean chit to him in Parliament "he was not connected with anything" came only later.

As with so much else concerning the biggest spy scandal in the country's history, there were no clear answers emerging on the vital questions. And one senior government official concluded that someone wanted to embarrass him, so he quit. If that is indeed the case, it added a touch of needless meanness in an already messy situation.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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competitive weaponry. According to the investigating authorities, the documents seized represent a smorgasbord of information, some utterly valueless and misleading while others are stamped with the highest secret classification "Not To Go Out Of Office" in red. Investigating sleuths believe that the network was told to lay their hands on anything marked Secret but that could also include information that could prove irreparably damaging for the country's security, both internal and external. As principal secretary, Alexander's office was privy to every move of any importance taken by any of the various ministries (*see box*). "In Mrs Gandhi's time, specially the last year before her death, the prime minister's office had become all-powerful, reducing many cabinet ministers to irrelevance. All major decisions and every major deal was sent here for clearance. Compared to this case, the Larkins brothers (the earlier spy network busted last year) resemble a couple of erring schoolboys," says a top intelligence source.

IN ATTEMPTING to reconstruct the origins and dimensions of the spy ring, counter-intelligence operatives say that Narain's role was central to the entire operation. As one of the ubiquitous "liaison officers" who have sprung up like weeds in every crack of the Government edifice, Narain's basic job for Maneklal was to cultivate influential government contacts. He was hired by them in 1960. The firm has collaborations with firms in Switzerland, West Germany and Japan as well as with two French companies—Tecalemit Flexibles for manufacturing flexible hoses, Burton Corblin for making piston-type compressors and also represents the French firm of PCM Pomp Moineau. The firm's present head, Yogesh Maneklal told INDIA TODAY that Narain's job was solely liaison work "and to organise the visits of our foreign collaborators visiting Delhi to help them in meeting people in government, and he also helped the firm in following up on industrial licences applied for".

Narain, like others of his calling, operated in that twilight world also inhabited by arms dealers where the activities are not strictly above board as in, for instance, the finding out of bids and specifications of rival competitors. In the process, what started off as industrial information-gathering gradually got diverted into espionage at the urging, for hitherto unknown considerations, of Colonel Alain Bolley. Surveillance photographs offer conclusive proof that Bolley and Narain used to meet clandestinely at tourist spots like the Qutab Minar where the information Narain had obtained from his carefully-cultivated network of government contacts was passed on.

But that brings up the puzzle of the intriguing French Connection. Who were Bolley's masters? French intelligence? Or

The shop where documents were xeroxed

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

COOMAR NARAIN

Unlikely Spy

FOR THOSE who knew him, news of the involvement of Coomar Narain in the sensational spy drama has been received with shocked surprise. For the last 15 years, he has been staying in Defence Colony which also houses a number of retired service officers. One of them who introduced Narain to the Defence Colony Club says he used to see him every morning on his way to work but they only greeted each other. Narain hardly visited the club and generally lived a quiet life.

Even his neighbour, Mrs Kashyap says: "We hardly knew anything about him." He was also a member of the Gymkhana Club where a lot of top bureaucrats and serving defence officers are members. But despite that attraction, Narain hardly visited the club except for a couple of occasions when he was seen lunching by himself.

The Narain family originally hails from Palghat in Kerala where Coomar's grandfather had a house. But they sold their property in the '50s and moved to Madras from where they moved to Cochin before finally settling in Delhi. In Delhi, Coomar occupied the Defence Colony house while his wife and two adopted teenaged daughters lived on the farm he had bought in Mehrauli on the outskirts of the city.

Mrs Narain is probably the most surprised by the shocking revelations about her husband. "On that day, he came to the farm for lunch at 2 p.m. as was his daily routine. He then rested for a while before going back to the office. He normally gave me a ring before going to bed but this time he never called. His servant came to the farm the next morning and said that he hadn't come home. I rushed to the house and only then learnt that he had been arrested." She is absolutely convinced that he is innocent and has been framed. "He never mentioned anything about any of the other people mentioned in the case. I am sure it is a horrible mistake," she says.

Neighbours at Defence Colony are

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was he a maverick moonlighting for the CIA as some reports have suggested? In an interview with French television from New Delhi just before leaving, Bolley flatly rejected the charge that he was working for the CIA. "No French diplomat would work for an American intelligence agency," he stated.

Reports from Paris, where Bolley is being kept under tight wraps, say that Bolley could be the 'victim' of an insidious campaign conducted by jealous competitors. The immediate suspect is the Soviet Union, which, according to this theory, was concerned at Rajiv Gandhi's ostensibly reflexive pro-West tendencies and is striving to sabotage his plans of unbolting protected Indian markets to western suppliers. The theory goes that the Soviets specifically wished to wreck the massive Rs 2,000 crore 155mm gun deal which the French were hopeful of bagging. Bolley had played a key role in the negotiations. But what is equally obvious is that, considering the "special relationship" built up between India and France in the last couple of years, the Indian Government would hardly declare Bolley persona non grata unless there was incontrovertible evidence of his involvement.

Till the current controversy, Bolley's credentials were impeccable. He graduated in 1955 from the Aviation School at Salon-De-Provence in the specialised branch of the engineer-officer corps of the French Air Force. In 1975, he completed a course in higher military studies which qualified him for foreign assignments. In 1977, he became an air force colonel and was posted to New Delhi in July, 1980 as deputy defence attache.

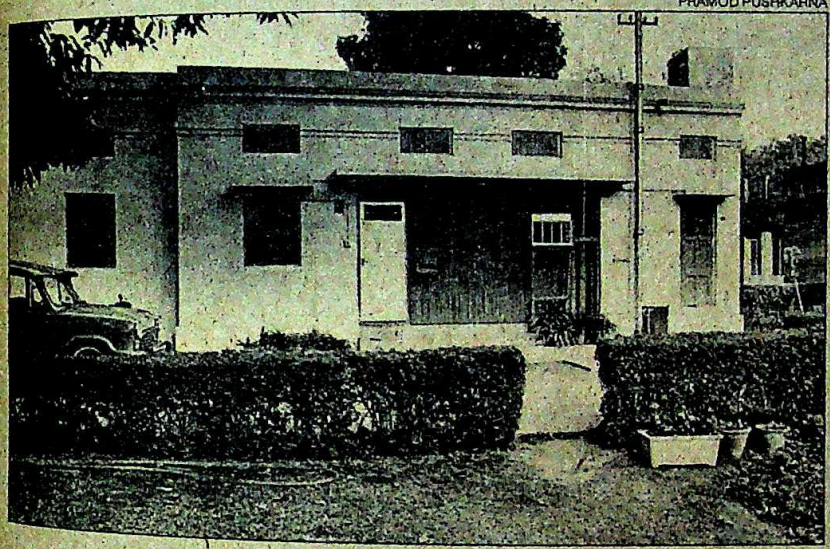
HOWEVER, as with most other embassies, there is almost always an agent of the French external intelligence agency, the DGSE-K (Direction Generale De La Securite Exterieure, formerly the SDECE), the French equivalent of the CIA, and he often operates under the cover of a military attache. Since the socialist government took over, the agency's brief has been towards gathering more economic, financial and scientific information. France's arms sales pitch is legendary and a military attache has a pivotal role to play in a client country.

Bolley fits the frame to perfection. He had done invaluable groundwork for the French in their major arms deals with India in the last four years, including those for the Mirage 2000 fighter, and the Matra Magic 550 and Milan missiles. It is also in the last four years that the French need for defence-related information has escalated dramatically. France has become the world's third largest supplier of conventional arms largely because of its *laissez faire* attitude to arms sales. With most of the lions of the French arms industry having been nationalised, it is far more accurate to speak of the existence of a "military-industrial complex" in France than it is in the US.

The promotion of arms sales is also subject to this symbiotic relationship between industry and the state. The state has become the principal purveyor of French arms. Thus, Bolley's role in the entire affair has a strange sort of logic. Indian intelligence sources also say that one of the reasons why the French had been so successful with their arms sales to India was because they had access to crucial information on what Indian defence requirements and specifications were in advance. The successes include:

► The Rs 1,200-crore Mirage 2000 deal for the supply of 40 aircraft which makes India the single largest customer

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Narain arriving in court (extreme left) and the Hailey Road office

at Mehrauli say that the Narains hardly did any entertaining or had a hectic social life which is quite contrary to the reports of wild orgies that appeared in some sections of the press. Says Ranbir Singh, who sold Narain the three-and-a-half acre farm: "Whenever I met Narain, he was very friendly and polite.

Narain's wife at their farm

There were no parties or anything at the farmhouse that would possibly suggest he was not what he seemed."

Narain started his career as a stenographer in the foreign ministry. He was posted abroad in China for a year immediately after his marriage in 1955. On his return, he worked in the finance and commerce ministries where he first came in contact with Gopalan. In 1960, he quit government service and joined Maneklal and Company. Yogesh Maneklal says that Narain was hired by his father and he really has no idea as to his activities in Delhi. Neither, for that matter, does Narain's driver Rameshwar. "I used to drive him all over the city but I did not find anything suspicious in his activities. He was a good man." Intelligence surveillance, however, has established that Narain used taxis to meet Bolley. Meanwhile, two of his office assistants have been picked up for questioning about his activities in the Hailey Road office and the kind of people he used to meet in his mysterious incarnation as a master spy.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

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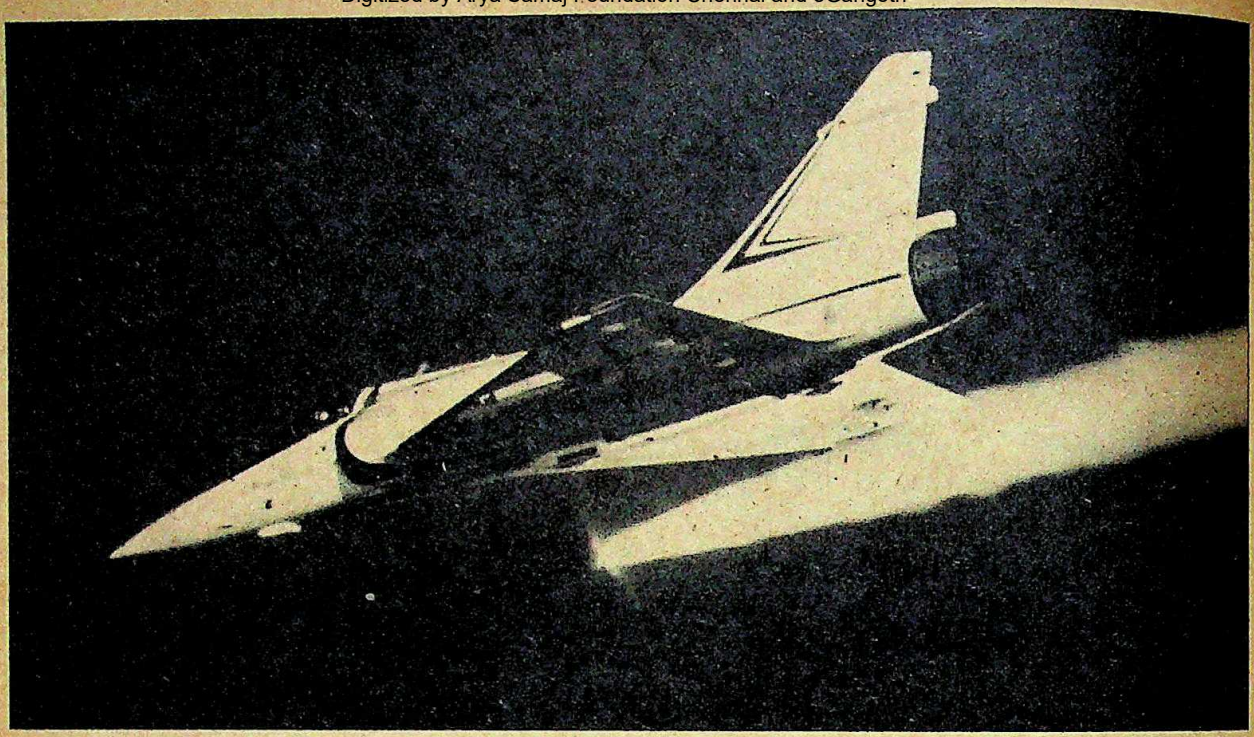

The Mirage 2000 firing a Matra Magic 550 missile: key contracts

for the aircraft to date.

► Matra Magic 550 missiles, initially linked to the Mirage sale but grew much larger in scale when the Indian Air Force decided to integrate the Matra system with its MiG-21 bis and MiG-23 Flogger B aircraft. The deal is still to be finalised but could involve as much as 10,000 missiles.

► Milan anti-tank missiles. The deal for an unspecified number of missiles was signed against considerable opposition and opinions are still divided on the wisdom of the choice.

► AS-70 laser guided bombs to be fitted to the Jaguars, Mirages and MiG-23s.

► The French were also leading the field in the race for the 155mm gun deal which was due to be signed shortly. The requirement is for 600 pieces as outright purchase with the provision to manufacture much more indigenously.

In addition, the defence forces have been buying crores worth of smaller components like electronic aids, radar equipment, precision ammunition and surveillance equipment including that sought to be used to convert Air India Boeing 707s into AWACS aircraft.

In the light of the successes in the past, it is obvious that Bolley was being pressed for more new information when at least two major orders, involving close to Rs 3,000 crore, were in the final stages of decision. Last fortnight, Lt-General J.R. Malhotra, who heads the Corps of Artillery in the Indian army, told the press that a final decision had almost been taken on the purchase of the 155 mm calibre howitzer to replace the second world war vintage 25-pounders. The French firm OFEMA was competing for the Rs 2,000-crore order with the Austrians and Swedes. In fact in such a sensitive stage was the deal now that, in spite of the panic in the wake of the arrests, Colonel Joel Lesne, OFEMA's technical delegate in Delhi refused to leave, though he firmly declined to talk to INDIA TODAY. Along with the artillery guns, at stake now was the sale of a Rs 1,000-crore integrated computer system for the joint use of the three services.

INTELLIGENCE sources say Bolley and, in turn his men, were under pressure to find out more, and quickly, to back the French claims to these deals and in the rush made some mistakes. "They did fail to cover their tracks and did not even seem bothered to look behind their backs as we trailed them," said an intelligence agent.

But even against that background, intelligence sources are unable to explain the wide range of confidential information that Bolley was getting which was quite unconnected to his, or his country's requirements. In fact, when Indian counter-intelligence first realised that highly classified information was being leaked out, it was in connection with Pakistan. In September last year, prominent US newspapers reported Indian plans to stage a pre-emptive strike against Pakistan's nuclear facility at Kahuta. The reports were based on leaks from a US senate sub-committee meeting. The meeting was held when Pakistan foreign minister Sahibzada Yakub Khan was in Washington.

The Indian intelligence sensors were quick to pick up the trails of the international campaign as Khan went around giving off-the-record interviews to the American Press, complaining about the Indian designs on Kahuta and the Pakistani plans for retaliation. "Madam may just do it one of these days," he told a group of Washington newsmen one afternoon, adding menacingly, "and in that case what alternative will we have except to strike at Tarapur? And then Madam Gandhi will face the prospect of having to evacuate 10 million people out of Bombay." To Indian officers it was clear that there was an obvious design to the campaign and both the Pakistanis and the Americans had access to confidential information.

Other clues had also surfaced. Defence officers going abroad for negotiations reported surprise at the extent of information prospective western manufacturers, specially the French, seemed to have on Indian defence requirements.

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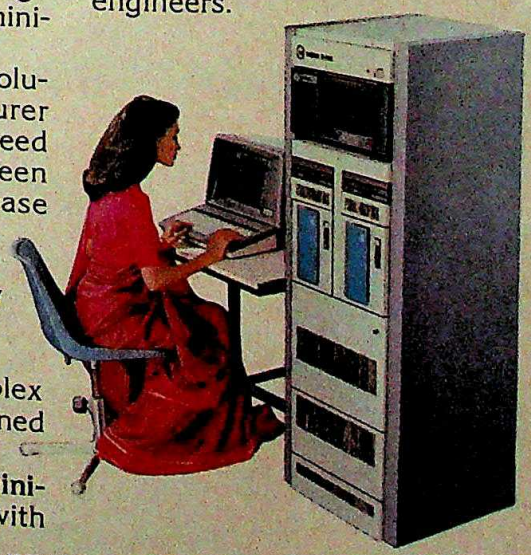

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* Data Quest—July 1984

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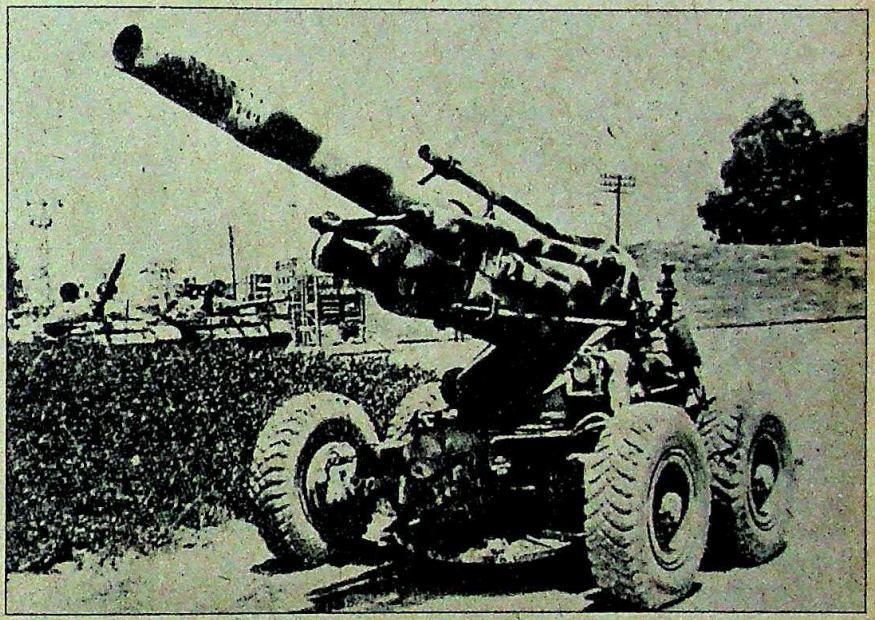
information that was highly classified and could only have come from informants in highly-placed Indian circles. The clincher came when Sri Lanka produced secret reports about the involvement of RAW in the training camps set up by separatist guerrillas in Tamil Nadu.

By late September, it was obvious that the leaks were emanating from the prime minister's secretariat as well as the defence ministry. Surveillance had already indicated the involvement of Narain, Bolley and government officials like Kher and Gopalan. Says an intelligence official: "We had to proceed very carefully because the prime minister's office was involved and we were not sure just how many others there were."

BUT IT was only when prime minister Rajiv Gandhi finally gave them the green signal for the crackdown, that the real extent of the leaks became known. Intelligence sources say that they are now faced with a dual problem, one more formidable than the other. The exact dimensions of the spy ring are yet to be fully traced and investigating officials do not rule out the possibility of further arrests or the involvment of other senior government officials. The other problem is that so far Indian counter intelligence has mainly concentrated on keeping tabs on Pakistan, Chinese and American personnel in India suspected of espionage activities. The Colonel Bolley affair has now made it clear that western European personnel are equally active in obtaining classified information and with their slender resources the Intelligence Bureau will be hard-pressed to cope with the additional pressure.

There is also a third problem: that of plugging the leaks that have already occurred. Among the documents seized were copies of the Intelligence Bureau's Daily Summary of Intelligence (DSI) and Weekly Reports (WR) which also contained information on strategic states like Punjab and Assam. Last fortnight, the IB set up a special cell headed by Additional Director M.K.Narayanan with six deputy directors (of the rank of deputy inspector-general of police) to examine the extent of the leaks. Sources, however, say that it will be weeks before the information is collated, assessed centrally and firm conclusions drawn. Former RAW chief R.N. Kao, who resigned after Mrs Gandhi's assassination, is back in his old Cabinet Secretariat office and is also associated with the investigation. He has also reportedly roped in his protege and successor Shankaran Nair to assist in the assessment.

The current spy drama has also succeeded in laying bare the gaping holes in the country's security set-up. The security clearance procedures for people in sensitive posts is extremely ill-defined and lax.Normally, government servants are appointed after a police clearance which merely involves the local police special branch sending a junior officer to the applicant's locality to verify his antecedents. Only on specific orders from the Government is further background investigation conducted.But even then, the object has a very limited purpose —to ensure that the applicant does not have a criminal past or connections with "objectionable" political groups. The intelligence agencies, on the other hand, have a limited cell which keeps tabs on their own operatives.



The 155 mm howitzer gun: crucial deal

In the case of the handling of classified material, there is a Secretariat Manual which prescribes the procedures for classification of files and who is entitled to have access to them.There are seven classifications of sensitive files which are:

Official Circulation; Restricted Circulation; Confidential; Secret; Top Secret; For Your Eyes Only; Not To Go Out Of Office.

However, though the manual also specifies the people who are permitted access to the various categories of files, it was observed more in the breach. Personal staff of senior bureaucrats, specially trusted people like Kher and Gopalan who had been in the same office for years on end, routinely handle classified files. The principal secretary has it in his power to send for any file he wants without any questions being asked.In the last few months, with the Punjab extremists, Operation Bluestar and Mrs Gandhi's assassination, the flow of files to Alexander's office had become a veritable flood.

What made things easier for the moles was the fact that owing to the Indian Government's abnormal obsession with secrecy, even routine and comparatively unimportant letters and documents, specially relating to defence, were stamped Secret. It would be logical to assume that virtually every second file that passed through the office of the principal secretary would have been similarly stamped. The sheer volume of such files would have made it quite impossible to keep in step with security procedures.

The leaks from the nation's highest secretariat have inevitably brought renewed attention on the agencies whose business it is to prevent such leaks in the first place. "We do not want to detract from the fine work the IB has done. But the fact of the matter is that this ring was operating for nearly two years and we knew nothing about it. What would have been our fate if India had to go to war with another country during this period?" queries a senior intelligence official. Intelligence sources, however, confirm that they wanted to move in on the ring in early December but the ruling party preferred to wait till

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COLONEL ALAIN BOLLEY

The French Connection

IF THE latest spy scandal to rock the country is an endless series of riddles, the most complicated of them all is the central character in the drama, Colonel Alain Bolley. The key question before Indian intelligence men still is: what were his real motivations, and who was he working for? Was he a member of the French secret service, the SDECE (Service de Documentation Exterieure et de Contre-Espionage) or was he a case of "false flag recruitment" by the CIA? Or was he working on his own, on behalf of the French arms manufacturers, all for a kickback?

Initially an engineering graduate of Ecole Superieure de Electrits, he had an uneventful six-year service in the French air force before getting his first foreign posting to Morocco. And then came the most controversial phase of his career—service in Algeria at the height of the terror unleashed by the OAS (Organisation De L'Arm Secrete), the organisation of hawkish French ex-serviceman who found Algerian independence unacceptable.

Significantly, it was also during this period that Service Five, as the dirty-tricks wing of the SDECE is designated, was most active in Algeria. Its agents were taught demolition, assassination, kidnapping, torture and sabotage and many were posted in Algeria under cover of jobs in diplomatic missions. These men known as *Barbuzes* were hated for their brutality.

Apart from his Algerian posting and a vague service record in the air force, another factor pointing to Bolley's special upbringing, according to intelligence officers, is his rather remarkable linguistic talent. New Delhi's diplomats recall with a fair bit of awe his fluency in English, German and Japanese. At parties he was much sought-after for his rather colourful expressions that often turned vicious while talking of things like French socialism and Eurocommunism. Intelligence men are also studying the pattern of his travels in India. In 1981, he visited Mussoorie on a three-day holiday with his wife Brigitte, and then proceeded on a conducted tour of the various defence establishments in the east including the 39 Gorkha Training Centre (GTC) at Varanasi, the Eastern Army Command headquarters at Fort William in Calcutta, India Air Force bases and naval installations at Bagdogra, Puri, Konarak and the Garden Reach Workshop.

He followed it up the next year with visits to the Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) plants at Hyderabad and Bangalore, the naval base at Cochin and the College of Military Engineering and the Indian Military Academy in Pune. Later he went around scouring Ladakh with halts at Kargil, Leh, and Padam. Sigficantly, in 1983 when the Mirage deal was in its final stages, he more or less stayed put in Delhi. Counter-espionage agents are now trying to interpret the likely significance of his three-week visit to Paris between August and September, 1984. The French Embassy, however, says that he had merely gone on leave.

> "The French secret service seems to have become something of a state within a state, operating almost entirely outside the laws of the French Republic."
>
> MICHAEL TREGENZA

Indian officers find it difficult to believe that the French, with such high stakes in maintaining good relations with this country would make the mistake of unleashing their espionage agencies in India, a country that is of marginal strategic interest to them. "It sounds so unreal," said an Indian officer, "that the French will take the risk of penetrating the Indian Prime Minister's Secretariat merely for the sake of helping their arms manufacturers make more money." But there is another school of thought that feels that the bagging of these key orders in India is so vital for the survival of certain sections of the French armament industry today that the Government might well have decided to get into the act.

Similar confusion prevails regarding the origins of the plot. Logically, it seems extremely unlikely that a French intelligence officer would work for the Americans because SDECE has a long history of animosity with the CIA and FBI. This, in fact began in the mid-'60s with the defection to America of M.de Vesjoli, the man heading the American section in the SDECE. Ever since then, the CIA and the SDECE have been engaged in a slanging match. But, while this background rules out the possibility of an SDECE man helping the Americans, it leaves the field wide open for the penetration of the French services by the CIA.

Besides, sources point out, in France the intelligence agencies are known to often act on their own, without the sanction of the Government. The SDECE, particularly, is known to be a law unto itself and has even been involved in large-scale drug-peddling to raise money for its covert activities. For example:

- In 1971 Colonel Paul Fournier, the number two man in SDECE, was caught with heroin worth Rs 8 crore at Newark, New Jersey, in the US. He later confessed that he was working on behalf of one of the directors of French intelligence.
- In Haiti, an SDECE agent was caught with 106 kg of heroin. Around the same time, in the seventies, the organisation was accused of circulating and using counterfeit currency.

The French Government has apparently found it impossible to keep an effective control over its intelligence agencies, and as Michael Tregenza, an acknowledged authority on European espionage systems states, "the French secret service seems to have become something of a state within a state operating almost entirely outside the laws of the French Republic and beyond governmental control".

This, and Bolley's intriguing background open endless possibilities. And with Bolley disappearing from the scene, Indian intelligence men are extremely pessimistic about the possibility of ever solving the riddle. They are, indeed, resigned to waiting till the present investigations produce some of the answers to the jigsaw puzzle, or perhaps till Colonel Alain Bolley, Legion d' Honneur, decides to write his memoirs.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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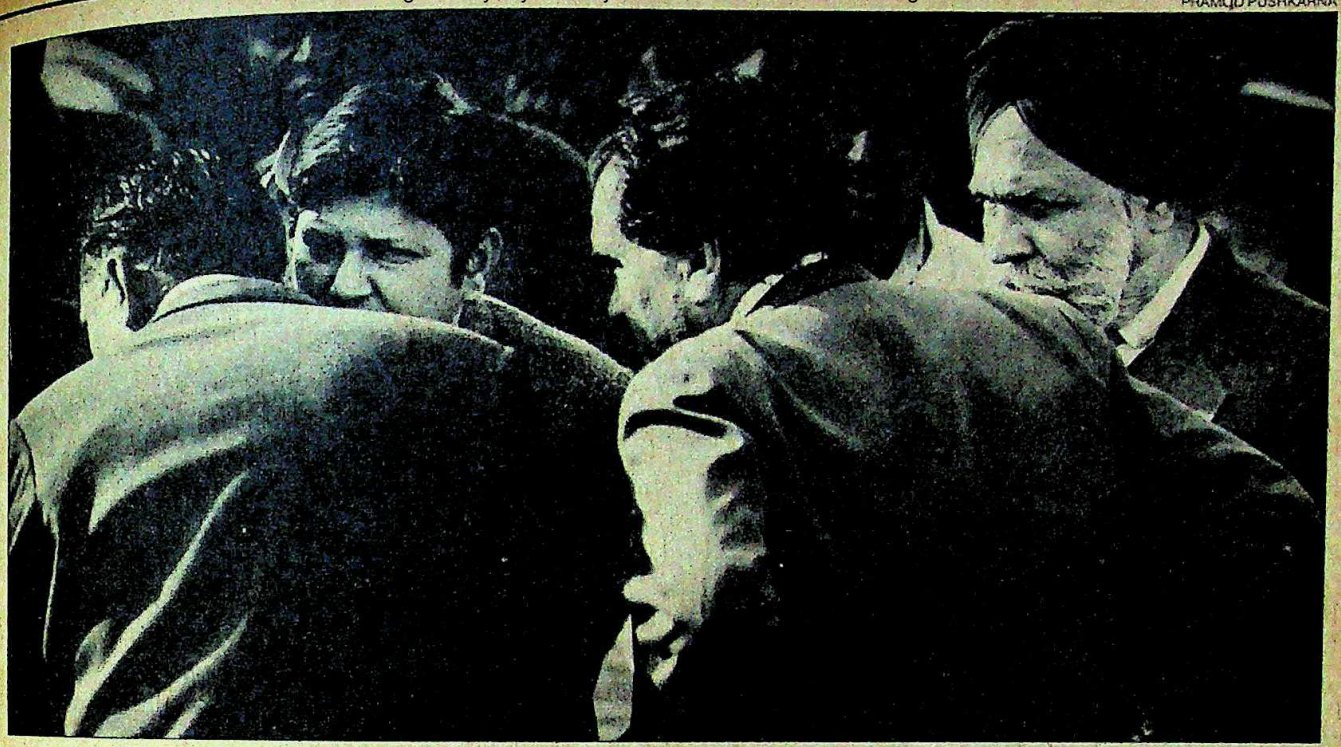

after the elections to get more information on its dimensions and also avoid any pre-electoral embarrassment.

That the network operated for so long and with impunity is also indicative of the limitations of the country's counter-intelligence set-up. Even after the Larkins case last year, no significant effort was made to beef up security procedures and the IB's counter-intelligence wing still continues to be dangerously short of vehicles, funds and personnel. In addition, the IB is also saddled with the increasing threat of international terrorism. There have been alerts in the recent past about Middle East terrorist groups sneaking into India and of Indian terrorists making contacts with foreign terrorist groups.

Such a situation also lends credence to the suspicion in certain intelligence circles that the original tip-off regarding the spy ring was actually given to RAW by the Soviet counter-espionage agency, the KGB. The KGB with its greater resources and massive network of operatives would have had Bolley's name on their files as an intelligence agent and would certainly have maintained their own surveillance on his activities as they do on all intelligence operatives from the western embassies based in Delhi. In fact, it is still widely believed in intelligence circles that the original tipoff about the Larkins spy set-up had also come from the KGB who had stumbled across it while keeping routine surveillance on the CIA agents the Larkins were meeting.

RAGHU RAI

Investigating officials discussing the case outside court (top) and R.N. Kao

The Soviets would, in fact, have been bagging two birds with a single stone. Since the late '70s, they have been getting increasingly worried about losing their monopoly on arms supplies to India to western arms sources. A majority of India's biggest arms deals since 1980 has been with the West, particularly Britain and France, a situation that had led to the sudden proliferation of arms dealers and representatives of western arms manufacturers. Since the Larkins affair, their access to the Defence Ministry and the headquarters of the three service arms had been drastically curtailed. Now, after the Bolley affair, there is bound to be a further tightening up on security procedures with regard to non-official visits to sensitive government departments. The ones who will profit most from that would undoubtedly be the Soviets.

Last fortnight, the prime minister summoned the top-ranking intelligence officials for a review of the intelligence set-up and the possibilities of revamping them to make them more effective. A reappraisal was also made of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) with regard to external and internal intelligence. Over the years, the JIC's seem to have become more and more ineffective mainly because of the lack of coordination and cooperation between the various intelligence agencies. Sources say that the JIC's have become forums for slanging matches where internal feuds and inter-service rivalry rather than common concerns are predominant.

Intelligence veterans, however, say that the moment is ripe for major changes in intelligence strategy and doctrine. Says one: "It is high time we became more aggressive and result-oriented. We should have better interaction with agencies of friendlier countries, something which is not encouraged at the moment." But change seems to be anathema to the intelligence agencies and it will require a concerted effort from the very highest levels to bring it about. Till then, however, Coomar Narain's breed can continue to sell the country down the drain with little fear of being found out.

—DILIP BOBB with SHEKHAR GUPTA and RAJU SANTHANAM in Delhi and RAMESH CHANDRAN in Paris

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ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

An Unequal Battle

IT SEEMED to be a calculated move to consolidate the Congress(I)'s supremacy over its political foes. Last fortnight, the ruling party advanced the assembly polls by three months, clearly to give the battered Opposition yet another drubbing. With a pro-Congress(I) wave generated in the wake of Mrs Gandhi's brutal assassination showing no sign of decline, 10 Congress(I) state governments approached the Election Commission to hold the assembly elections in March instead of June 1985 when their five-year terms were to expire. Having armed himself with the state governments' approval, R.K. Trivedi, the bespectacled election commissioner, announced in a hurriedly convened press conference on January 24: "Countdown for the second general elections within 10 weeks has begun from today."

It is indeed going to be a mini general election. According to Election Commission notifications, the state assemblies of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh and the Union territory of Pondicherry will go to the polls on March 2 and 5 this year. Nearly 270 million of the country's voters will elect 2,534 of the total 3,997 MLA's in all the assemblies. In fact, it is for the first time since 1967 that so many assembly elections are being held so soon after the Lok Sabha poll. Even then, both elections were held after a gap of about six months.

Said G.K. Moopanar, general secretary of the All-India Congress Committee(I): "In all these states, the Congress(I) was the ruling party and we have decided to seek a fresh mandate from the people for strengthening the hands of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi." He added that if the Lok Sabha verdict was a vote for integrity and stability, the assembly election result would in turn be an affirmation of the new leadership and cordial Centre-state relations.

Obviously the major consideration for an early poll was the ruling party's conviction that any delay would not only give the Opposition a chance to recover from the shock but would lead to a massive decline in the pro-Rajiv wave blowing all over the country. Though the party has majorities in at least half the 11 assemblies, and two-thirds majority in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Gujarat and Maharashtra, a section of the party is of the opinion that the Congress(I) will not be able to repeat its earlier performance if the elections were held as scheduled in June 1985.

In fact, the decision to go in for elections was taken after a detailed study of the results of the assembly segments in the Lok Sabha elections. According to these results, the ruling party led over opposition candidates in over 2,100 assembly segments in these 11 states. The party high command also collected information through government intelligence agencies about the mood of the electorate, and all of them echoed that any delay in holding elections would erode the party's base in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Following a consensus among the central leaders, the Congress(I) decided to direct even those reluctant chief ministers like Arjun Singh of Madhya Pradesh, Chandrashekhar Singh of Bihar and Madhavsinh Solanki of Gujarat to go for a March poll. The high command even conceded the request of Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh for dissolving the state assembly 27 months before its term was to expire in 1987. Boasted Singh: "We have a leader with a clean image, a party with a record of service and an army of young and committed workers. Why not use these favourable factors in our favour?"

Singh and his party colleagues were convinced that victory was certain, and they would have to merely go through the ritual of polling in March. Their hopes were based on the massive rush for Congress(I) tickets. Before the deadline for receiving applications closed on January 25, the dozen Pradesh Congress Committees(I)'s (PCCI's) had collected over Rs 1 crore as fees from 20,000 of the 80,000 prospective MLA's. The rush was so much that the party bosses had to summon the police in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh to keep the mobs under control.

Not only were the PCC(I) presidents and the AICC(I) office-bearers forced to find hide-outs to rest after the sleepless nights they had spent, they even had to seek police protection to move about unmolested. For instance, Union Finance Minister and Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) Committee President Vishwanath Pratap Singh spent four nights away from home

to avoid the over 2,000 ticket-seekers who had descended on his three-bedroom Kailash Colony apartment in New Delhi. In Maharashtra, AICC(I) observer Tarun Gagoi was surrounded by a rush at Sahyadiri Guest House, and Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil could not leave New Delhi's Maharashtra Sadan for his appointment with the Central leaders till he had accepted applications from all the waiting party workers. All the state government bhavans in New Delhi were bursting at the seams and over 40 state ministers were put up at New Delhi's five-star hotels.

Obviously believing that the important factor for selection would be the candidates' knowledge of modern gadgetry and equipment, over 20,000 Congressmen had typed their applications on electronic typewriters, and about 5,000 of them had written that they were young, educated and familiar with "modern approaches to administration". A candidate from Uttar Pradesh declared in his application form: "I have never faced any corruption charges in my political life. Flying and collection of electronic gadgets are my important hobbies."

Confronted with a deluge of applications, the Congress(I) had the daunting task of selecting only 2,500-odd candidates out of over 80,000 applications—all of them claiming to be clean, young and efficient. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) which met last fortnight, however, decided that only clean, experienced candidates with winning chances would be given a ticket. Said V.P. Singh: "We have decided to give more representation to youth and women and we will drop all those against whom there are serious charges of indiscipline and cor-

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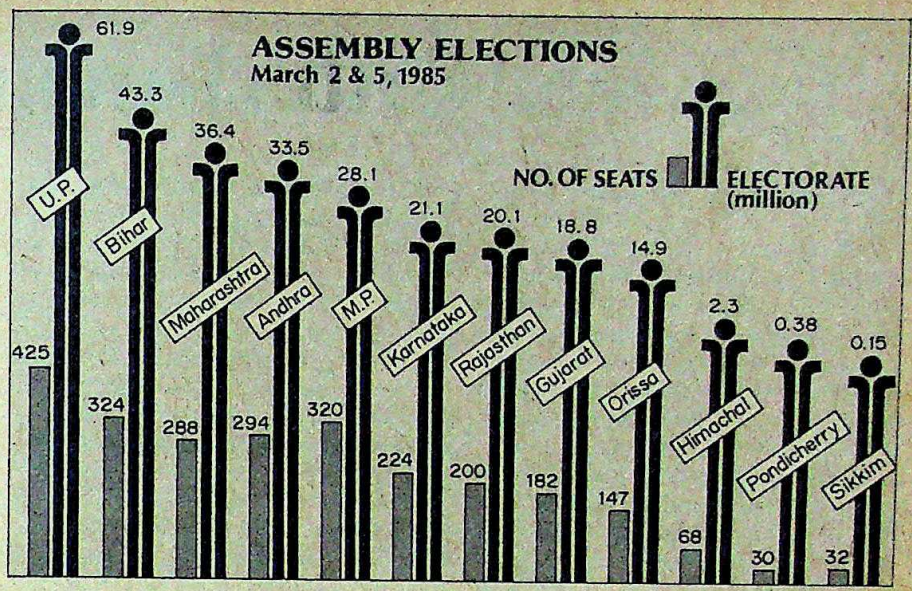
PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Applicants for Congress(I) tickets: convinced of victory



ruption. We want to build a party of Rajivji's liking."

The decision to weed out "unclean" MLA's was taken following a series of confidential reports sent by 438 coordinators appointed by the Development Centre of the ruling party. The centre, a part of Indian Youth Congress(I) (IYC-I), was launched in 1983 when Rajiv was looking after the frontal organisations. As part of the strategy, the IYC(I) appointed nominally paid coordinators throughout the country to provide a feed-back to Rajiv about the development activities, the image of the local MLA's and MP's and any frailties of the state administration. Over 50 MP's were dropped on the basis of adverse reports sent by the youth coordinators. According to Congress(I) sources, this time, too, the coordinators' reports suggested that over 50 per cent of the MLA's do not have a clean image and their renomination would adversely affect the party's poll prospects.

But the party was not depending entirely on these reports. The AICC(I) appointed over 40 observers in all the states along with Pradesh election committees to recommend a panel of names for each of the assembly constituencies. The scrutiny of the names began on January 28, when the central parliamentary board began its marathon meeting of selecting candidates. Said Murali Bhandari, AICC(I) observer for Uttar Pradesh: "Never before have we found so much dedication, unity and commitment to the leadership as we see now in Uttar Pradesh. Though all of them want to become MLA's, they have assured us that they will abide by the high command's decision."

The leadership is, however, anxious to elect legislators who are not only loyal to the new leadership but are also capable of replacing the old leaders in their states. It was with these objectives that the party's central leadership nominated new young AICC(I) observers and members of various election committees. Though there are no firm indications of this yet, it is clear that a decision regarding at least half the chief ministers of the states going to the polls has already been taken. This will be implemented only after the assembly polls.

THERE were hints, in fact, of an orchestrated campaign against Vasantdada Patil when he was accused publicly by Union Steel and Mines Minister Vasant Sathe of sabotaging his Lok Sabha poll. In Bihar too, supporters of Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh and former chief minister Jagannath Mishra continued to trade charges against each other. In both cases, the central leadership has received over half a dozen memoranda against the chief ministers.

The opposition parties are keenly watching which way the nominations will go. With the idea of a one-party opposition with a common symbol and one leader buried for the moment, the opposition strategists are understandably pinning their hopes on the dissensions within the ruling party. Each selection will mean at least 50 rejected candidates, who will, the opposition leaders hope, either work for them or against the Congress(I). The most important factor in the opposition's favour seems to be the absence of formidable state-level Congress(I) leaders. Says BJP leader L.K. Advani: "The political situation is entirely reversed this time. Contrary to the Lok Sabha poll when the Congress(I) could project one leader for the Centre, it can't do so now in any state. While we have a clear leader in each state assembly of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Orissa, the Congress(I) has none." Madhu Dandavate, leader of the Janata Party parliamentary group is also hopeful. "As compared to the Lok Sabha poll, we now have far better chances. We have a second line of leadership in all the states where the Congress(I) has none," he says.

Though the Opposition as a whole has not evolved a poll strategy to avenge its defeat, it is likely to concentrate on states where it can either win power or give the Congress(I) a reasonable fight. According to sources, opposition parties hope to retain power in both Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh where local issues are likely to dominate the election. In Orissa, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, the opposition parties, even if divided, are expecting to give the ruling party a run for its money.

It is only in Uttar Pradesh that none of the opposition parties, including Charan Singh's Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP) is capable of putting up a respectable fight. Although the DMKP's New Delhi office was the second-most crowded after the Congress(I)—it received over 2,000 applications—its leadership has given up hopes due to what it described as the possibility of "blatant rigging" in the elections. Even the firebrand Akbar Ahmed of the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch predicted over 400 seats to the Congress(I) in the Assembly. Said Akbar: "We will fight the

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elections. But it is the bureaucracy and police which will ensure the Congress(I)'s successive victory and not the voters. If district magistrates and superintendents of police are with you, you don't need votes. They will be right there in the ballot boxes when they arrive at the counting centres."

The opposition leaders were apparently blowing up the possibility of rigging in the elections to cover up their own failure to project a single issue in the assembly elections. Ahmed's party was talking of crop insurances, job guarantees for the unemployed and the DMKP equally enthusiastically promised remunerative prices for agricultural products, more government expenditure on villages and curbs on capital-intensive industries. None of this seemed to cut much ice with the voters who were used to the 'one slogan-one leader' dominated election campaign.

There were some half-hearted attempts to forge unity around one state leader. For example, the opposition leaders are likely to project Sharad Pawar, Ramakrishna Hegde, N.T. Rama Rao, Babubhai Patel, Biju Patnaik, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and Shanta Kumar as their chief ministerial candidates in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. The Opposition is also confident of giving a severe blow to the Congress(I) in Sikkim where Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the ousted chief minister, has proved his invincibility by trouncing the ruling party in the Lok Sabha election.

But none of these parties was willing to concede that it had fared worse than the others in the elections. While the BJP leaders claimed proudly that its candidates were running second in 102 parliamentary constituencies and had polled 7.7 per cent votes, the Janata leaders drew satisfaction from the fact that it was the only non-communist national party to reach a double figure mark in the Lok Sabha. The DMKP claimed adamantly that it was the dominant party in Bihar, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Thus it seems that only in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, where personalities like NTR and Hegde dominate, the chances of the Opposition unitedly fighting the ruling party are bright.

Yet with their inability to feel the pulse of the people even after a disastrous performance, the opposition parties—barring a last minute miracle—seem to be heading inexorably towards another disaster.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with bureau reports

DHIRENDRA BRAHMACHARI

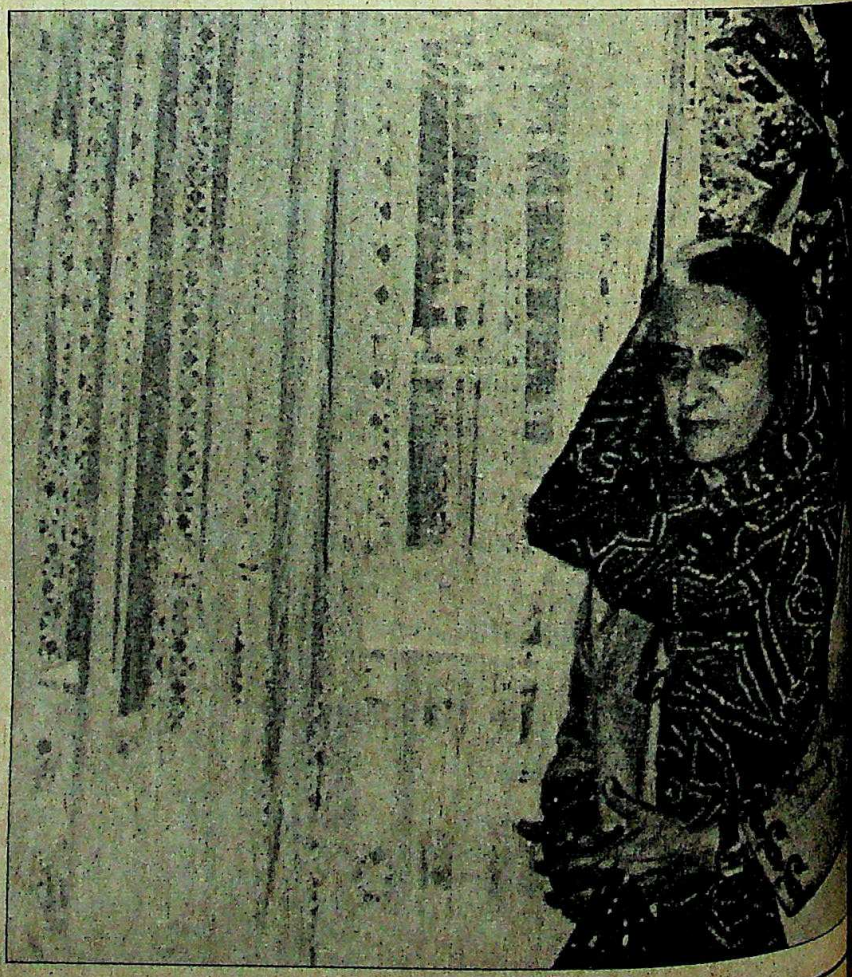
Crash Landing

JUST yesterday he had all the trappings of power and glory. Union ministers fawned ingratiatingly over Dhirendra Brahmachari, the 69-year-old yogi with the hypnotic eyes and astonishing political clout. He could stroll into even the most important government function or ceremony, or drive his gleaming white Mercedes right into the prime minister's residence without security guards stopping him. He flew his own planes, and ran posh air-conditioned yoga ashrams where socialites rubbed sweaty shoulders with the *hoi polloi*. But today his unexpectedly humiliating tumble into oblivion couldn't be more complete.

Since the change of order at South Block, the yogi has become something of a persona non grata. No ministers hang about his sprawling Vishwayatan Yoga Ashram in New Delhi any more, and neither has he called upon the new prime minister. In fact, the spotless white dhoti-clad figure of the swami was conspicuous by its absence at the swearing-in ceremony of Rajiv Gandhi. And this was the first time since 1967—barring the Janata regime—that he had failed to turn up. As a top Congress(I) functionary says: "Earlier it was clear that only those who were in the good books of Brahmachari were rewarded. But the situation is completely changed now."

Brahmachari's troubles have come in a bunch: he faces a criminal case in Jammu; voluntary donations and government grants to his various charitable and research institutions have plummetted to less than a Rs 1 crore this year from Rs 10 crore in 1981-82; the Government has not extended his income tax

Brahmachari with Mrs Gandhi: halcyon days



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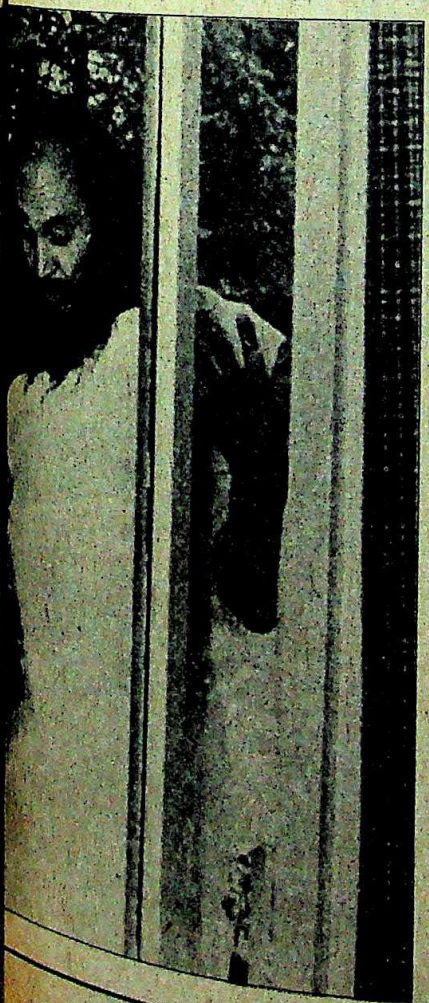
exemption: all of this has led to a general financial crisis. The yogi admits: "Our request for extending the period of income tax exemption for donations has been pending for many months. Officers are probably taking their time because Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari is involved." Quite a fall for the late prime minister's trusted confidant.

But none of this happened suddenly. The swami's fortunes began to slide downhill soon after Sanjay Gandhi's death in 1980, only to revive temporarily with Mrs Gandhi's personal intervention, which enabled him to expand his yoga activities. But the swami's ultimate fate was clearly on the cards ever since Rajiv Gandhi began to emerge as the second most powerful force in the Congress(I). Some examples of the swami's decline and fall from grace over the past three years:

1981: Under the stewardship of H.K.L. Bhagat, Union minister of state for information and broadcasting, Doordarshan drops Brahmachari's weekly yoga programme.

1982: The Government rejects



INTERVIEW

"Only those who rise will fall"

FOR DHIRENDRA Brahmachari, the installation of Rajiv Gandhi as the prime minister has marked the beginning of an uncertain future. A regular feature at the former prime minister's house for over three decades, Brahmachari is now suddenly out in the cold. In an exclusive interview with Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA, *Brahmachari spoke about his relationship with Rajiv and his future plans. Excerpts:*

Q. *You were very close to Mrs Indira Gandhi. Do you have the same relationship with Rajiv also?*

A. I have good relations with Rajiv also. There is no change in that after he became prime minister.

Q. *Have you met him after he took over as prime minister on December 31?*

A. Earlier I used to go to the prime minister's residence only when I was summoned. I am not like other politicians who hang around there. It is not a yogic character to call on the politicians just for nothing. I will try to meet Rajiv only if something is very urgent and important. At the moment, none of my work is held up for which I need Rajiv's intervention.

Q. *Rajiv has not invited you so far?*

A. Maybe there is no work. Moreover I have been dragged into politics. By not meeting me maybe Rajiv wants to show to the world that I am not involved in any politics.

Q. *People feel you have fallen from grace and Rajiv doesn't like you?*

A. Only those who rise will fall. (*Girta to woh hai, jo chadhta hai.*) I was never on the top. I just loved that family. I have never been part of the throne, so where is the question of my being thrown out?

Q. *You were a regular visitor to the prime minister's house before Mrs Gandhi's death. Didn't Mrs Gandhi try to establish a good relation between you and Rajiv?*

A. Rajiv has been in politics for the last four years. I have met him many times but never discussed politics. But Mrs Gandhi was worried about him. With tears in her eyes she told me a few months before her death, she would be killed and wanted her well-wishers to take care of Rajiv. I assured her that I would give every drop of my blood for Rajiv's safety.

> "It is always a bad habit of the people around the king to launch a tirade against a person who is loved by the ruler."

Q. *What do you think about Rajiv as prime minister? How is he different from his mother?*

A. I have seen Rajiv growing since childhood. He has got qualities. If he runs the administration according to his own judgement and independently, he will be a successful prime minister like his mother. If he is guided by others, he will be doomed.

Q. *Has Rajiv proved to be a good prime minister so far?*

A. He has the support of the people of India. But the people in the party should not be over-confident after winning 400 seats. They should be careful now. A successful ruler should possess all the qualities of *sam* (peace), *dam* (money), *dand* (power) and *bhed* (ability to divide his foes). I am confident Rajiv has all of them.

Q. *Do you think that he is being dominated by others? Why don't you warn him against this?*

A. I can't say anything at the moment because he has not made any move so far. And I am concentrating on my own yoga activities. People will realise the importance of my work and contribution after my death. I can't advise him. You see, it is always a bad habit of the people around the king to launch a tirade against a person who is loved by the ruler.

Q. *If you do not get the same respect and recognition from Rajiv which you were getting earlier, what do you intend to do?*

A. I don't know his mind yet. Whatever I am doing it is for the country. I have no personal interest. If he doesn't like me, I will go back to the mountains and continue to do my yoga there.

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Brahmachari's request for the handing over of land surrounding his Ashok Road ashram for a central yoga research institute.

1983: Brahmachari's informal visits to 1, Safdarjang Road are curbed; he now has to seek prior appointment.

Mid-1983: The Safdarjang aerodrome slaps on a monthly rental of Rs 10,000 for his planes which have so far used the hangars free of cost.

1984: A criminal case is registered against the swami for allegedly assembling imported guns and peddling them in Jammu & Kashmir.

Late 1984: The Government rejects his plea for a 130 per cent income tax exemption on donations to his research projects.

Pushed into a corner both financially and politically, the swami was forced to cut his losses. Out went the prestigious yoga research institute in Jammu, which he had launched with so much fanfare in 1981. For his impressively named Rs 21 crore Department of Physiology at his newly opened Aparna Centre for Scientific Research in Yoga, Brahmachari had intended to sign up a hundred senior scientists and doctors, and import a variety of very sophisticated equipment including computers.

In November 1981, the Union Finance Ministry even granted for a period of seven years, income tax exemptions on donations to the project. With the money that poured in, Brahmachari recruited over a dozen scientists and doctors at handsome salaries, and imported equipment worth over Rs 1 crore. He boasted: "Our centre is the only one in the world doing scientific research on the impact of yoga on the human body. We have developed computerised programmes which can control blood pressure and heart ailments without any medical aid." Indeed, Brahmachari and his associates even had papers published in reputed journals, to their credit.

But all that is gone now. When a controversy blew up over donations by DCM to Brahmachari's institutions, in 1983 the Finance Ministry decided to review the exemption of taxes on donations to the swami's ashrams, among others. Ominously, Brahmachari's annual request for extension of the tax exemption was kept pending. The message was pretty clear to the yogi, who last month began winding up his show. He even sacked 50 of his employees including the scientists. "There's no other option," he said. "If I don't get donations, I can't run my research projects, they're very expensive."

Brahmachari with his plane: grounded

The next to go were his planes: for the past three months, he hasn't flown any of the three he owns, depending instead on the Indian Airlines for his trips to Jammu and elsewhere, like any other mortal. He has sent feelers to friends at home and abroad that he plans to sell off his eight-seater Dornier, originally bought for Sanjay Gandhi. In fact, to meet the "routine expenses" of his ashrams, he has been forced to sell a couple of his large circle of cars. Predictably, his SOS calls to his erstwhile minister friends and proteges are being studiously ignored. The Congress(I) functionary explains why: "His equation with the new leadership is not clear, and all of us are waiting for clear signals."

But Brahmachari, if bloody, is still unbowed. His back-up strategy should see him comfortably off, government patronage or not. His assets are considerable: three aircraft, two private airstrips, three ashrams, one Mercedes, two bungalows and around 775 km of land in Jammu under his direct or indirect control. Ever since the first disturbing signals, the swami has worked at reinforcing his position: since 1982, he has bought over 50 acres of land in Haryana for his Aparna Studios Pvt Ltd along with former MP Yashpal Kapoor, who happens to be one of the directors. Within six months, a huge studio complete with the best facilities and most sophisticated equipment in north India came up there. Officials of the Information & Broadcasting Ministry acknowledge this, and over a hundred episodes of Doordarshan's *Hum Log* have already been filmed there. The charges are right royal too: Rs 20,000 per day.

Buoyed by its success, Brahmachari has launched into film-making himself. He is producing a small budget film on the science of yoga, for which he has signed on a Bombay actor and playback singer Asha Bhosle. The star of course, is the swami himself who sings three songs in the film. Over 40,000 ft of the two-hour film have already been shot at the studios, at the Bharatpur bird sanctuary and other hill stations of north India. The film is expected to be released this June.

Nothing seems to have fazed the swami. "I will continue my yoga teaching and establish the nation's only university devoted to yoga," he vows. "Even if the funds don't come," he says bravely, "I will confine my activities to a very small scale. But the truth will always prevail. I am sure I will receive the financial and moral support from all for the cause which was so dear to prime minister Indira Gandhi," he adds typically. Nevertheless the grounded swami has never faced such rough weather since he first landed in New Delhi in the early '50s.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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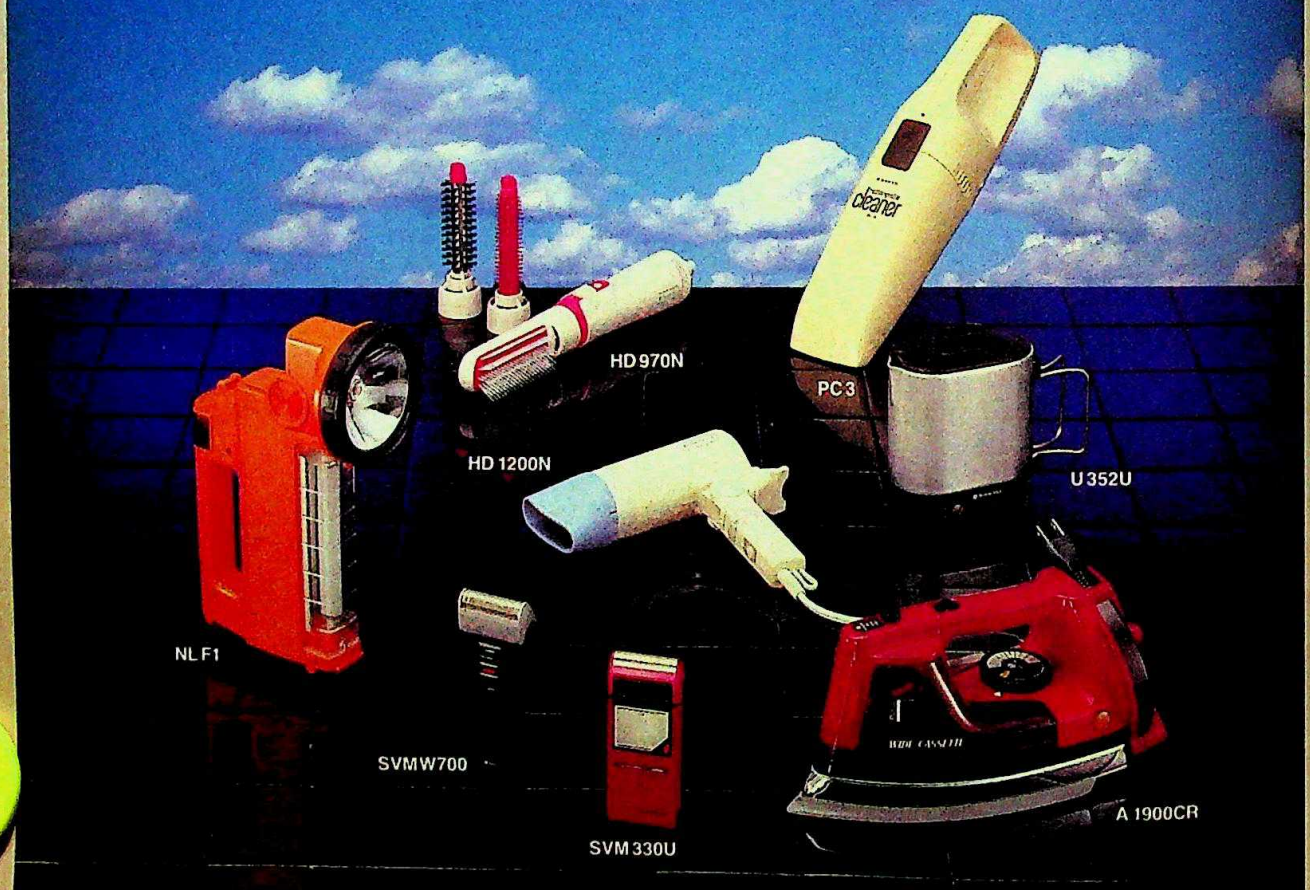

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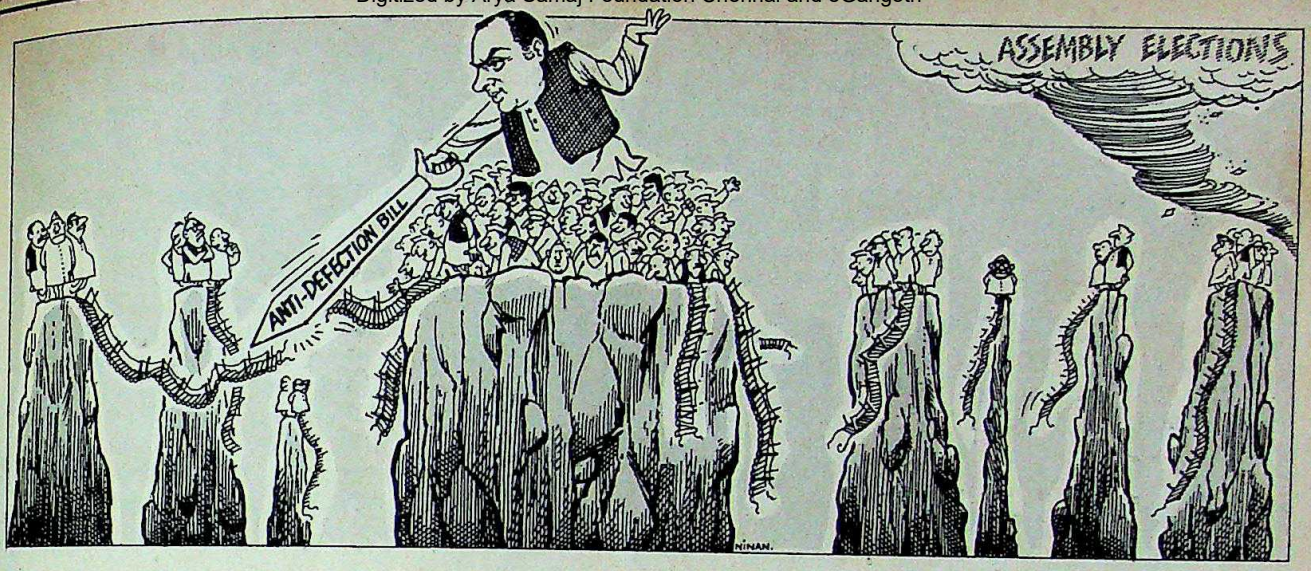

ANTI-DEFECTION BILL

Taming the Turncoats

THE MOTHER had a predilection for sweeping issues under the carpet, and to let them rest there. The son is visibly in a hurry. Mrs Gandhi introduced a constitution amendment bill against defection in May 1973 which hung fire for two years, finally to be overtaken by the Emergency and given a decent burial. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, on the other hand, promised an anti-defection law in his poll campaign last year-end, and, presto, there was such a law within eight weeks.

The 52nd amendment to the Constitution, carried out last fortnight by the two Houses of the Parliament where the ruling Congress(I) enjoys a steamroller majority, is purported to end the era of fickle-mindedness in politics. Personally for Rajiv, nothing could have boosted his clean image more a month before the assembly elections in 11 states of the Union, more so because it is the Congress(I) rather than the Opposition which has unquestionably been the traditional beneficiary of defection. Of the 2,700-odd recorded cases of defection between 1967 and 1983, as many as 1,900 defected into the Congress or the Congress(I); and, of the 15 chief ministers who defected during this period to usurp the lofty chair, at least 10 were Congressmen.

The amendment bill, which was enacted in Parliament despite an opposition walk-out, puts a summary end to 35 years of "legislative anarchism" in Indian politics by making floor-crossing almost impossible. It provides that a member of either Houses of Parliament or state legislature will cease to be a member:

- if he resigns from the party which selected him;
- if he votes, or abstains from voting, in the House "contrary to any direction" issued by the political party to which he belongs; or
- if he has been expelled from such political party "in accordance with the procedure established by the Constitution, rules or regulations" of such party.

"I don't understand why the Opposition is expressing its unhappiness over the bill, because its basic purpose is to cleanse the political life of this country of the dirt accumulated over the years," said Asoke Sen, the 71-year-old law minister who piloted the bill. But the Opposition was quite willing to look the gift horse in the mouth because, according to its leaders, the "expulsion clause" by which a member expelled by his party is simultaneously disqualified from the House, automatically "confers legitimacy on party despotism".

It is not certain why Rajiv insisted on adding this clause even though in his two meetings with the opposition leaders on January 18 and 21 he had agreed to remove this provision from the bill. Sen surmised: "Perhaps the prime minister's opinion was shaped by recent instances of dissidence within the Congress(I) in which partymen having openly revolted against the leadership continued as members of Parliament or state legislatures."

There were of course other such nettling instances of Shyam Sunder Mohapatra and F.M. Khan in the Rajya Sabha, both expelled from the Congress(I) yet continuing as members; and A.R. Antulay and Akbar Ahmed in the state assemblies of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh respectively who had won the elections on Congress(I) tickets to drift away later. Rajiv pointedly referred to Mohapatra in a meeting on the amendment bill at the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) to which Sen was invited.

Till his expulsion from the party last year, Mohapatra, a former general secretary of the All India Congress Committee(I) (AICC-I), had carefully avoided voting in the House against the party whip though his role was openly critical of the leadership outside the House. But the new legislation apparently makes no distinction between members' views and conduct within the House and outside. Said L.K. Advani, general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rajya Sabha member: "This will muffle dissent forever in a party like the Congress(I) where no internal elections are held and there is no inner-party democracy." The last time that party elections were held in the Congress was at the AICC session in 1972, way before the 1978 split which led to the birth of the Congress(I).

Though the opposition leaders do not admit it, the new amendment eliminates their hope of renewed dissidence in the Congress(I) which is often the signal for building up a general anti-Congress(I) movement in the country. At one stroke, therefore, Rajiv had

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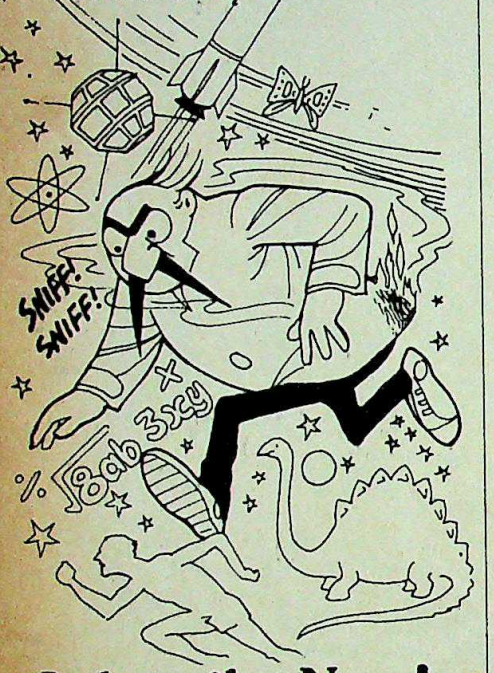

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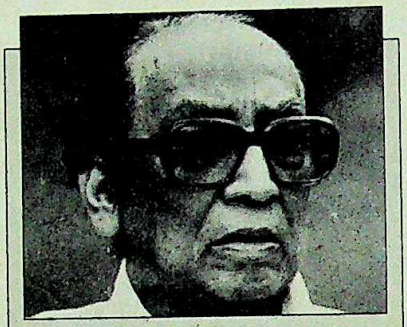
nipped in the bud the possibility of an opposition consolidation in the near future and the danger of dissidence within his party—probably over distribution of tickets for the impending assembly elections. "This is the new government's first step towards totalitarianism," Madhu Dandavate, Lok Sabha member of the Janata Party, dramatically put it.

However, the amendment, which



"I don't understand why the Opposition is unhappy because its (the bill's) basic purpose is to cleanse politics of the dirt accumulated over the years."

ASOKE SEN,
law minister who piloted the bill

involves Articles 102(2) and 191(2) of the Constitution, involving disqualification of members of Parliament and the state legislatures respectively, also adds an altogether new dimension to the concept of party splits. Earlier, splits had occurred in virtually all parties; even the exit of Mrs Gandhi from the Congress in 1969 and 1978 falls within the purview of splits. Last year, the Congress(I) unabashedly lent its support to three breakaway minority governments in Jammu & Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh and Sikkim. The ploy did not work in Andhra Pradesh and Sikkim, but, in the case of Jammu & Kashmir, the defectors' government led by G.M. Shah is still resting on the prop of the 26 Congress(I) MLA's.

But the new amendment lays down that breakaway members will be disqualified if the split involves less than a third of the strength of the party in the House. This part of the amendment deprived the compulsive party-changers of even the cover of leaving *en masse*, because, in the context of the Congress (I)'s present strength of 400 in the Lok Sabha, possible defectors can retain their seats only if they can gather a support of around 133.

Unfortunately, the amendment, as Sen readily pointed out, "is prospective and cannot be retrospective". Had it been so, the 11 MLA's of the National Conference in Jammu & Kashmir who had deserted the 46-member ruling party last year to form the ruling and breakaway National Conference (Khaleda) would have lost their seats, subject to the amendment being applicable to the state which has a special status under Article 370 of the Constitution.

Still, so overwhelming was the appeal of the amendment to the general public that the implicit niceties of the bill were generally ignored and it was welcomed by most. N.T. Rama Rao, the Andhra Pradesh chief minister, who had himself been a victim of Centrally-engineered defection in August last year, was so impressed by the legislation that he ordered his party MP's to vote for the "entire amendment" unreservedly. "Let us hope," he said in a statement, "that this legislation will mark the beginning of a new political culture."

Significantly, the anti-defection law takes immediate effect because the sections of the Constitution it seeks to amend are not on the entrenched list and, therefore, it is not necessary for the bill to be ratified by a two-thirds majority in half the state assemblies. Thus the present composition of Parliament virtually gets frozen in its present state as a result of the amendment. Nor is future regrouping possible in the state assemblies. However, the amendment does not ban mergers of parties and groups.

Before the elections, Rajiv had promised to carry out a total package of electoral reforms which included not only bringing about a law against defection but also delinking elections from money power and patronage. By legislating the bill against defection, Rajiv has shown his preference for redeeming the electoral pledge piecemeal, maybe leaving the task of enforcing a ceiling on election expenses of his own party candidates as well as others for a date later than the assembly elections in March.

The speed with which the anti-defection law has been enforced has brightened his government's image to its admirers and even many of its critics. If only the total package of electoral reforms were carried out, the Government's intention would have appeared to be entirely untainted by motives.

—SUMIT MITRA

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RAIDS

Spring Cleaning

FEW GOVERNMENTS that decide on a crackdown against suspected corruption choose to avoid the glare of favourable publicity. Yet that was precisely what the Government did last fortnight as it began a wide-ranging investigation into a host of bank and business transactions, while simultaneously ordering raids on suspected smugglers and other economic criminals. And it seemed certain that heads would roll very soon, especially in the Government-owned banks.

More than 200 investigators drawn from the Cabinet Secretariat and the Union Ministries of Home and Finance launched a massive but strangely silent campaign to track down both the domestic and overseas links involved in smuggling, espionage, bank frauds and doubtful commercial deals signed by Government agencies since 1980. Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh explained that "sometimes you can't publicise the actions you have already taken because of administrative compulsions," but the real reason was that the Government did not want enquiries into banks to get publicised in a manner that would cast doubts on the banking system itself. Home Minister S.B.Chavan was equally tight-lipped, explaining blandly that the Government is determined to make it clear that corrupt and dishonest people have no place in the new Government.

The official silence, however, only served to give currency to wild rumours about raids being conducted against one prominent businessman or the other, with newspapers publishing reports that hinted at the possible identity of the alleged culprits but without going to the extent of naming them.

Senior officials from the Finance Ministry's Customs Department and Enforcement Directorate were scouring Europe in search of information about the conduits for laundering black money and about people who may have influenced the decision-making process in Delhi. But their real objective was to get a fix on the reasons for the likely loss of a staggering Rs 200 crore advanced as loans by various Indian banks in London to businessmen of Indian origin settled abroad. In addition, reports reaching the Finance Ministry said that over Rs 100 crore may have changed hands as illegal commissions on large contracts involving the import of foodgrain, fertiliser, sugar, petroleum products and defence equipment. The contracts themselves are valued at over Rs 5,000 crore.

With regard to controversial banking transactions, the investigations centred on the loans given by the Punjab National Bank and the Central Bank of India, especially to the Esal group in London, which was declared insolvent by a London court last month.

Finance Ministry officials seized the opportunity to run a new broom through the more than two dozen public sector banks. Finance Minister Singh not only refused to extend the three-year terms of the directors of 12 banks but also issued instructions to his ministry's banking division to refer to him the dossiers on the controversial chairmen of various banks.

Towards the end of last fortnight, a decision was taken to change at least four bank chairmen, with the crucial meeting on the subject being chaired by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself. It was also decided to amend the criminal procedures so that action against recalcitrant officials would be easier. In yet another move to limit the number of people who could influence banking decisions, it was decided to reduce the membership of bank boards from the present 14 to nine.

Meanwhile, R.C.Misra, the tubby chairman of the Central Board of Excise and Customs, unleashed his men on smugglers and organised raids on shops selling smuggled goods. The raids were conducted simultaneously at Delhi's Lajpat Rai market (a free-wheeling wholesale centre for electronics goods of every description) and Calcutta's appropriately named Fancy Bazar. Goods worth more than Rs 1 crore were seized. More than 20 middle-level smugglers were detained across the country.

The commercial world, meanwhile, was agog with excitement and tension as rumours spread that action was being initiated against key businessmen who had been involved in controversial deals. While there was no confirmation possible on who exactly was being investigated, the names that figured on the grapevine invariably mentioned people who were close to the former finance minister, Pranab Mukherjee. The odd man out in this pack was former principal secretary to the prime minister P.C. Alexander's younger brother C. Cherian, who is a prominent Cochin-based shrimp exporter.

Cherian, however, issued a hot denial of any raid having been conducted at his office, and threatened to sue the papers that had reported the 'raid'. Another person to issue a heated denial was the London-based Swraj Paul, who was hinted at in a newspaper report. Said Paul: "This talk of raids on me is a load of rubbish. And there have been no raids that I know of on the offices of my brothers in Calcutta. The Government must investigate the journalists who plant stories like this." That discounted hints by police sources in Calcutta that some action was afoot.

Sources within the Finance Ministry said that over 500 files were being scrutinised for possible leads. These related to permission granted on a host of deals involving technical and financial tie-ups, company take-overs, the use of foreign brand names, suspected tax evasion, and much else. Over a dozen leading industrialists camped in New Delhi for over a week, but none of them got an audience with the new leadership.

What exactly would materialise at the end of the whole exercise remained unclear. But the Government's multi-pronged attack made one thing clear: at least a couple of the new ministers were making a determined bid to try and provide a clean government.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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MAHARASHTRA

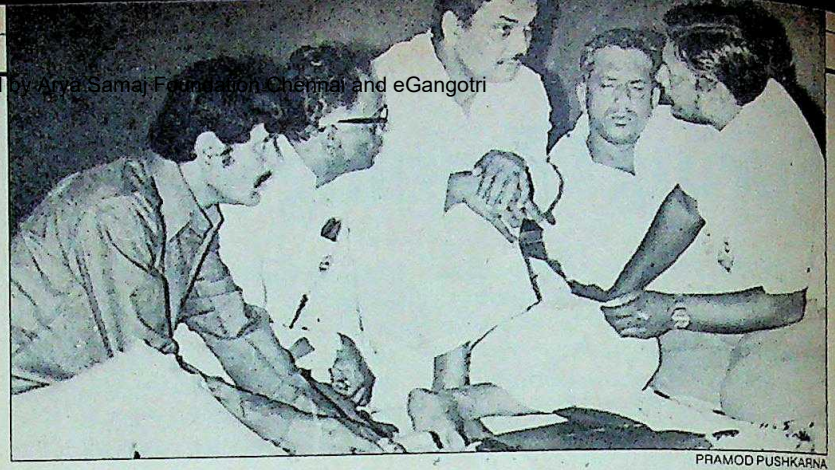
Farmers' Force

THE FARMERS' leader, Sharad Joshi of the Shetkari Sanghatana is back in action. The farmers' convention held last fortnight in Dhule clearly demonstrated his clout, with leaders of all major opposition parties in the state vying with each other to express their support for his cause. They had reason to woo Joshi and his farmers, particularly with the Assembly elections looming close. In the recent parliamentary polls, the Sanghatana had demonstrated its effectiveness in channelising discontent over procurement prices into an anti-Congress(I) campaign. This may not have helped the Opposition win any seats, but even in some Congress(I) strongholds, the fight was so tough that the ruling party could scrape through with narrow margins.

Union Minister Vasant Sathe experienced the Sanghatana effect first hand in his constituency of Wardha central where, after a nervous campaign, he managed to win by 24,000 votes—a steep fall from his 1980 margin of nearly 2 lakh votes. In Washim, Amravati and Nasik, the Opposition actually came close to winning. Congress(I) politicians all over Maharashtra were greeted by Sanghatana boards banning their entry into the villages. The farmers' most effective weapon was the *gaa bandhi*, which stopped Congressmen and debt collectors from visiting the villages without prior permission.

Congress(I) candidate from Amravati, Usha Chaudhary was treated to another Sanghatana tactic: heckling. The farmers raised embarrassing questions about what the candidate's stand had been on farmers' issues during parliamentary debates. Chaudhary snapped: "Am I supposed to carry my parliamentary papers with me to recall what happened during long-ago debates?"

That is why the Dhule convention was of such crucial political importance, and the opposition parties so keen to woo the farmers. Joshi ultimately announced that the Sanghatana would support the Opposition, but only on the condition that they unite under a common manifesto, leader, programme and symbol. In a considerably chastened mood, the opposition parties in the state seem prepared for the first three pre-conditions, even accepting Sharad Pawar of the Congress(S) as their leader. It is only the last one that might prove difficult. "The sharing of a common symbol may present technical difficulties but this time we are very hopeful of complete accord in other matters," says Prakash Javadekar, general secretary of the BJP's youth wing.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Sharad Joshi (centre): show of strength

An important issue at the convention—the third since the Sanghatana was founded in 1978—was the question of the involvement of its members, many of whom belong to the Congress(I), in the assembly elections. Joshi had in fact invited representatives of all political parties to the convention, to state their attitude towards farmers. But many of the farmers themselves were keen to keep to the path of struggle and not get involved in the elections. As a farmer from Parbhani noted, "the choice is between the farmers' struggle and supporting the capitalistic parties. Let the farmers go their own way." Joshi, who gave up a UN job with the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva to become a farmer admitted: "If you leave the path of struggle and go for electioneering, you can get caught in manoeuvring and deviate from the main purpose." Nevertheless, the Sanghatana ultimately decided to get involved, although as Joshi remarked, the Congress(I) was "enemy number one", and the Opposition "enemy number two".

Significantly, the Sanghatana, which has been branded as an organisation of big farmers, had included representatives from the radical left and champions of landless labourers at the Dhule rally. Kumar Shiralkar, leader of the Dhule landless tribals, Sharad Patil, leader of the Dhule breakaway CPI(M) and Swami Agnivesh of Haryana, who has been the champion of bonded labourers were present at the convention. In fact in March a workshop of leaders of mass movements is being held by the Sanghatana near Pune.

Joshi was much in the news in 1979, 1980 and 1981 when the farmers agitated for higher prices for onions, sugarcane and milk. Since then, however, the Sanghatana has kept a low profile but Joshi refutes the theory that nothing substantial has been achieved. He points out that there is a new awakening amongst farmers, and farmers' representatives from 11 states were present at the convention. Calling for an hour-long road-blocking agitation all over the state in early February, Joshi said: "You can't say we have achieved nothing. There is a time and place to fight." Last week the Sanghatana challenged the Maharashtra Government's removal of thousands of its *gaa bandhi* boards in the Bombay High Court.

Calling for the replacement of the Agricultural Prices Commission by an agricultural costs commission, Joshi said that while the new prime minister should be given a chance, the stepmotherly attitude to the farmers would have to end.

The only party which failed to turn up at the convention was the Congress(I). On the other hand, not only did Chief Minister Patil rebuff the Sanghatana, the police actually prevented some 4,000 farmers from attending the convention. As many as 250 tractors and trucks were halted under the pretext that the vehicles shouldn't carry people without a proper licence. The indignant delegates retorted that the next time the Congress(I) held a meeting for the prime minister, they would help the police enforce the same rules. "Despite the Government's harassment, they can't stop the awakening of the farmers," says Ram Chandra Babu Patil, president of the Dhule convention. He may be right. The parliamentary elections certainly proved that the farmers' vote was a force to be reckoned with.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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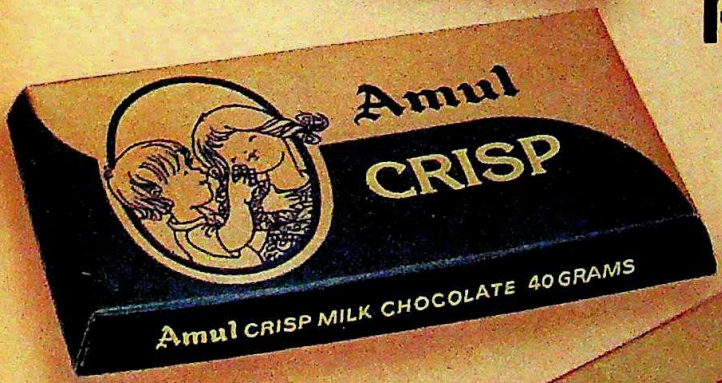

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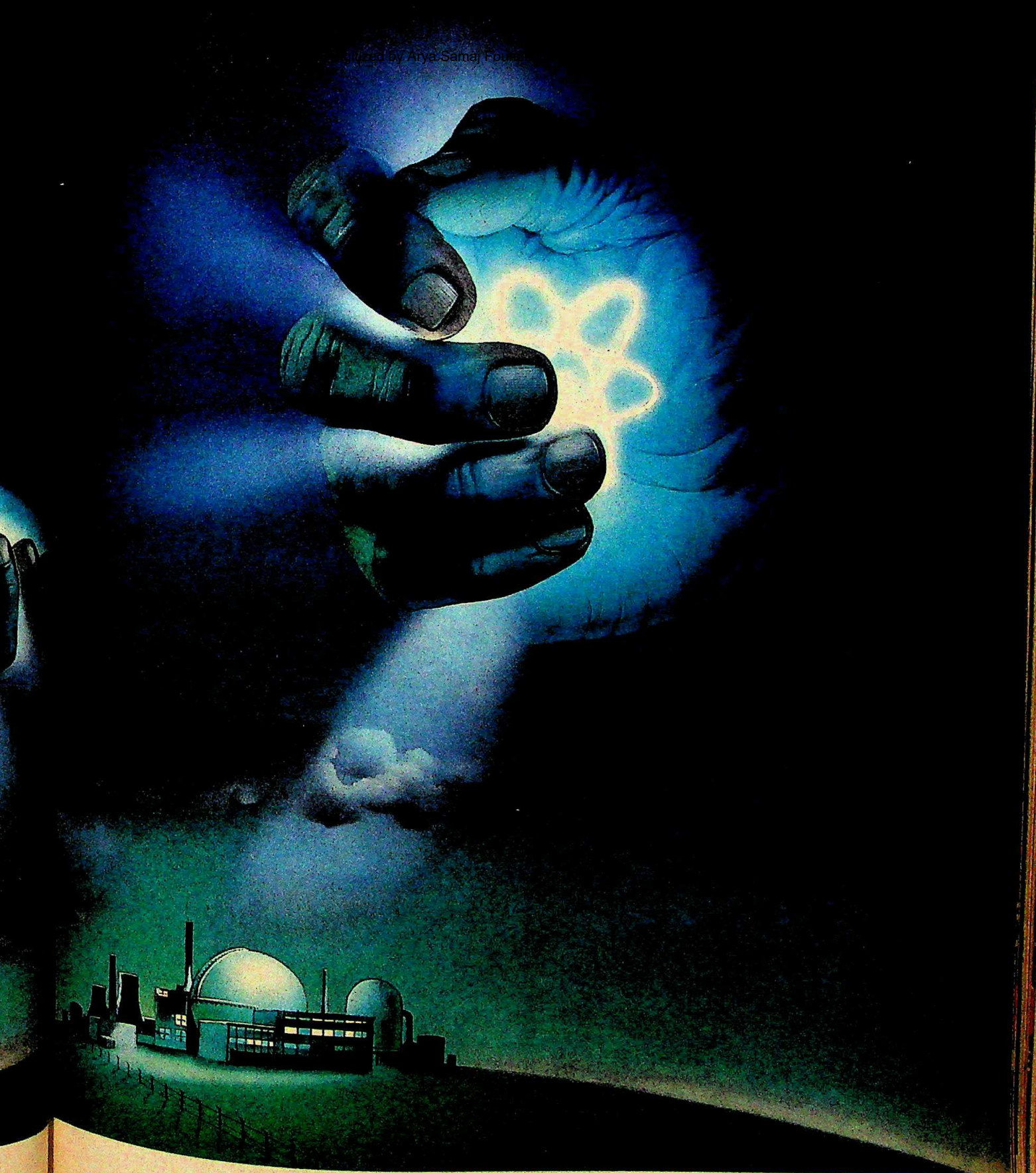

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MEGHALAYA

The Jowai Jumble

THE CONGRESS(I) Government of Meghalaya is currently busy covering up the last traces of its culpability in the state Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department's multi-crore rupee scandal that had set the North-east buzzing with shock and incredulity last June. Although the state Government is yet to make all the details public, this scandal is reported to have involved over Rs 13 crore and the two ministers who had been looking after the PHE department. The inquiry committee set up by the Government amidst much publicity last year to identify the culprits, finally submitted its report to the state Cabinet last fortnight but significantly gave a clean chit to the two ministers. On the other hand, the report predictably nailed several PHE officials, some of whom are expected to be eventually convicted.

Opposition leader Kyndiah

Opposition leaders point out that the committee has chosen not to probe beneath the superficial facts of the case or the specific role of the two ministers.

The report only confirms the worst suspicions of the state's opposition leaders, who point out that the committee has obviously chosen not to probe beneath the superficial facts of the case or the specific role of the two ministers. "The ruling party refused to allow a high-powered independent commission to probe the case and instead chose a serving bureaucrat to prepare an official report," says B.B. Lyngdoh, a leader of the Opposition and former chief minister. Indeed, the terms of reference of the inquiry committee, headed by the Managing Director of the Meghalaya Government Construction Corporation, N. Rymjah, did not specifically require a probe into the role of the two ministers, despite Chief Minister Captain William Sangma's assurance that he would not shield anybody found guilty in the affair, even if they were ministers.

Ministers Ksih (left) and Marak

In fact, so devilishly simple was the case that it hardly required a special enquiry to pin down the principal culprit, R.B. Giri, a lowly executive engineer in the PHE department's Jowai division. Against a total allocation of Rs 40 lakh for the purchase of materials during the financial year 1983-84, Giri had placed orders for materials worth Rs 13.27 crore and had managed to pay the contractors Rs 4.63 crore before he was restrained. The executive engineer had clearly overstepped his bounds, because normally, an executive engineer cannot make payments beyond Rs 20,000 per month without prior sanction from the department.

What is mind-boggling is the absence of any checks and the fact that the amount paid out is not insignificant considering that the department's entire capital budget for the year was a little less than Rs 10 crore, while the state's annual plan size was about Rs 64 crore. The Chief Public Health Engineer, P. Arunachalam must have known what was happening from the monthly accounts reaching him, but strangely he took no action.

"I was kept in the dark about what was happening," claims Salseng Marak, the former PHE minister, "and when I came to know, I ordered stoppage of payment and further purchase of materials immediately." But there is irrefutable evidence to prove that Marak had come to know of what was happening at Jowai by mid-December. While preparing a reply to an innocuous assembly question on the expenditure incurred for the purchase of material by each of the PHE department's divisions since the beginning of the financial year, the department's new Secretary, D. Das, had been alarmed to discover that the executive engineer had already placed orders worth Rs 2.64 crore.

This had been brought to Marak's notice on December 14 whereas his order to restrain the executive engineer at Jowai was passed only on January 10 1984 (No.M/PHE/6/83/130). In the meantime, state funds had been continuously flowing out of Jowai. The secretary's desperate wireless message (No. PHE 177/83/PT/24) to the manager of the United Bank of India, Jowai, urging the immediate suspension of "further payments of all bills sent by the PHE officers at Jowai except bills meant for pay and allowances," was mysteriously ignored. The secretary subsequently dashed to Jowai but could neither find the offending engineer nor any details of how much money had already been paid.

Finally, Secretary Das wrote to the minister suggesting it would "be befitting to institute an inquiry commission headed by an eminent retired engineer not below the rank of chief engineer and an efficient retired financial advisor and also a member of the Finance Department or a senior officer from the office of the accountant-general, Meghalaya". Marak acquiesced to this suggestion on February 6 and forwarded the file to the minister of state, Nihon Ksih, for his "views". Ksih ignored the file and did not give his approval for an inquiry until he was called by Marak and forced to comply on March 30, 1984.

Investigations later revealed that in mid-December and January'84, Giri had placed an additional Rs 10.6 crore worth of supply orders. Similarly the bulk of the money was actually paid out during the period between November 9, 1983 to January 2, 1984. The total payment

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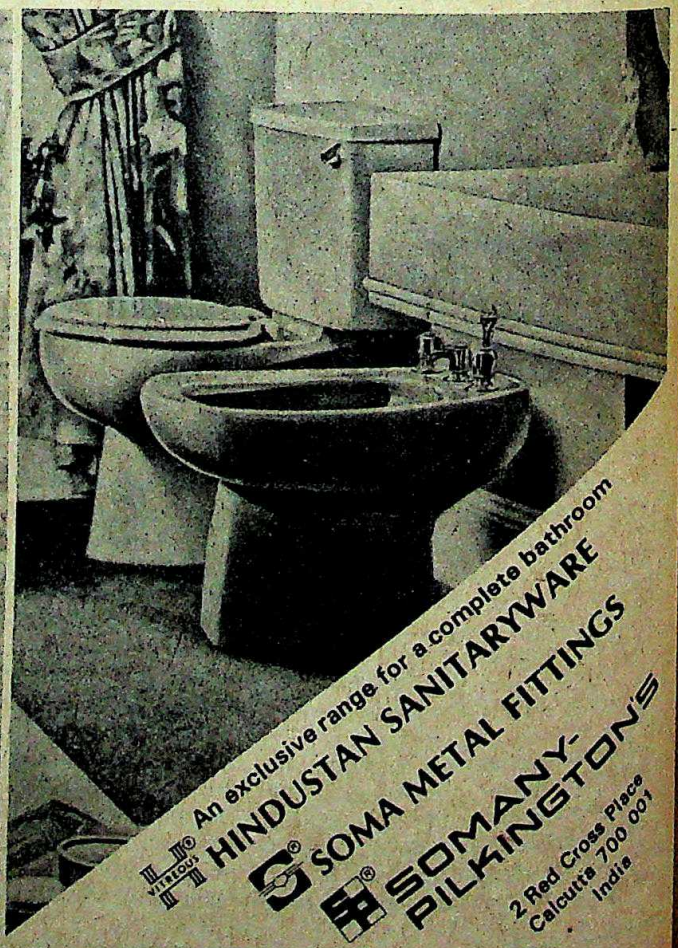

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made by the executive engineer was Rs 2.94 crore. Ultimately at least Rs 4.63 crore was paid, but the state Government has not divulged its loss yet.

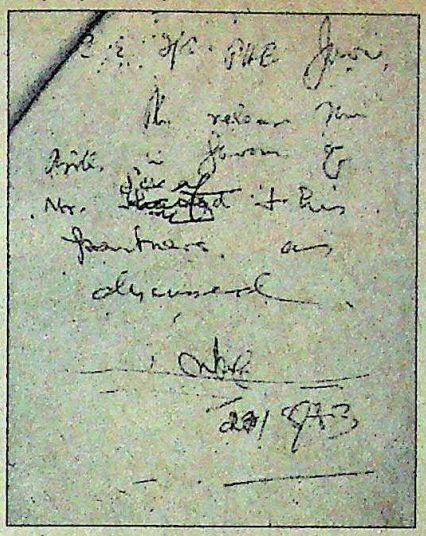
Marak not only blames Ksih for the undue delay in approving the inquiry but also feels that the minister for state "should have taken steps at the earliest opportunity in this matter since he was in charge of the Jowai division". Marak also does not deny that Ksih was well acquainted with Executive Engineer Giri.

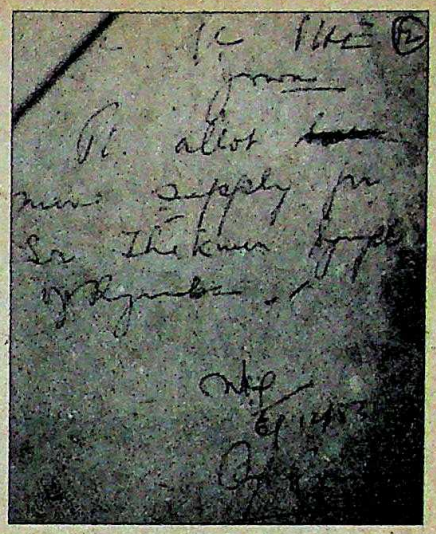
Nihon Ksih was elected from the Rymbai assembly constituency, the headquarters of which is Jowai, on an independent ticket and was inducted into the Congress(I) ministry reportedly because of his "influence". "Ksih was responsible for all administrative matters and Giri's appointment as the officiating executive engineer," says Marak. Having started his career as a member of road maintenance gangs, Giri, an under-matriculate, was promoted to the rank of an overseer. Subsequently, he was promoted in quick succession and made executive engineer in August 1983. Giri held three BDO posts while he was executive engineer, Jowai.

It was common knowledge in official circles that engineers could take advantage of the prevailing administrative system to spend far beyond their authority, but despite this, policy makers in the PHE department did nothing to plug the loopholes by introducing a letter of credit system as adopted by the Assam administration. "There was something wrong with the system," says Marak in retrospect, while opposition legislator P.R. Kyndiah feels "the system was deliberately kept open for misuse".

It was only after the scandal leaked out, with the Gauhati-based daily, *The Sentinel*, publishing exposes and the Opposition creating a furore in the Assembly last year, that the Government introduced the letter of credit system which allows the drawal of monies up to the sanctioned limit. In the absence of this system all that Giri had to do was issue supply orders to "friendly contractors", get the store-in-charge to certify the delivery of supplies and then write out a cheque. "Under this system, it was not even necessary for the supplier to actually supply the material," adds a bureaucrat.

The involvement of the PHE department's minister for state is suggested by a number of informal slips he had written to Giri. One of the slips seized shows that Ksih instructed Giri to issue supply orders to two particular contractors,





The controversial memos from Ksih to Giri: incriminating evidence

with a footnote stating that all the bills should be "kept pending as discussed". In another slip, Ksih writes: "Please release this bill in favour of... as discussed." Curiously, Ksih has not denied writing these slips, nor has the inquiry committee read anything particularly unusual in them.

WHAT the inquiry committee has established is the worthlessness of much of the material supplies. "Most of the stuff can't even be sold as scrap," comments a bureaucrat. On the other hand, the contractors can compel the state Government to pay up the money still owed to them, which is over Rs 8 crore, since they have legal proof of actually having delivered the goods. But a majority of the contractors have shown no inclination to go to court. "They have made enough money and courts will mean only further complications and investigations," explains a senior police official. The lucky contractors went on a spending spree last year and one of them even bought a Mercedes Benz that the police unfortunately seized.

The tragic part is that Jowai town still does not have the drinking water facilities supposed to have been provided by the PHE department. And the Jowai affair is hardly an isolated occurrence. Currently, another inquiry committee is investigating an identical case in the department's Tura division involving Rs 3 crore. In Williamnagar division too, the PHE department executive engineer has been alleged to be guilty of gross overspending. To top it all, the department actually had an identified surplus stock of materials worth about Rs 2 crore at the beginning of the 1983-84 financial year.

Ever since the formation of the state in 1972, the Centre has been pumping in ever higher doses of financial assistance for development programmes. The state survives on Central assistance, which has been more than doubling every five years. In the Fifth Plan the state's plan size was Rs 135 crore and in the Sixth Plan it was allocated Rs 265 crore, while its next plan is expected to be around Rs 570 crore. Meghalaya desperately needs development and in this context, says Kyndiah, condoning ministers responsible for shocking wastage of funds "is not becoming of a government committed to a clean and efficient administration" He adds: "The amount involved in the Jowai scandal is frightening, considering that Meghalaya, with a population of just about 14 lakh has an annual revenue of just Rs 16 crore".

Though the chief minister did appoint a commission of inquiry and ordered the arrest of Giri and two of his colleagues—who were subsequently released on bail—he steadfastly refused to drop the two ministers on the grounds that he would not "succumb to political pressure". Neither did he agree to an inquiry by the CBI. Instead, Marak was taken out of the PHE department and placed in charge of food and civil supplies while Nihon Ksih was given subordinate charge of forests and independent charge of stamps and registration. The PHE portfolio is currently being looked after by the chief minister himself. From the Government's point of view, the submission of the Rymjah Committee Report is the final denouement in the Jowai affair.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Shillong

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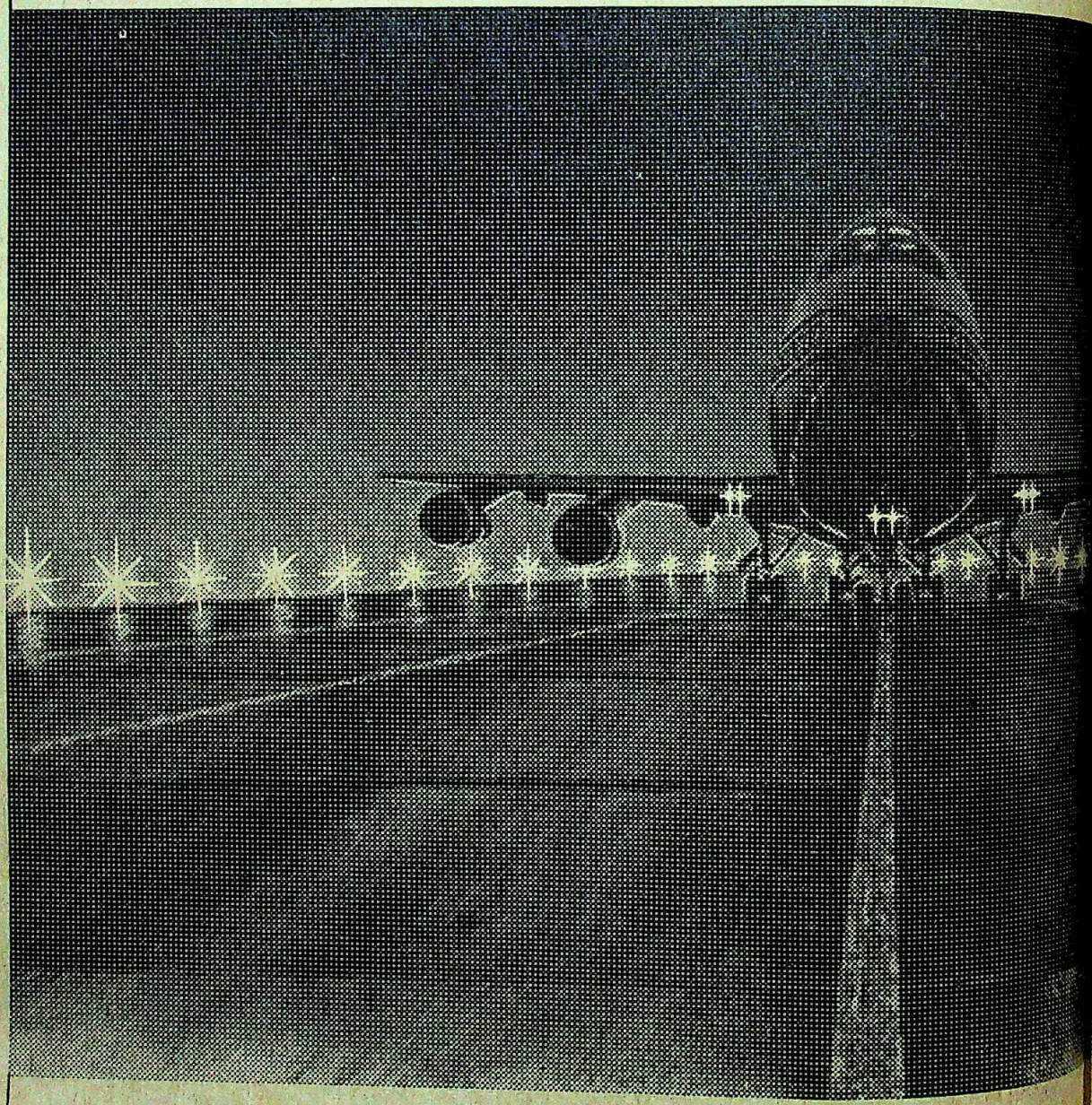

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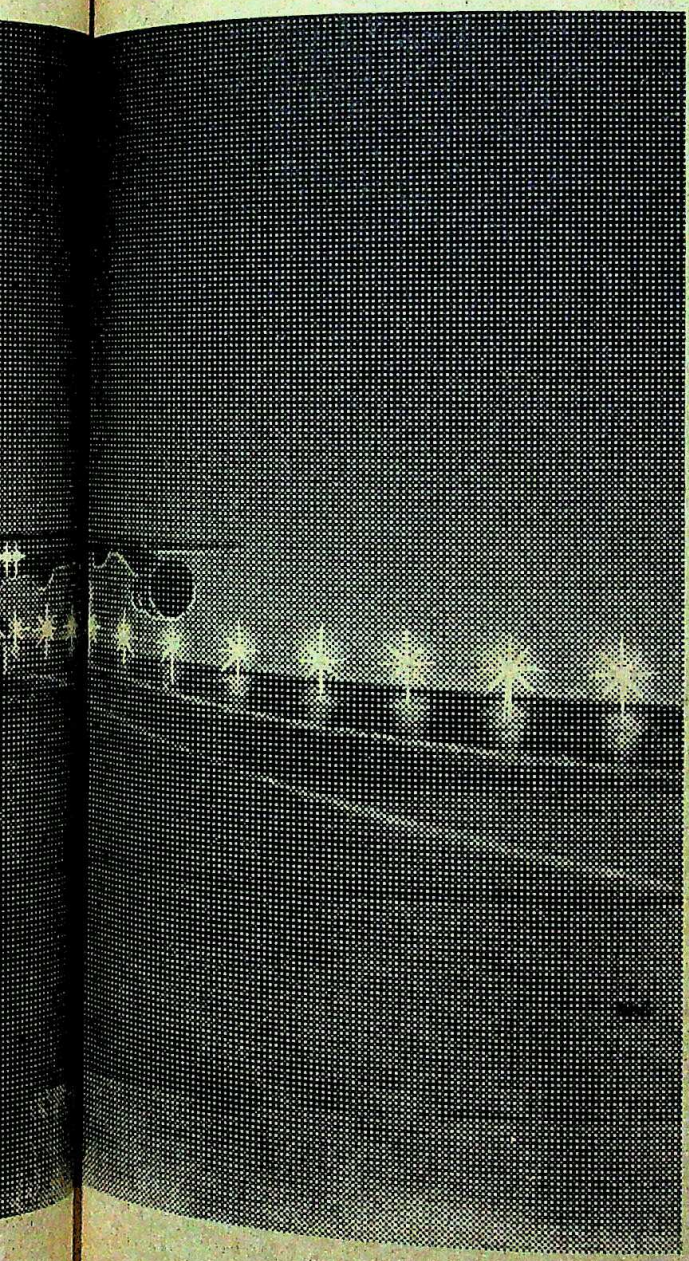

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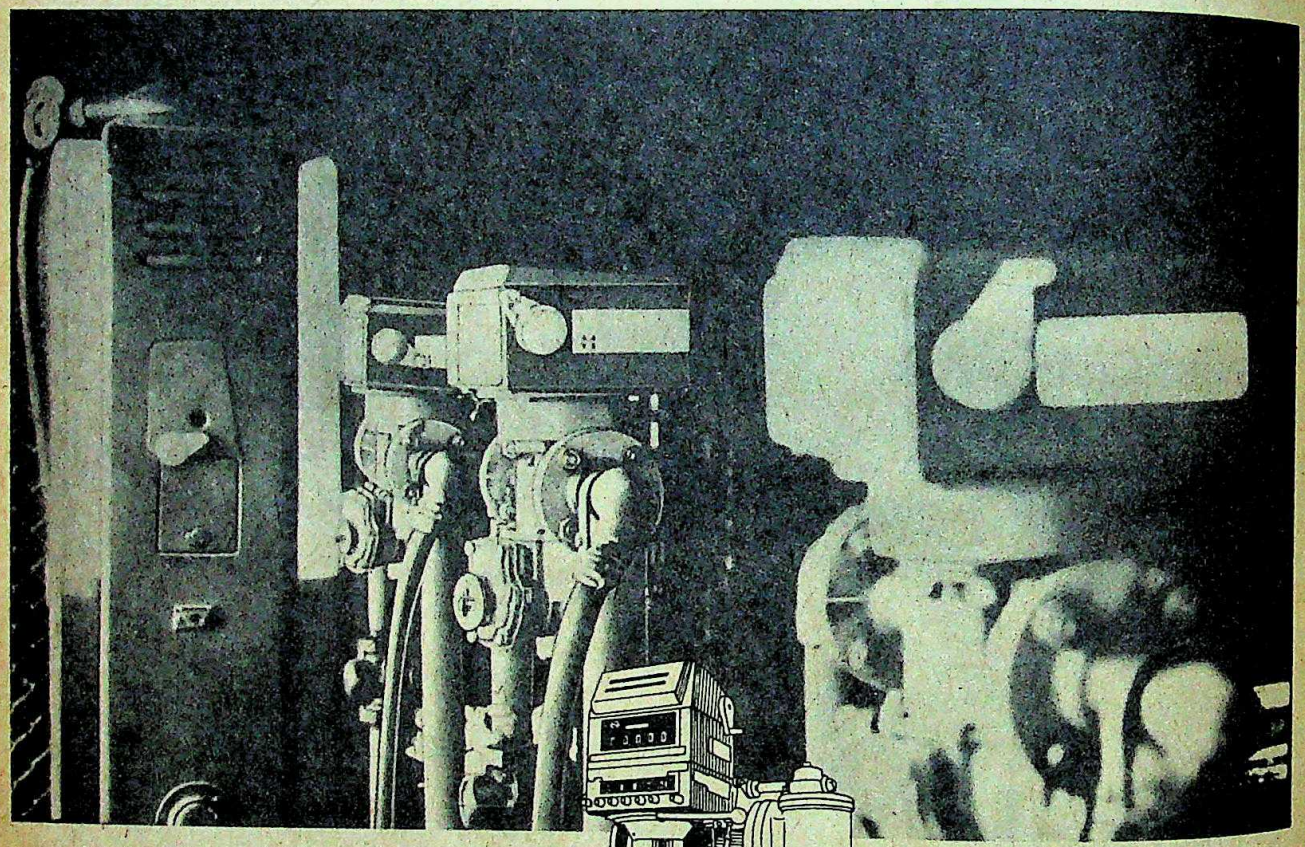

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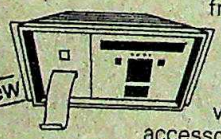

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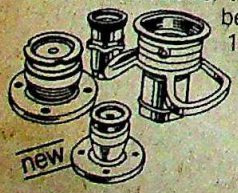

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MANIPUR

Peace Factor

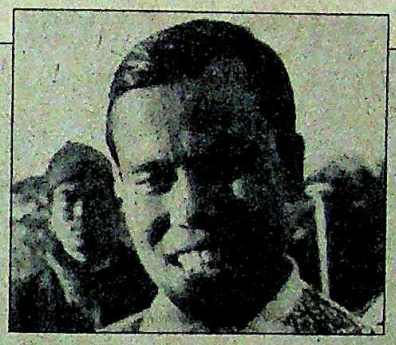
SITTING in a room jammed with people, a cream shawl draped around him, intelligent eyes flashing as he talks softly, Nameirakpam Bisheswar Singh looks more like a Gandhian student leader than a one-time chief of the revolutionary People's Liberation Army (PLA), the terror and legend of the north-eastern valley of Manipur. Three-and-a-half years of imprisonment have left Bisheswar a sick man: his hands tremble continuously and his jaw twists tortuously as he speaks. "For the last few years the shackles prevented me from sitting or lying down properly," he says quietly. His kidneys are damaged and asthma attacks convulse him daily. Yet this sick man elected to the Manipur Assembly while still in jail and subsequently released on bail on January 11, promises to become a major factor in the state's politics in the near future.

Flushed with new-found freedom, the former revolutionary is yet to fix his political bearings. "Right now I am not in a position to make any political statement," Bisheswar told INDIA TODAY five days after his release. There are a number of thorny questions about his recent decisions that Bisheswar will have to clarify to supporters now that he has turned from armed struggle to parliamentary politics.

Popular support for Bisheswar is undeniably overwhelming. The day he was declared elected from the Thongju constituency, thousands took to the streets and went in procession to Imphal jail demanding his release. All the same, Bisheswar, a believer in Marxism, wonders whether this support is "individual or ideological". If popular support for him stems from his legendary past, Bisheswar is going to find his politics an uphill task.

On the other hand, the question uppermost in the minds of Congress(I) leaders, army and intelligence officials, is whether Bisheswar's apostasy will succeed in bringing an end to insurgency in Meitei. Admitting that Bisheswar "should become an important person in state politics" Chief Minister Rishang Keishing emphasises that this will only be possible if the former PLA chief "utilises his present position properly".

The security forces do not, however, presume that peace depends solely on Bisheswar. The unknown factor in the current equation is the present chief of the PLA, Temba Singh, and his followers camping in the jungles of northern Burma, ostensibly still undergoing training. Army intelligence believes that Bisheswar and Temba are not exactly the best of friends. The former is reported to have opposed Temba's marriage with a non-Meitei tribal girl called Mary in 1981 and subsequently banished him from their group. Nothing was heard of Temba till April 1982 when



Bisheswar is a pivotal factor in the attempts to bring about permanent peace in Manipur.

he took over the leadership of the PLA from Mani Kanta Singh. By this time, Bisheswar had been captured by the army in an encounter at Tekcham in July 1981 and his successor, Kunja Behari, had been subsequently killed. Temba secured control of the PLA since he was the only remaining Ogha or Guru as the Lhasha trained PLA members are called. The other Oghas had either been killed or captured.

As it is, Meitei insurgency has been at a low ebb for the past one year, the last incident being a shoot-out between the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the PLA in April 1983. The army's success in containing insurgency in the state's valley area has lent credibility to the Keishing Government. And now the latest feather in Keishing's hat is Bisheswar joining the mainstream. Asked whether Bisheswar had ever expressed a desire to join the Congress(I), Keishing told INDIA TODAY: "About a year ago he wrote to me that he would first contest as an independent and then join the Congress(I) Party when elected." Bisheswar, however, disclaims knowledge of any such letter.

Keishing's rivals in his ministry, especially those who had aspired for chief ministership, have begun making friendly overtures to Bisheswar in a bid to rope him in with their plans of destabilising Keishing. The five former Congress(I) MLA's (out of the 13 expelled from the party on the eve of the elections), who have been elected as independents this time are another factor the dissidents are hoping to use against Keishing. Irengbam Tompok Singh, the former deputy chief minister given the education portfolio in the latest ministry, met the former PLA chief and is reported to have suggested they work together to eradicate corruption.

But Keishing remains unperturbed: "The Congress organisation as a whole today is determined to enforce discipline within the party, and the prevailing conditions do not warrant any such adventure from party members." Knowing this Tompok Singh and a couple of other contenders for chief ministership have not expressed dissension publicly.

Keishing's next major task is to further the isolation of the insurgent National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) that operates in the northern hills of Manipur. By launching a programme to enrol several thousand Naga tribals in the Congress(I) and forming Congress(I) units in scores of villages, Keishing is in the process of creating a "nationalist force to counter the anti-national activities of the NSCN extremists".

Bisheswar is thus a pivotal factor in the attempts to bring about permanent peace in Manipur. Although he contested the elections with the objective of bringing peace and removing corruption from the state, the successes of his aims are fraught with many uncertainties, not the least of which are the three court cases pending against him.

Moreover, Bisheswar still has enemies, especially the former members of the Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM). O. Sudhir, RGM leader, had relinquished arms and had been rehabilitated by the state Government in 1978 only to be killed by his former disciple Bisheswar Singh's gang. This is perhaps why the former PLA chief continues to be surrounded by armed guards who frisk every visitor. The Government also cannot afford to lose Bisheswar at this juncture, for without him the end of insurgency in Manipur will once again become a distant hope.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Critical Clash

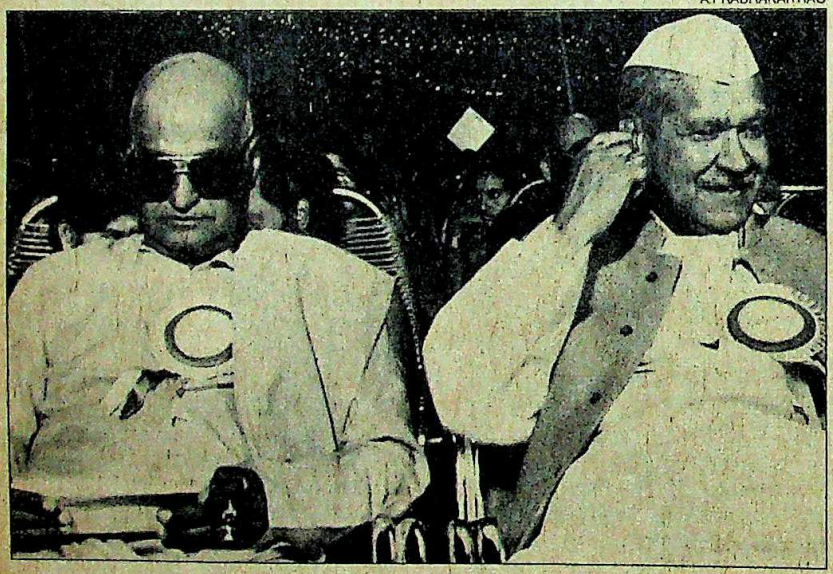
WHEN the 67-year-old Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma replaced the controversial Ram Lal as the governor of Andhra Pradesh, on August 28 last year, he was described as a cool man on a hot seat. However, it didn't take long for him to change. Last fortnight, when Sharma declined to give a fresh lease of life to three ordinances, it not only soured relations between him and Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao but is beginning to precipitate a constitutional crisis over the role of a governor.

Exactly a month after Rama Rao wrote to Sharma urging that the three ordinances be re issued, the governor sent in a terse 21-sentence reply stating that the Constitution permits only limited legislative powers to the governor and that an ordinance has to be ratified by the legislature within a specified period; political parties, high courts and the Supreme Court had criticised the repromulgation of ordinances as a violation of the Constitution and reissue of ordinances would be a gross constitutional impropriety as these were earlier repromulgated a number of times.

The three ordinances which have lapsed relate to the abolition of the posts of part-time village officers, district formations, and the payment of salaries and removal of disqualifications. Significantly, a fourth ordinance promulgated during the Bhaskara Rao regime raising the age of retirement from 55 to 58 was repromulgated by Sharma on the specious plea that it came up for reissue for the first time. The other three have been reissued four times each.

The ordinance on the abolition of posts of village officers is most important for Rama Rao as it was first issued to sack the 37,597 village officers like munsiffs, patels and patwaris whom he described as "hereditary vestiges of feudal rule and source of tyranny of simple villagers". But the planned change in village administration could not be made as the bill to replace the ordinance was referred to a joint select committee of the legislature and its report was not ready when the Assembly was dissolved on November 22 last year. The plan to recruit a regular cadre of village assistants in their place had also begun. But the stalemate is leading to administrative problems and litigation with some of the former part-time village officers taking the issue to the high court.

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



Rama Rao with Governor Sharma: conflicting positions

In his latest letter to Sharma, Rama Rao pointed out that there are no fetters on the legislative power of the governor under Article 213 of the Constitution. He sent notes drafted by the Law Secretary D.J. Jagannatha Raju and Advocate General K.C. Reddy as replies to the points raised by Sharma. In their explanation the legal experts contended:

- the powers of the governor to legislate under Article 213 are coextensive with legislative powers (R.K. Garg vs Union of India, Supreme Court, 1981);
- the Constitution only stipulates that an ordinance is to be replaced by an act of legislature;
- the courts cannot go into the question of reasons for repromulgation of an ordinance (Mathura Prasad vs State of Bihar, Patna High Court, 1975. That verdict stated it is not for the court to declare an ordinance as ultra vires on the score of rule of successive ordinances. It is for the legislature to disapprove on the rule by successive ordinances or for the electorate at the next poll); and
- none of the ordinances has been finally rejected by the state legislature so there is no bar or impropriety in repromulgating them. The governor did not consult the law officers on this issue.

Sharma who has impressive educational credentials including a doctoral degree in constitutional law from the Cambridge University, a stint at Harvard School of Law, and Lincoln's Inn, however, remained unconvinced. Said a peeved Rama Rao: "I am not for confrontation but I want to work for the service of my people." Meanwhile, the chief minister described the governor as the "puppet of the Centre" while talking to journalists on the ordinance controversy.

The governor, however, told INDIA TODAY: "As the constitutional head of the state and as one who has sworn allegiance to the Constitution I will be guided by it in making my decisions." Yet, the delay in replying to Rama Rao without categorically stating that he refused to repromulgate the ordinances and not calling the state's legal experts raised doubts about Sharma's role. Legal opinion has been overwhelmingly in favour of the reissue of the ordinances as it did not involve new policies of a caretaker ministry and legislation had already been brought forward by the Telugu Desam Ministry. Said one leading lawyer: "Even the caretaker Charan Singh ministry could issue seven ordinances including a new penal law against blackmarketeers. It is the Congress(I) that has perpetuated ordinance raj and is indulging in filibuster tactics in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council."

By the end of the fortnight, the caretaker cabinet had more surprises in store. The governor as chancellor was dealing with universities directly without consulting the Education Ministry. With the ordinance factor also destined to become a major issue in the coming assembly elections the conflict between the chief minister and the governor is rapidly coming to a head.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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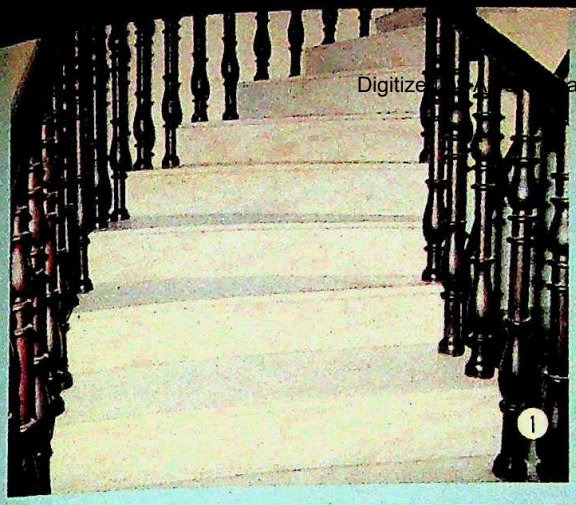

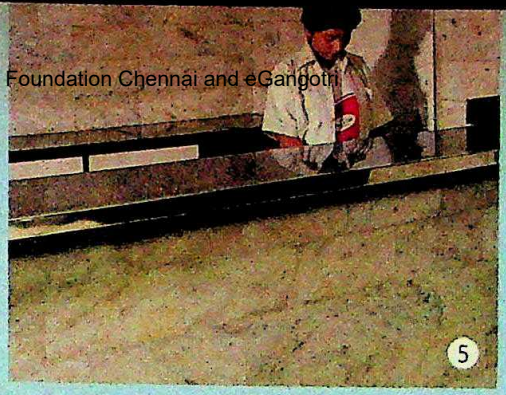

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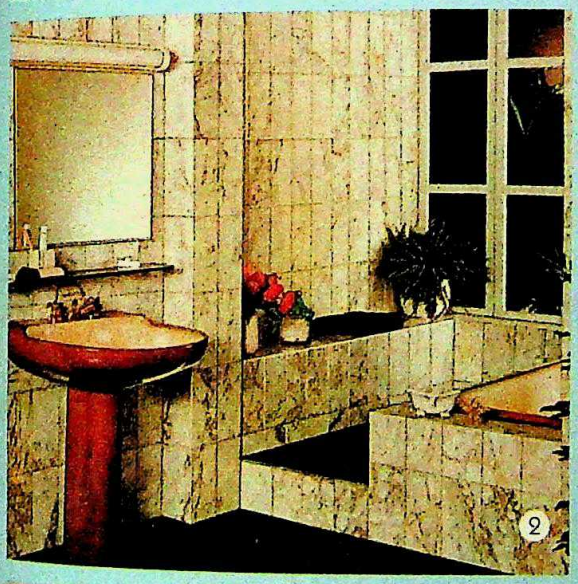

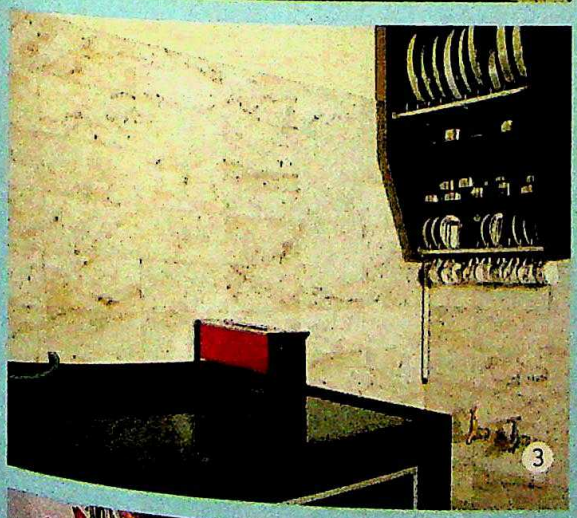

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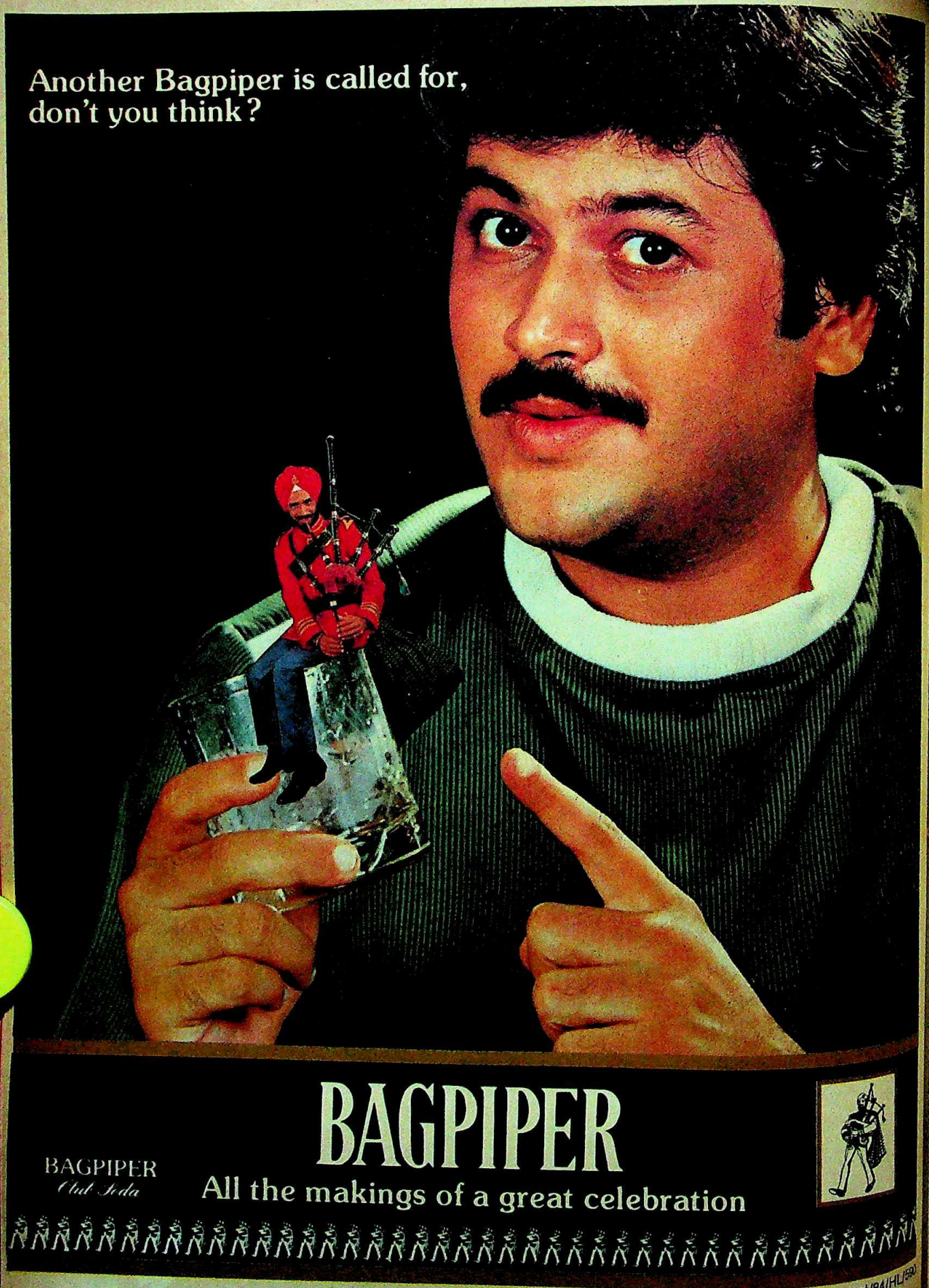

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PUNJAB

Hesitant Steps

PRIORITIES by themselves do not solve problems. This became increasingly clear last fortnight when the Punjab problem, accorded the highest priority by the new Government, became entangled in a web of confusing attitudes and political rhetoric. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi declared himself against a step-by-step treatment of the outstanding issues and wanted an all-or-nothing package. If that seemed to indicate that he would take a tough line on the issue, Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal dragged a large red herring across the north-western sector of the country by talking of a reunification of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh—an impractical proposition that nevertheless drew a surprising degree of support from Congressmen.

The Congress(I) also kept up its verbal barrage on what had once been a side issue, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. And the Akalis themselves talked in a confusing babble of voices. Meanwhile, the three members of the ministerial committee on Punjab had their attention diverted by the parliamentary session. Finally, the elections to state assemblies were announced, and this would almost certainly keep the Government busy for the next few weeks. Unless a dramatic breakthrough suddenly materialised, it seemed likely that Punjab would stay on the back-burner till the middle of March.

Nevertheless, some initial forays were being made discreetly. Home Minister S.B.Chavan, who is a member of the three-man committee, disclosed that "Some mediators from both sides have established contact with each other and have been meeting me and other government leaders. The modalities are being worked out to initiate official moves." The mediators mentioned by Chavan are believed to be some non-political Sikhs trusted by both the Government and the Akalis. INDIA TODAY learnt that one such mediator had met two of the detained Akali leaders: Atma Singh, senior vice-president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), and Jagdev Singh Talwandi, leader of the Akali Dal's hardline faction named after him. Atma Singh is recuperating under police guard in Amritsar after a double cornea transplant, and Talwandi is in Ambala jail.

The mediators also spoke to the second-string Akali leaders officiating for the party's jailed supremos, including the Dal ad hoc committee's convenor, Surjan Singh Thekedar, the acting SGPC chief Prem Singh Lalpura, the five head priests and former Punjab finance minister Balwant Singh. The mediators are believed to have handed in written reports to the cabinet committee on their discussions with the Akali leaders.

Rao

Chavan

Pant

The three members of the ministerial committee on Punjab had their attention diverted by the parliamentary session, and it seemed likely that Punjab would stay on the back-burner till after the assembly elections.

On his part, the head priest of the Akal Takht, Jathedar Kirpal Singh, told the mediators that the Khalistan demand was not an Akali creation but that this was being forced on them by the "intransigence of the Government in reaching a settlement". Atma Singh echoed this when he said, "The longer an overall political settlement is delayed, the greater will be the danger of hard core elements assuming pre-eminence in the voice of the Sikh community."

If any evidence of this were needed, it was provided last fortnight by the attack on Kirpal Singh a few days after he talked to the mediators. The Government itself was alive to the dangers involved. R.V.Subramaniam, senior adviser to the Punjab governor, said that such attacks, even if infrequent and far apart, could shatter the peace of the Punjab countryside. And with Subramaniam estimating that between 500 and 600 terrorists are still "unaccounted for" after Operation Bluestar, such attacks can be expected as long as Punjab remains in a twilight zone of army-imposed peace.

One way of defusing the tension suggested by the mediators is to release Akali leaders against whom there are no serious charges. This would include Akali Dal supremo Harchand Singh Longowal, leading politicians like Prakash Singh Badal and Surjit Singh Barnala, and Atma Singh and Talwandi as well.

Apart from this, a number of other points were suggested by Akali leaders whose views were obtained, either directly or through the intermediaries. These included:

- ▶ punishing those guilty for the violence in November 1984;
- ▶ delinking Chandigarh from Fazilka and granting it to Punjab;
- ▶ releasing the thousands of youngsters detained in Punjab if there are no specific charges against them;
- ▶ granting amnesty to those youngsters who have gone across to Pakistan in fear of arrest, if there are no criminal charges against them;
- ▶ referring the Anandpur Sahib Resolution to the Sarkaria Commission, or a tribunal.

Subramaniam agreed indirectly with the need to release some of the Akali leaders, for he said, "they are the only ones who can talk on behalf of the party. Those outside are not in a position to take any definite stance." But on several other issues, it was not clear whether the gulf between the Akalis and the Government was wide or narrow. For instance, the Government has clearly stated that it would like the Akali leaders to speak up against violence and extremism. In fact, some of the Akali leaders contacted said that they had never supported the idea of Khalistan and that they were prepared to issue a statement to this effect and also con-

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demn the role of violence in politics—provided the Government released the Akali leaders and negotiated with them. But on several other issues—like the call for punishing those guilty of the November riots—there seemed little likelihood of the Government obliging.

Among the Akalis, meanwhile, there were signs of impatience. Balwant Singh complained that "the three-man committee has done nothing in three weeks, it has not even written to the convenor of the Akali ad hoc committee." And he felt the Government was not keen on finding a solution to the Punjab problem before the assembly elections.

Meanwhile, there was renewed squabbling within the Punjab Congress(I). The relatively hardline faction led by Darbara Singh reacted quickly to the information that Swaran Singh and Raghunandan Lal Bhatia were trying to mend their fences with the Akalis, convened a meeting of the Pradesh Congress(I) Committee and said the conciliatory moves amounted to offending Mrs Gandhi's policy of keeping the Akalis at a distance. The Swaran Singh move was scuttled. Some of Rajiv Gandhi's own hardened stance on Punjab is believed to originate from the influence of Darbara Singh.

Kripal Singh

There were plenty of differences within the Akali camp too with Rajinder Kaur, daughter of Tara Singh and president of the Istri Akali Dal, being expelled from the party. Rajinder Kaur evidently prefers the soft line vis-a-vis the Government, and had been criticising some of the Akali leaders in her magazine *Sant Sipahi*. Differences also surfaced over the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. At a press conference in

DELHI RIOTS

Legal Battle

LIFE HAD been going rather well for 37-year-old Shivcharan Singh. Part-owner of a printing press in Bombay, he often travelled to Delhi to be with his wife Harpreet Kaur, daughter Vimi, 7 and son Vikky, 4. When not busy at the press, he helped an amateur theatrical group stage plays. So it was to be just another trip to Delhi when the expectant Shivcharan boarded the Janata Express in Bombay on October 31 with a dozen colleagues from a theatre group.

The theatre group made it to Delhi, but Vimi and Vikky never saw their father again. Shivcharan's journey came to a fiery end beside the track at the Tughlakabad railway station near Delhi where he was dragged out of the sleeper coach by a bloodthirsty mob, beaten senseless and then set on fire while still half-alive. Soon he was just another number on the list of 2,717 Sikhs killed in Delhi and elsewhere following Mrs Gandhi's assassination.

But Harpreet Kaur was not willing to write off her husband as just another statistic. She and her children have started legal proceedings seeking Rs 6 lakh in damages and compensation from the Government for the inability of its employees to protect Shivcharan from the mob at Tughlakabad station. Her lawyers, K.T.S. Tulsi and D.S. Narula, have served notice on the home secretary, the lt-governor of Delhi and the general manager of the Northern Railway to pay the damages or face a suit in the high court. This is the first suit filed on behalf of Sikh victims of the post-assassination violence by lawyers Tulsi and Narula. Several more now are under preparation.

When it comes to court in February, this case could become a trend-setter in torts litigation in India, especially if the court upholds the plea that the Government is liable to pay damages for the misdeeds of its employees. Harpreet's lawyers argue that the Government is liable, and challenge the concept of "sovereign immunity" enjoyed by government servants against being held responsible for the consequences of actions taken by them in the performance of their duty. In the notice, Harpreet has charged that the Delhi police and railway staff "instead of protecting the life and property of the passengers...dragged and handed Shivcharan over to the mob."

HARI OM GULATI

Harpreet Kaur with her son Vikky

Harpreet was told by non-Sikh colleagues travelling with her husband that upon seeing the mob, Shivcharan had locked himself up in the toilet of the coach. But railway staff travelling in the coach pointed out his hiding place to the mob and even helped them drag him out. Uniformed policemen apparently on duty at the station "deliberately acquiesced in the commission of the crime". It was only ten days later, Harpreet says, that she learned of Shivcharan's death when her brother-in-law identified a photograph of the charred body.

Tulsi and Narula argue that Article 21 of the Constitution, which grants every citizen a fundamental right to life and personal liberty, imposes on government officials like the home secretary and the lt-governor a statutory duty to "effectively look after the life and property and safety" of citizens, especially minorities. "The state must be held liable to repair the damage done by the acts, neglect and defaults of its officers, servants and agents", the notice said.

The lawyers claim that the passivity, connivance and encouragement of the police and railway staff at Tughlakabad station resulted in the infringement of Shivcharan's right to life. "This cannot be corrected by any other method except to award exemplary damages." But assessing the monetary value of a person's life is always a difficult task. In this case the amount was calculated on the basis of Shivcharan's salary and a life expectancy of 75 years. Even assuming that he earned the same amount all his life and spent half of it on himself, his death has deprived his family of Rs 4.56 lakh. "Loss of love and affection," is calculated at Rs 1.44 lakh, making for a total of Rs 6 lakh.

The most significant precedent for

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Chandigarh last fortnight, Thekedar and Lalpura quoted the 1973 version of the resolution, while Balwant Singh mentioned the watered down version drafted in 1978, and authenticated by Longowal. This only calls for autonomy for the states. But there was little doubt that the resolution would be a major stumbling-block. Rajiv Gandhi said he finds "some parts" of the resolution secessionist. The reference that most Congressmen object to is the description of the Sikhs as a "qaum", which in Urdu and Punjabi means community but which, translated into English, can take on the meaning of a nation. The other is the demand that there should be a dominance of the Khalsa in Punjab. This has been objected to as being against the secular spirit of the Constitution. Minister of State for Law, H.R. Bhardwaj, told INDIA TODAY quite firmly: "The copy of the resolution that I received is secessionist. When a community claims to be a separate nation, it is secessionist." In saying that, he appeared to unfairly lump the whole Sikh community with the resolution and brand it secessionist.

The eminent soldier, Lt-general Jagjit Singh Aurora, said the branding of Sikhs as separatist started when Rajiv Gandhi started "misconstruing and twisting" the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in search of political gain. "If the prime minister talks like this, how can the Akali leaders feel confident that the Government will change its attitude towards them?" Aurora asked.

The soldier also felt that the Government should expect the Akali leaders to let off steam once they were released, but that it should not get unduly perturbed by this. Finally, Aurora argued, the Government should unilaterally concede the Akali demands and ease up on the army clampdown on the state, so that a semblance of normalcy could return. He felt this would take the wind out of the Akali sails. "The people of Punjab will accept this and the leaders will have to lump it," he explained."

But there was no indication last fortnight that the Government was in a mood to accept these suggestions. And Rajiv Gandhi's comments suggested that he was not as yet satisfied with the Akali leaders' stand on the outstanding issues. The simple fact that stood out of the attitudes of the Government and the Akali Dal was that each expected the other to modify its stance before any progress at all could be recorded.

What stood out equally clearly was the fact that the initial hopes of a quick solution to the problem had already faded, that attitudes were getting hardened in some cases, that the numerous knotty issues involved would take a long time to get untangled, and that the Government had so far managed no more than a very hesitant first step: the starting of talks through intermediaries. If a solution is to be found within a reasonable time frame, the pace of activity will have to pick up quickly.

In the meantime, it would be wise to keep in mind Harvard sociologist Karl Deusch's warning—however grim—that the last resort of the frustrated is terrorism.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

claiming compensation is the Supreme Court judgement in 1983 in the case of Rudel Sah versus the State of Bihar. Sah, a poor villager, was kept in jail for 14 years even after he was acquitted of charges by a Mirzapur sessions court in 1968. The Supreme Court held that Sah's right to personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution had been violated. "One of the telling ways in which violation of that right can reasonably be prevented... is to mulct its violators in the payment of monetary compensation. The right of compensation is some palliative for the unlawful acts of instrumentalities act in the name of the public interest and which present for their protection the powers of the state as a shield," the court ruled.

While welcoming the Government declaration that everything possible would be done to compensate the victims of the November violence, lawyer Tulsi has suggested that compensation commissioners, empowered to grant full compensation without having to prove who caused the loss, be appointed in every city effected by the violence. Tulsi warned that the courts may not be able to handle all cases with due despatch "considering the magnitude of the riots and the imperfect law on the point". Recourse to the courts has been encouraged by National Sikh Forum Convenor Lt-general J.S. Aurora (Retd) as, he says, "the Government's record so far does not inspire confidence in the minds of the Sikhs." The guilty had to be punished, he said, and if the Government would not do it, the affected people must move the courts. That is exactly what Harpreet Kaur is doing and the outcome could create judicial history.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

TAMIL NADU

Letter Bombs

IT WORE an air of weary inevitability. With Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran still recuperating in Brooklyn, USA and a shroud of secrecy and confusion cloaking the actual state of his health, his ruling AIADMK back home was heading for a serious split in its ranks. The first overt signs came with the sudden and surprising removal of his confidante, former actress Jayalalitha from her post of deputy leader of the parliamentary party last fortnight. An outraged Jayalalitha immediately hit back at the "gang of four"—Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, party General Secretary, P.U. Shanmugam, R.M. Veerappan, state information minister and V.N. Janaki, MGR's wife whom Jayalalitha calls "the lady in New York who is the de facto chief minister", for having usurped the party in MGR's name and for taking advantage of his medical condition (*see interview*).

Certainly, the manner of her removal was intriguing enough. It was done supposedly at MGR's behest in a letter sent through a friend (Shanmugam refused to disclose who the 'friend' was) even though latest medical reports indicate that the chief minister is still in no condition to write or dictate letters. Nedunchezhiyan who met the chief minister in the US reported merely that "he is in full possession of his faculties and is also able to utter monosyllables".

Jayalalitha herself was firmly convinced that the letter was a fraud. "I was elected to the post only eight months ago and normally such posts are supposed to be for a full term of six years. Then why have I been suddenly removed? I am convinced that this letter is bogus. They are producing letters and telexes like rabbits from a magician's hat. I wish to meet MGR face to face and ask him what crime I have committed," she stormed.

But Jayalalitha's removal was not the only sign of a party power struggle. Nedunchezhiyan, who had gone to Brooklyn with Chief Secretary K. Chockalingam to discuss the question of formation of the state Government with MGR, returned on January 13 and handed over to Governor S.L. Khurana a mysterious sealed letter. Allegedly signed by the chief minister, the letter cryptically recommended that S. Thirunavukkarasu, a

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known Jayalalitha supporter, be stripped of the portfolio of excise, handlooms and textiles and be allotted the nutritious noon meals scheme portfolio instead. His earlier functions, the letter supposedly stated, would be handed over to Nedunchezhiyan.

The move smacked of byzantine intrigue. Thirunavukkarasu is the leader of the youth wing of the party and one who has always enjoyed the reputation of being trusted by MGR. In fact, when former commercial taxes minister S.D. Somasundaram was sacked from the party last year, his prestigious portfolio was given over to Thirunavukkarasu. Equally intriguing was the fact that there was hardly any need for a change of portfolios when the new government is to be formed in barely three weeks time. Further, Thirunavukkarasu was not even holding the excise portfolio mentioned in the letter and a puzzled Khurana

MGR's wife Janaki (right) and Nedunchezhiyan

had to seek clarification from MGR before taking action on the letter. Neither was there any mention of the commercial taxes portfolio. An embarrassed Nedunchezhiyan reportedly told Khurana that the chief minister had forgotten to mention the commercial taxes portfolio. A ruffled Thirunavukkarasu stated: "I doubt if the chief minister applied his mind to the matter. I am questioning whether the chief minister's decision was an independent one or an influenced one. I am going to New York personally to satisfy myself that the decision was his own." Two days before his scheduled departure, a telex message arrived from MGR which stated: "Heard that you plan to visit New York to visit me. You may please wait till my arrival in Madras by the end of the month." Meanwhile, the finance minister produced Xerox copies of the controversial letter to journalists two days later with the angry retort: "This is only to convince you that the letter was from MGR himself. You can ask the chief minister himself when he comes back."

However intriguing the flurry of mail and messages between New York and Madras, it was becoming patently clear that former MGR favourites were falling from grace. Over 100 party workers owing allegiance to the Jayalalitha-Thirunavukkarasu faction were removed

JAYALALITHA

"Let's wait for MGR's return"

Jayalalitha Jayaram, 36, the former AIADMK *propaganda secretary and high-profile Rajya Sabha* MP, *considered to be the political heiress of MGR, was a damsel in distress last fortnight. Insult was added to injury when she was stripped of her post as deputy leader of the* AIADMK *parliamentary party after having been very unceremoniously turned out of Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi on the midnight of December 31. She was even asked to get out of the party by Agriculture Minister K. Kalimuthu. Putting on a brave and pleasant face in the midst of this political storm, Jayalalitha spoke to* INDIA TODAY'S S.H. VENKATRAMANI, *sitting in her bungalow in Madras.*

On her reactions to the steps taken by the AIADMK against her:

I had made a appeal that I should be allowed to meet MGR. And that has not been allowed. Even a person accused of murder is heard before a judgement is pronounced on him. I should have been given the chance to meet MGR. After all I have not committed a crime, I have only sacrificed a lot and worked very hard for the party.

You will remember that when the party General Secretary P.U. Shanmugam was questioned why I had been stripped of my post as deputy leader of the AIADMK Parliamentary Party, he could not give any reason. He could only say that the party had received instructions from MGR sent through a friend. Who was this friend there was no clue.

I fail to understand where is the sudden need or hurry to change the parliamentary office-bearers of the party. The previous office-bearers were all there for six years, for a full term.

Some people have this impression that I have come out openly because I was divested of my post. Of course, I did have my suspicions when I was thrown out of the Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi. But the post of a deputy leader of a parliamentary party is not such a significant post or a very important post. My being stripped of that post is not the reason for my speaking out. I had my suspicions all along. But it is these people, my enemies in the party, who, in a hurry, have let the cat out of the bag. They were so impatient to harass me, to remove me from all the posts I held.

The real reason I have spoken out now is that I feared that they (the coterie—Information Minister R.M. Veerappan, Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, P.U. Shanmugam and MGR's wife V.N. Janaki) may even expel me from the party before MGR returns, and if I am expelled from the party, I can't even demand to see MGR, even after he returns.

Jayalalitha Jayaram: suspicions about the "gang of four"

On whether the party would have taken the steps it has against her if MGR was in possession of his mental faculties:

Certainly not, and my eyes were opened to this on the night of December 31 when I was turned out of Tamil Nadu House. Unless these people were absolutely sure that MGR is not going to regain his mental faculties they wouldn't have done all that they have to me.

Now I don't question their right to issue an order, but why should they not have informed me? I could have at least made some alternative arrangements. Not that I am not able to attend to my parliamentary work because I don't have permanent accommodation in Delhi. My parliamentary papers are all still in the suite. That was my official address recorded in the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, and a lot of letters and invitations have come there. And I am not even aware of them.

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Veerappan (left) and Shanmugam: intriguing manoeuvres

from the party by Shanmugam and an average of 15 more were being expelled every day. The director-general of police, K. Mohandas, the intelligence chief and a close confidant of MGR's was abruptly transferred to an innocuous post. Another director-general of police, K. Radhakrishnan who had been personally selected by MGR was shifted to the post of director of vigilance.

With the battle lines clearly drawn, other party leaders and state ministers have been forced to make their alignments known. Electricity Minister S. Ramachandran and Education Minister C. Aranganayakam are ranged with the Jayalalitha camp while Industry Minister C. Ponnaiyan and Agriculture Minister K. Kalimuthu clearly identify with Nedunchezhiyan and Veerappan.

But the return of the chief minister may not quite provide the healing touch the party needs. Veerappan has already announced that the date of the swearing-in will only be decided after MGR has returned "and rested". In which case, Jayalalitha's fears that the coterie will rule the roost even after MGR's return may well prove true, with party leaders denied access to the chief minister.

By last fortnight, the political climate remained in a state of flux. Even Governor Khurana admitted to INDIA TODAY that "it is a very difficult situation and the choice before me seems limited. The leader of the majority party is unable to assume office immediately and nobody else seems to command a sufficient following". In the event of MGR being unable to return to active political life, it is obvious that the split in the party will be formalised. Which faction emerges with greater support in the Assembly is difficult to say but at the moment Jayalalitha is certain to have the backing of the Congress(I), judging by the detailed discussions she and Thirunavukkarasu had with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi recently. If that eventuality does take place, the Congress(I) could find itself in a position to call the political shots in the state on the strength of its 61 newly elected members. But till then, the future of Tamil Nadu is obviously being decided in a Brooklyn hospital room. The key question is — by whom?

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

This was premeditated harassment. Why did they keep silent for five months if I was to be deprived of my permanent suite? Does all this not indicate the mean depths to which the coterie could descend to hound and insult me?

On her plans now that the coterie is out to get her:

Until I was turned out of Tamil Nadu House, I had some hope. If MGR was really fully conscious and alert, then these people would not have had the audacity to do this. They are doing everything in MGR's name. If MGR is recovering fast and is soon going to assume office, would these people not be afraid that I will complain to him and he will question them, and if he is not mentally alert, then isn't it cruel that these people are keeping him prisoner?

If you see the arrangements they have now made to welcome MGR on his return. Apart from Nedunchezhiyan, and the chief secretary and a couple of senior police officials, nobody else is going to be allowed to go near him. One can understand the general public not being allowed to go near MGR. But why should cabinet ministers also not be allowed? After all, there are only 21 other ministers besides MGR and Nedunchezhiyan. Nedunchezhiyan has dug the last nail in the coffin. He has said that MGR will appear before the public before being taken to his residence. Are they going to exhibit him as a show-piece from a distance? And is it not clear that they did not want the earlier deputy general of police DGP K. Radhakrishnan to get a close view of MGR, and that is why they have transferred him as director of vigilance? If he had continued to be the DGP, as the chief of the police force, he must have had to be allowed into the airport.

You are doubting if I will be allowed to meet MGR even after he comes back, because the stranglehold on him appears to be complete, but then we can't be too sure till then. Let us see. If they don't allow me to see him even after his return, will that not confirm everybody's suspicions?

Her reaction to the public campaign against her in the party:

MGR was very happy with my party work. When I offered my resignation as propaganda secretary because former minister S.D. Somasundaram had complained about me, I acted on MGR's own instructions. He dictated the resignation letter to me on phone, and told me I would be reinstated soon and that he would be accepting the resignation only for political reasons. If his acceptance of the resignation was serious, then would the vacancy not have been filled up immediately?

On the two days that the general council meeting of the party was held on September 1 and 2, 1984, speaker after speaker urged that MGR should not accept my resignation, and 99 per cent of those present gave signed letters that my resignation should not be accepted. MGR collected these letters. He was very happy that I had captured the hearts of the partymen. Then on October 2, Gandhiji's birthday, MGR had assured ministers K.A. Krishnaswamy and K.S.R. Ramachandran that I would be reappointed propaganda secretary within a few days. But then he had to get sadly hospitalised before that. So the claim that MGR had criticised me at the general council is all false.

On her strength and popularity in the party:

Veerappan has no support in the party. That is why I am saying that there is no split in the party. About the legislature, it will be premature now to talk in terms of a trial of strength.

The Congress(I) is not involved in this at all. We have an independent majority. Even the bulk of the AIADMK members are not responsible for this. It is only two or three people who are holding the party and the state to ransom by virtue of their technical position. They are tarnishing the name of the AIADMK and MGR. And if I am fighting now, it is for MGR.

On whether the bluff will be called after MGR's return:

You see this coterie is going the whole hog. They are now expelling a lot of loyal members from the party. And the expulsion orders are being issued on the General Secretary P.U. Shanmugam's name. But then the governor already knows what is happening. And it is for him to act. So let us wait for MGR's return. Let us see what happens after that.

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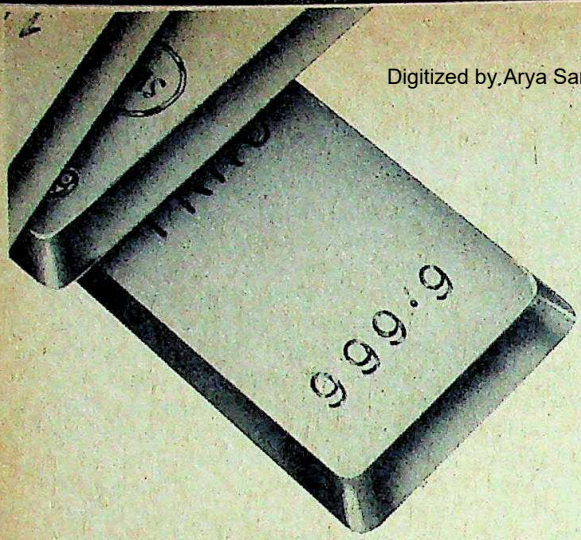

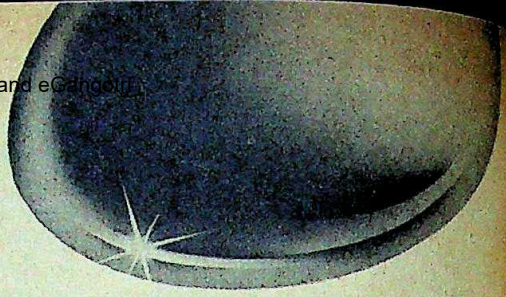

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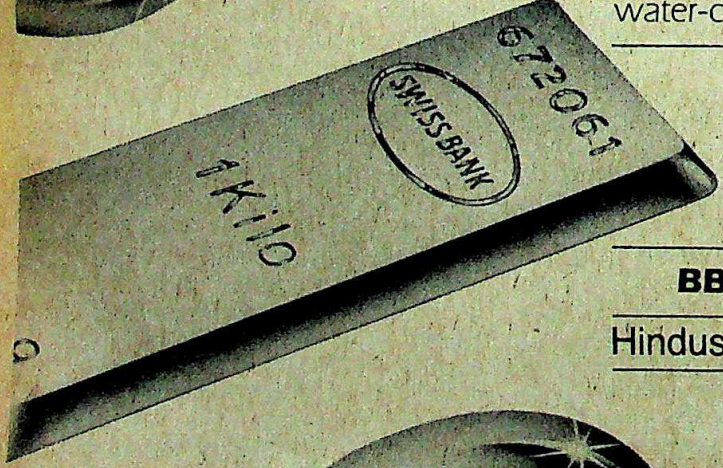

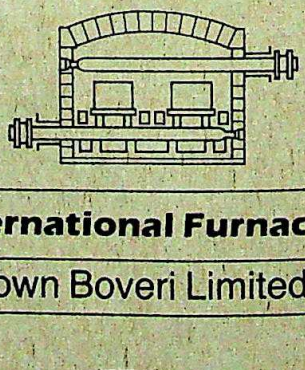

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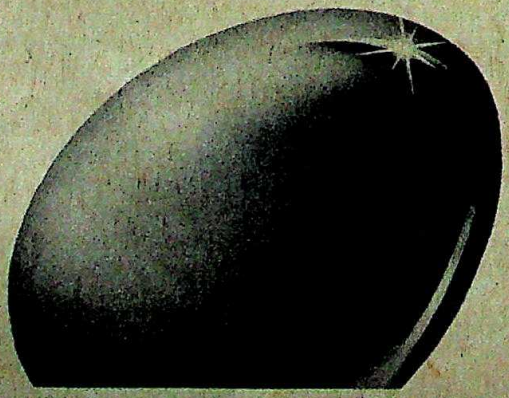

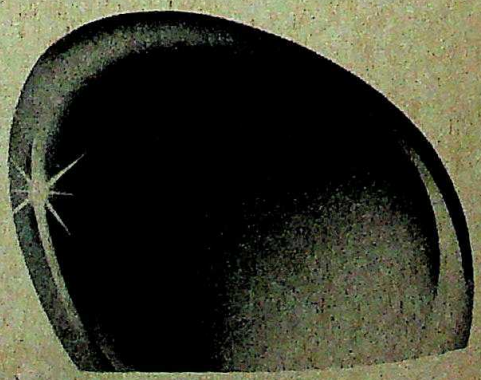

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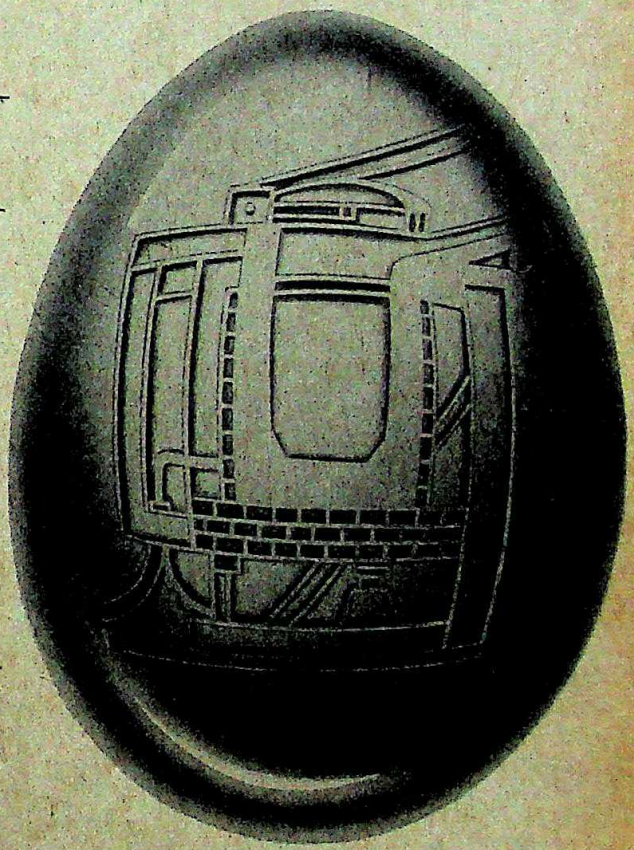

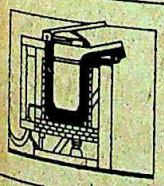

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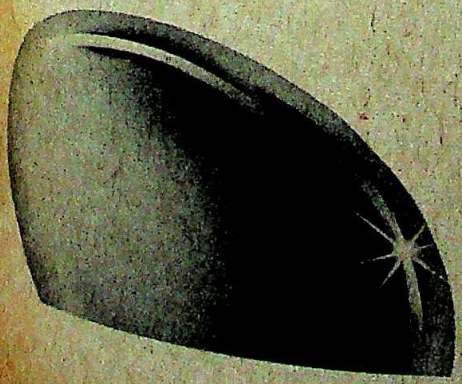

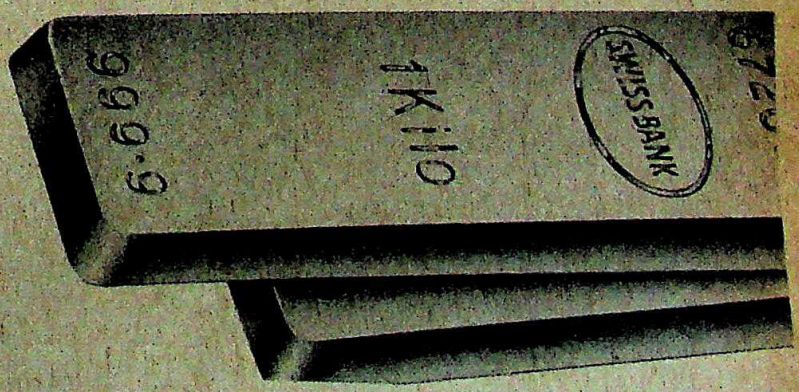

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BIHAR

Call to Arms

FORMER Bihar chief minister and DMKP leader Karpoori Thakur is anything but a good loser. But diminishing support among his traditional supporters and a humiliating defeat in the Lok Sabha poll seem to have made him desperate. Last fortnight, in a highly irresponsible act smacking of political demagoguery, he asked workers at a party meeting to "collect arms, with or without licence, to face the assembly elections". The weapons, he said, were to counter poll violence and "vote looting" by the Congress(I). The meeting, if somewhat reluctantly, ratified his call to arms, and with that Bihar seemed all set for another round of blood-letting.

Saner minds reacted swiftly to Thakur's extreme—some would say extremist—harangue. *The Searchlight*, an English daily of Patna, said, "Thakur should not only withdraw his call but apologise for the mistake." Within the DMKP, Gautam Sagar Rana, a former parliamentary secretary, questioned the propriety of using the same tactics the Congress(I) was accused of using. DMKP Rajya Sabha member Humkumdeo Narain Yadav condemned the call for violence and counselled Thakur to quit the party leadership "voluntarily" in the interests of democracy and the Opposition. Even the Yuva Lok Dal snapped its ties with the DMKP three days after Thakur's call to militancy, in protest against his "dictatorial" attitude.

Other opposition parties and the Congress(I) were even more appalled. CPI state office secretary Sahjanand Rai said: "Since Thakur has lost faith in the people and democracy he is urging his supporters to take up arms. He is also feeling frustrated about the revolt against the leadership within the party. People should not take him seriously." Bihar Minister of State for Home Bhola Singh said Thakur was inciting civil war. Ironically, Thakur is accused of being the author of the booth-capturing and rigging he seeks to counter with violence now. Alleges Congress(I) leader Kamalnath Singh Thakur: "Everybody knows it was Thakur who introduced booth-capturing in 1967 and institutionalised rigging in Phulparas in 1978 when he managed to get an unprecedented number of votes in the assembly by-elections."

But the perverse logic behind Thakur's moves became apparent when, a week later, he revived the reservation issue. "The DMKP will wage relentless war for the achievement of this goal (68 per cent reservation) and will implement it expeditiously if voted to power," he said. His strategy seemed to be to aggravate the divide between those for and against reservation and then consolidate his position as a leader of the backward classes. "Thakur's reservation call preceded by the call to arms should not be taken lightly. It smacks of a design to set society aflame to divide the people and save his leadership," said state Congress(I) minority cell convenor Shakil-uz-Zaman. The 1978 reservation policy had virtually split the people of the state into warring camps and resulted in large-scale violence. But in the process Thakur succeeded in uniting the "backwards" and emerging as their undisputed leader.

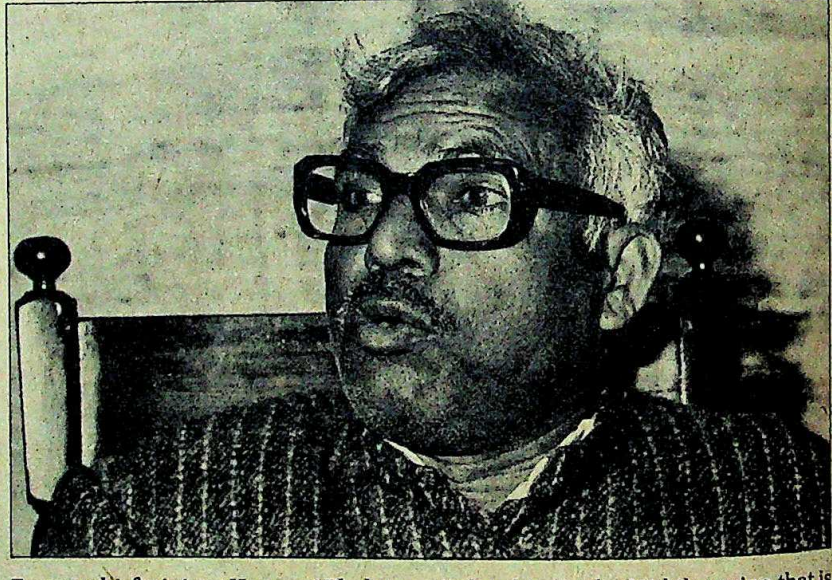
Unfortunately, there was a dangerous tendency to justify a resort to violence on the part of too many in the DMKP. "We have finalised a war strategy to protect the booths with the help of arms, legal or illegal. During the recent Lok Sabha elections the Congress(I) had looted our votes with the help of official machinery and goondas. We can no longer tolerate this. We must reply to the Congress(I) goondaism to protect our votes," said Bihar DMKP President Ramjivan Singh. State DMKP General Secretary P.K. Sinha rationalised further: "Suppose a criminal attacks you and tries to rob you of your cash. Will you sit idle or defend yourself with all your might? In a democracy we value votes more than cash or anything else. It is natural for the people to defend the votes. Defending votes means the defence of democracy and there is nothing illegal in the call of Thakur."

Thakur's problems seem to have begun when the Lok Sabha poll was announced in November last year. Both the CPI and the Janata Party accused him of trying to sabotage seat adjustment talks among the opposition parties. To add to his problems, the Yadavs within the DMKP itself were trying to isolate him in the Mithila region that is his base. Said a senior DMKP leader: "Thakur has been bossing over the party with the help of the Yadavs but they are not in a mood to accept the leadership of a non-Yadav any more."

The Darbhanga seat, on the other hand, was won by the late L.N. Mishra's son Vijay Kumar Mishra with the united support of the Yadavs and the Maithili Brahmins. His victory signified the formalisation of the caste equation in north Bihar, particularly in the Mithila region. So estranged have the Yadavs become from Thakur that a party meeting at Hajipur was disrupted last fortnight and a former minister and Thakur supporter, Motilal Kanan, escaped a bomb attack allegedly by supporters of a Yadav leader. These developments and the approaching assembly elections reportedly unnerved Thakur enough to goad him onto his new and dangerous road.

—FARZAND AHMED

BHAWAN SINGH



Former chief minister Karpoori Thakur: irresponsible act

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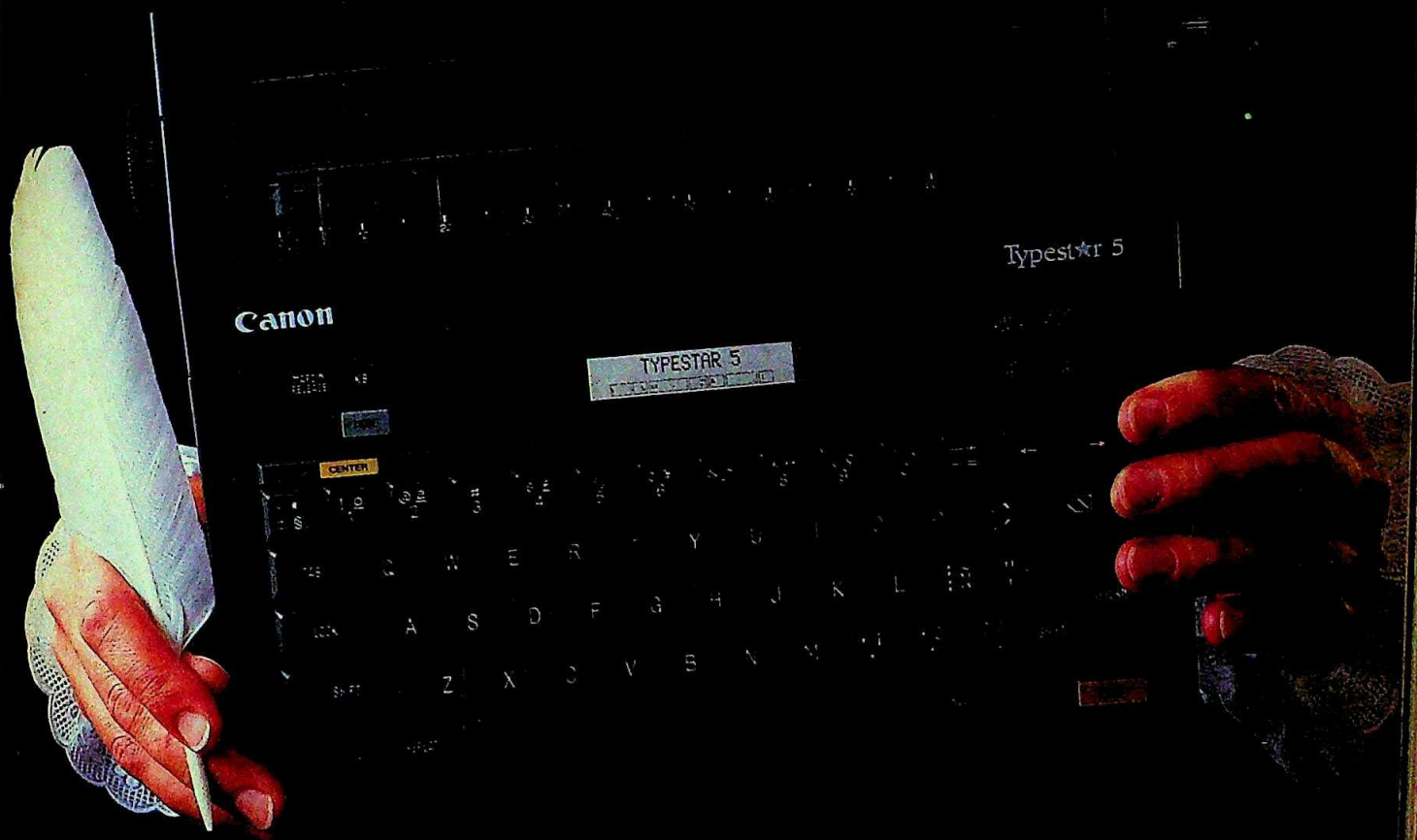

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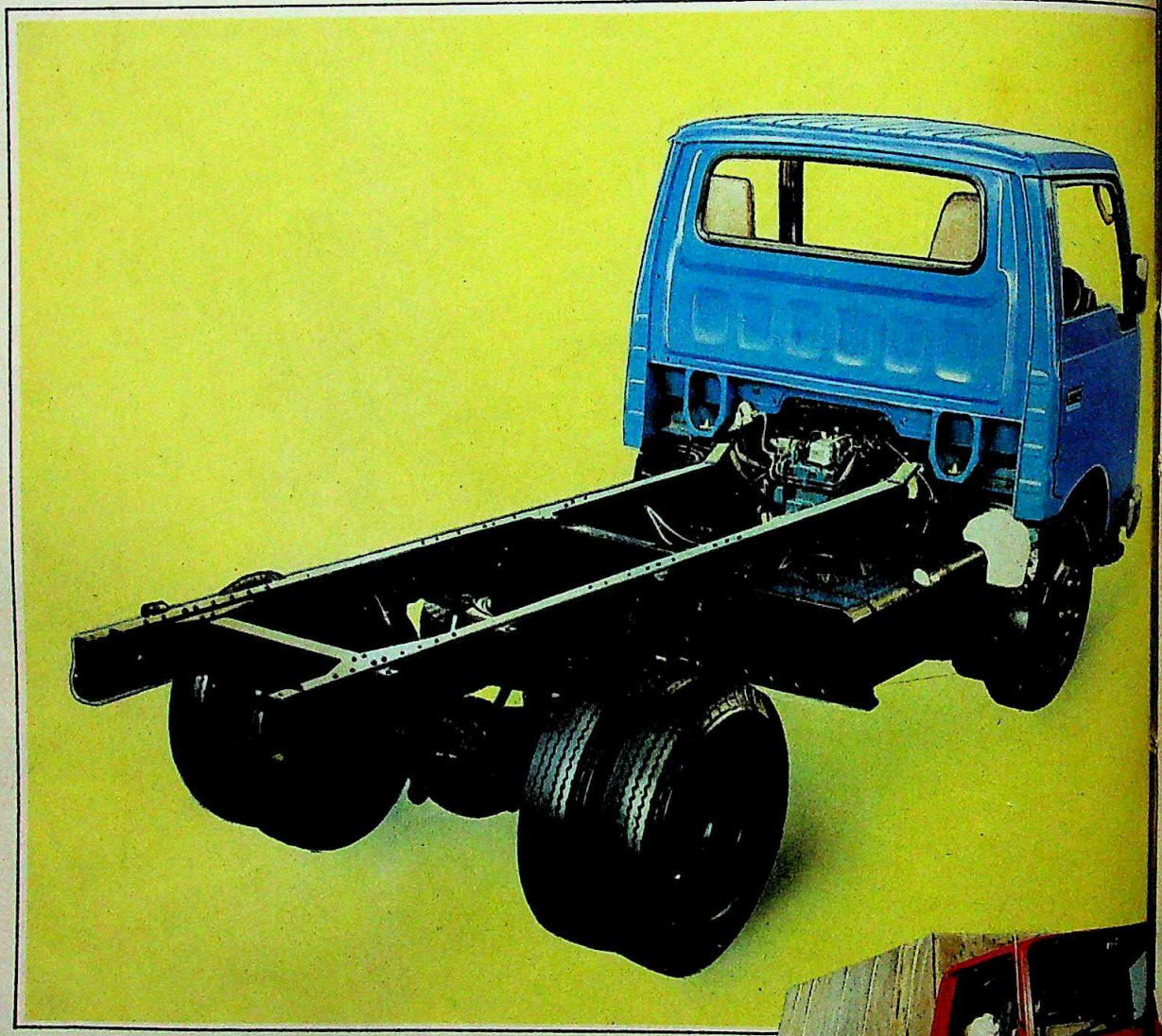

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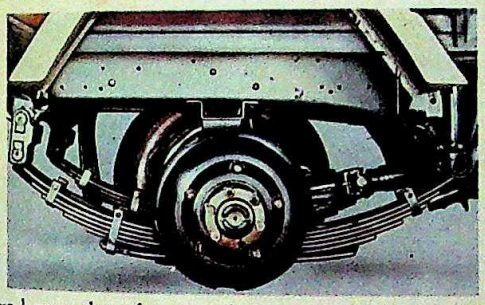

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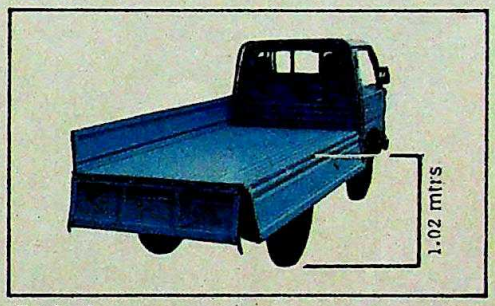

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PRESS

The Freedom Fight

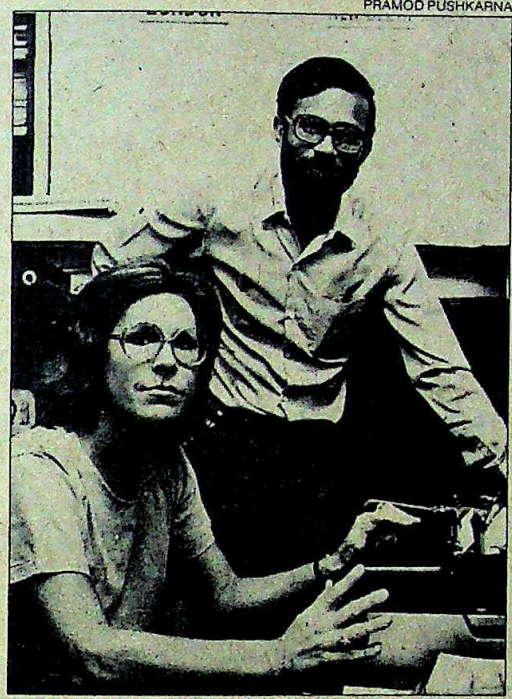
THE CASE is already well known, and on its way to becoming a *cause celebre* in the media. Brahma Chellany, a 27-year-old correspondent of the American news agency Associated Press (AP), has been charged with sedition by the Punjab Government, the first journalist so accused in free India.

While covering Operation Bluestar last June, Chellany became the only journalist attached to a foreign agency to remain in Amritsar through it. He filed several dispatches, but the most controversial was frontpaged in *The Times* of London and other prestigious foreign newspapers. It claimed that several of the more than 1,000 militants exterminated in Amritsar were shot at from point blank range by troops who first tied their hands behind their backs. Chellany quoted a doctor and police officials and also claimed to have seen a number of post-mortem reports certifying the nature of the killings.

While Indian missions abroad rushed around issuing denials and registering strong protests, in October, the Punjab police raided Chellany's office and residence in New Delhi; and the Government charged him with violating Sections 153A and 295A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for promoting hatred between religious groups and hurting the religious sentiments of a community (INDIA TODAY, November 15, 1984). Chellany was further charged with violating Section 4 of the Punjab Special Powers Press Act of 1956 for breaking press censorship imposed in the state of Punjab. Chellany filed two petitions in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the wide-ranging Terrorist Act and the Censorship Act which, in the Punjab Government's interpretation, meant that news about Punjab appearing outside the state was also liable to censorship. The Supreme Court admitted both petitions and issued Chellany interim anticipatory bail.

But the worst was to come. In mid-November the Central Government moved the Supreme Court asking for cancellation of Chellany's bail on the grounds that a violation of the Terrorist Act was non-bailable. The court rejected the application but asked Chellany to make himself available for interrogation in Amritsar. Between November 22 and December 1, Chellany was subjected to rigorous interrogation by officials of the Intelligence Bureau, the army and also the Punjab police. "The questions related to my sources for the reports I had filed but I refused to divulge them," says Chellany. "They wanted names of the police officials, doctors conducting post-mortems on the bodies and army officers who had supplied me with information."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Graham (left) and Chellany: preparing for battle

As a result, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs on December 4 moved another application for cancellation of Chellany's bail and the Punjab Government further charged him with sedition under Section 124A of the IPC which is defined as: "Whoever tries to bring or brings into contempt or whoever tries to incite or incites disaffection towards the Government established by law in the country is deemed to have committed an act of sedition."

This Chellany strongly refutes, claiming that the Punjab Government's application is full of "fabricated evidence against me". Since the charge of sedition is serious, and unprecedented in the history of the Indian media, support for Chellany's cause has been unstinting and widespread. Virtually all foreign media have condemned the charge and given the case wide publicity, with the *New York Times* carrying an editorial on the subject. The crux of the issue is contained in the AP Bureau Chief Victoria Graham's words. "The case," she says, "has grave implications for the freedom of the press in a society known for its freedoms and commitment to an open society. The most courageous journalist today could not but think twice before writing unpalatable truths, knowing that the alternative could be humiliation, harassment and jail."

Chellany is determined to fight the case in court. While his passport remains impounded, Chellany is getting a big hand from the Indian press. The Editors' Guild has come out in full support, with veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar calling the case "scandalous". Nayar, also a member of the Guild, says: "The sedition charge pertains to a specific incident. Chellany's case has no connection with having committed sedition. It simply withholds the right of a journalist to publish information."

Meanwhile, while a government has changed at the Centre, there is as yet no sign that it is going to continue pressing for cancellation of Chellany's bail. "Our apprehension that they will move the court for cancelling the bail remains," says V.M. Tarkunde who is fighting the case on behalf of Chellany. "Or they could start the prosecution in Chandigarh so that the trial is held within the parameter of the Terrorist Act. Or, given the new Government's liberal stance towards the media, they could drop the charges altogether."

Three weeks after the last legal move, all is suddenly quiet on the Government front. There are indications that, given the extensive publicity and pressure from the media, the Government will quietly drop the charges. If not, then Chellany, and his boss Graham, are going to fight it out. Although India possesses no law that effectively shields journalists from revealing their sources (the Law Commission in September 1983 submitted such a report still pending with the Government), all Indian journalists, given Chellany's precedent, can suffer.

—SUNIL SETHI

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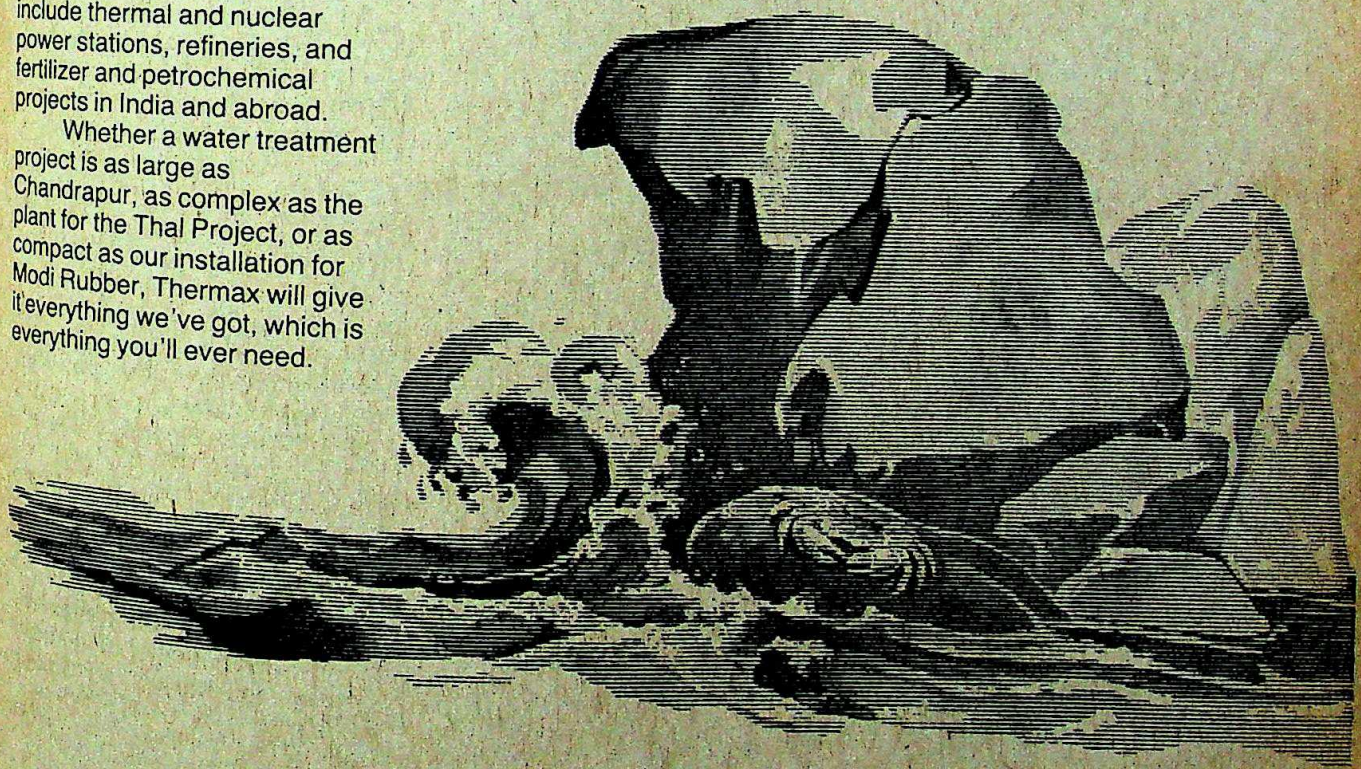

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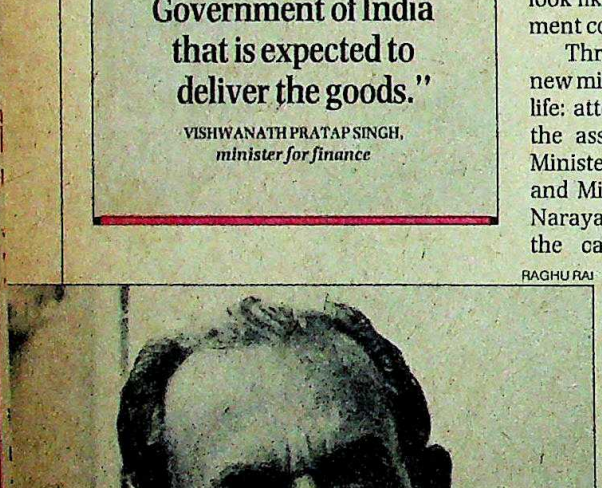
BHAWAN SINGH

"It is not government departments but the Government of India that is expected to deliver the goods."

VISHWANATH PRATAP SINGH, *minister for finance*

RAGHU RAI



"Rajivji is restless. He wants his ideas implemented fast. He is also receptive and welcomes ideas from his colleagues".

ABDUL GHAFOOR *minister for works and housing*

NEW MINISTERS

STYLE AND

THE PRIME minister may be young and new and repeatedly given to making promises of a clean, efficient government, but who are his chosen men and women to implement the promises? Is Rajiv Gandhi's council of ministers made of the stuff that constitutes an incorruptible and efficient administration? Does their previous track record show them as dynamic people—proficient in institutional administration, speedy as decision-makers and innovative as instruments of change? Do they, in fact, look like potential deliverers in a government committed to delivering the goods?

Three weeks into their new jobs, the new ministers have been leading a rushed life: attending Parliament, preparing for the assembly elections and some, like Minister of State for Power Arun Nehru and Minister of State for Planning K.R. Narayanan, relegated to their sick-beds in the capital's cold wave. Narayanan frankly admitted that, a bad bout of bronchitis apart, he was in no position to talk because "I simply don't know too much about my department yet." Others were eager to air their views, like the debonair Minister of State for Railways Madhavrao Scindia, who promptly answered a call and fixed an appointment himself. Others begged off, like Margaret Alva, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, arguing that parliamentary duty kept her on her toes round the clock, then relented when she was traced to her home, ready to go to bed by 8.30 p.m. A few were simply unreachable such as the Union Railway Minister Bansi Lal.

Given the exigencies of Parliament in session, preparations for the assembly poll and the business of settling down in their ministries, the question remained: what's new about the new ministers?

To begin with, not all that many are new. In the Union Cabinet of the 14 ministers excluding the prime minister, five are new, but with the exception of former Bihar chief minister Abdul Ghafoor, now minister for works and housing, all possess previous ministerial experience at the Centre. Of the six ministers of state holding independent charge of ministries, two are new this time but have served in earlier ministries in New Delhi. And of the 19 ministers of state, only eight, less than half that is, have no earlier experience of handling a ministry. Of these, three are new to Parliament: former diplomats Natwar Singh and K.R. Narayanan, now ministers of state for steel and planning respectively, and R.K. Jaichandra Singh from Manipur who is minister of state for youth affairs and sports. While the last is a newcomer in every sense, the erstwhile career diplomats can claim vast experience of dealing with the Government, having worked for it.

Not all that many ministers are that young either. In the Cabinet, the prime minister himself, at 40, is the youngest followed by Health Minister Mohsina Kidwai, 52, and Education Minister K.C. Pant, 53. Among ministers of state, the youngest are Industry and Company Affairs Minister Arif Mohammed Khan, 33, and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, 35. Both, however, have served as ministers of state before, so the honour of being the youngest new candidate for ministership goes to the ebullient ex-Maharaja of Gwalior, Madhavrao Scindia, who is 39.

Considerations of age, experience and availability for interviews aside, what do these people make of their new jobs and the new regime? What are their concerns, their priorities, their beliefs?

There are the traditional yes-men, whose chief concern is parroting eternal gratidute and loyalty to Rajiv. There are some more sophisticated who already sound like abbreviated Rajiv clones: their conversation is liberally peppered with phrases like "man management", uses of "new computer technology" and propelling the ministry "into the 21st century". And there are the sound ones who, through a mixture of shrewdness, smoothness, reliability and scrupulousness have come up in the right places.

A prime example of this category is Vishwanath Pratap Singh, the new minister for finance, commerce and supply, counted as the second most important member of the Cabinet after the prime minister. He has the credentials; as a scion of the ruling family of a feudality

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SUBSTANCE

called Manda not far from Allahabad, he has breeding, education and a private income. In the summer of 1980, the late Sanjay Gandhi, conscious of his clean, sound image promoted him as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. He has the reputation: two years later Singh became the first chief minister in the country to resign voluntarily (on moral grounds, he said) when he could not fulfil his vow of eliminating the dacoits within a promised period. Mrs Gandhi rehabilitated him in January 1983, bringing him into her cabinet as commerce minister. For a year-and-a-half, he served admirably, one of the few effective cabinet ministers. He actually cleaned up the ministry, computerising its organisation for efficiency, and braved the beef tallow scandal by suspending the import licences of 193 companies. Last summer Mrs Gandhi sent him back to Uttar Pradesh as party chief to prepare for the elections, and he succeeded admirably in the job.

Now 51, he occupies a massive, oak panelled office in North Block, more glamorously furnished than the prime minister's. He's not a man of words, and has a joking habit of fielding the questions back. "No time for feelings," he says when asked what it feels like to be in the job. "It's a time for keeping mum." He refuses to speak about areas of action, protesting that he cannot before the Government's first budget is out. But there is promise of serious re-evaluation and possible revamping: non-resident investment and functioning of banks will be properly looked into; foreign exchange generation will be promoted; repayment of foreign loans expedited and reinvestment outside the Government sector encouraged. He has recommended that the ministers of industry, finance, agriculture and commerce meet every month to draw broad policy parameters and jointly apprise the prime minister every alternate month. "So that there isn't a truncated view of the Government, and that it's not government departments but the Government of India that is expected to deliver the goods."

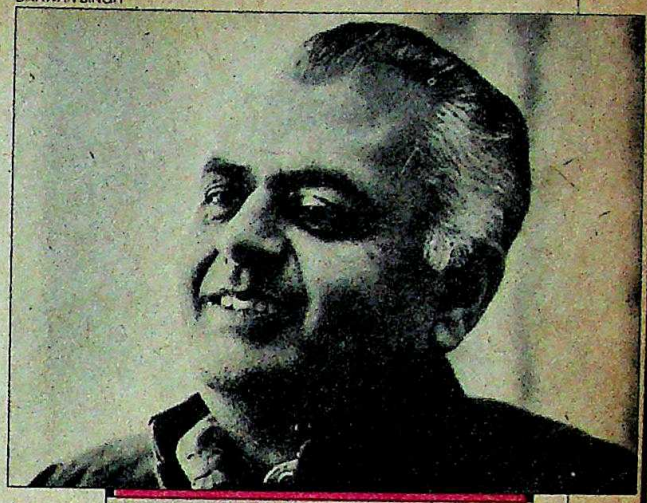
His cabinet colleague K.C. Pant, now minister for education is more explicit: "The style and idiom of the new prime minister is different. He often talks of taking India into the 21st century; in that sense, he's much more attuned to modern technology, and familiar with its application."

Pant, son of Govind Ballabh Pant, was a member of Mrs Gandhi's cabinet for over a decade, handling a variety of portfolios. After the Congress defeat in 1977, he quit the party but rejoined after 1980. Later Mrs Gandhi made him chairman of the Energy Commission, a job of cabinet rank. A low-key, conscientious, ponderous-looking man, Pant is an old-fashioned plodder: being MP from New Delhi constituency as well as serving as Union minister in New Delhi isn't an easy combination. Pant puts in a 14-hour-day at least, juggling attendance at local *kavi sammelans* with serious matters of state.

How dexterously he manages is clear from the target areas of attention he has earmarked in education. He is clear, incisive and open to suggestion. Universalisation of elementary education by 1990 (as many as 24 per cent, or 6 crore children, do not enrol for primary education), induction of non-normal education to take the pressure off colleges, emphasis on adult education (11 crore illiterates in the age group 15-55) are all priorities. There is the concept of de-linking degrees from jobs—"something that has to be worked out but is desirable". And there is the idea of strengthening school education (which gets poorer) by setting up pacesetter schools, cleaning up colleges, introducing computers in polytechnics. All these are constrained by shortage of funds, power and maintenance facilities. "It will take time," says Pant "but I will push all the elements of the programmes. There is need to consult the states and redefine the last document of education policy which came out in 1968. It's a big challenge but we have got the big mandate to be able to meet it."

Does the massive mandate make action more imperative? "Of course," says the new Minister for Works and Housing Abdul Ghafoor who was woken up in New Delhi during his afternoon snooze on December 31 by the prime min-

BHAWAN SINGH



"There is a need to consult the states and redefine the education policy. It's a big challenge but we have a big mandate to meet it".

K.C. PANT,
minister for education

BHAWAN SINGH

"Madam made me minister of state. Madam made me chief minister. Now I'm back. It's all their (The Gandhis') decision."

T. ANJAIAH,
minister of state for labour

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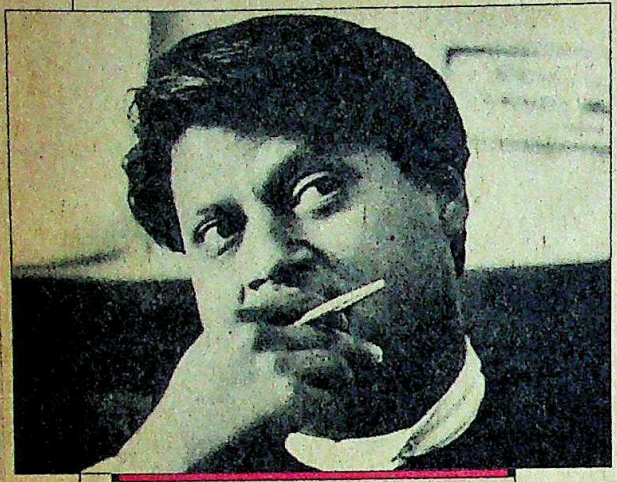
BHAWAN SINGH



"Other ministries may have more glamour, but railways gets you into the nitty-gritty of a challenge"

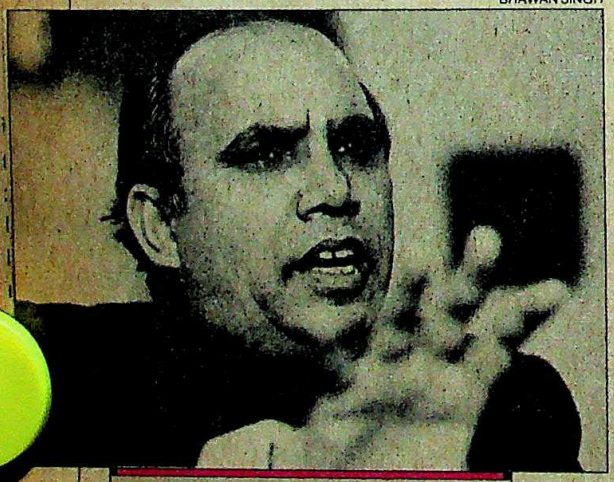
MADHAVARAO SCINDIA, *minister of state for railways*

ister and invited to Rashtrapati Bhavan for the oath-taking. "Rajivji is restless. He wants his ideas implemented fast. He is also receptive and welcomes suggestions from his colleagues."

Ghafoor, 68, has never been either MP or a Central minister but, barring a brief period in 1967, he has been an MLA from Gopalganj, the town where he was born, since 1952. He became chief minister of Bihar during the JP movement but was removed during the Emergency and replaced by Jagannath Mishra. Known as "Chacha" back home, his clean, matter-of-fact, upright style has stood him in good stead.

In New Delhi, he is going to embark upon an immediate clean up of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). "I will not stand for corruption at any level. I've already set up a review panel at the DDA to return officials who have completed their tenures." A sign of his style: as works and housing minister he hasn't pushed for immediate allotment of an official residence himself, and is quite happy in his flat in an MP's hostel.

BHAWAN SINGH



"I haven't a broad horizon in politics. What matters is my dedication to the (Gandhi) family"

HANS RAJ BHARADWAJ, *minister of state for law*

In colourful comparison to their sedate senior colleagues are the ministers of state, a motley crowd that never fails to surprise. There is the Minister of State for Labour, T. Anjaiah, who held the same portfolio, till he was appointed chief minister of Andhra Pradesh in 1981. The two best-known facts about him are: that he started life as a labourer in the Allwyn factory in Hyderabad and that, as chief minister, he had his head snapped off by Rajiv Gandhi when he loudly arrived to receive him, band, bunting and all, at Begumpet airport. He was one of the Congress candidates to win the election from Andhra Pradesh, and his top priority is to advise the Centre in remedying "the Andhra situation".

Now 55, he sits grandly beneath a portrait of Mrs Gandhi festooned with tinsely garlands. "Madam made me minister of state. Madam made me chief minister. Now I'm back. I never wanted to go back to the state. I never wanted to come here. All their decision," he says, with a touching humility that takes precedence over form. His other priorities are bringing the following amendments to labour laws: to allow provident fund loans for building houses, a revision of public sector wage policy, payment of bonus and DA in accordance with income slabs and payment of gratuity to workers during industrial lock-outs. Asked about the airport incident Anjaiah dismisses it with a wave of the hand. "Only a little misunderstanding," he tersely grunts.

LESS keen to forget her longstanding connection with the Gandhi family is Maragatham Chandrashekhar, 67, minister of state for women and social welfare with independent charge. For the first time, women have a separate ministry, with the Department of Social Welfare attached. But it cannot be fairly said that Chandrashekhar either understands the importance of her job or substantively knows what she is talking about. True, she has some vague notions that "women must realise they are individuals too" and "women must be helped to help themselves" and so on. And last fortnight, she called a meeting of women MP's (whose number has gone up from 22 to 36 in the Lok Sabha, the highest ever) to deliberate these notions, but she gets eloquent only on the subject of the Gandhi family.

Her conversation then becomes afflicted with deep sighs. "Tell you about my relationship with Mrs Gandhi? Where do I begin? Where do I end?" Sigh. "I am a loyal soldier of the party—Gandhiji, Nehruji, Indiraji and now, Rajivji, I am prepared to serve them all." Sigh again. "I am lucky to have had the opportunity to serve the prime minister and grateful to him that he has given me the chance." Ocean of sighs.

If such remarks strike an inappropriate note, Chandrashekhar's career graph is clear indication of how long—and how far—inappropriate people can make it in politics. A teacher by profession, she won the first election to the Lok Sabha from Tamil Nadu in 1952, but was defeated both in 1957 and 1967. From 1967 to 1969 she obtained a sinecure of commissioner for linguistic minorities. In 1970 she was nominated to the Rajya Sabha and renominated again for another term. This time she was elected to the Lok Sabha from Tamil Nadu. The reasons for her rise could be many but they are as likely as not contained in the line: "Mrs Gandhi was, is, will always be my heroine."

Equally at sea in his new environment is Bir Sain, the minister of state for environment. His apppointment undoubtedly raised the most eyebrows. A faceless politician from Uttar Pradesh who was not considered ministerial material even in

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his own state till last July when he was yanked out of virtual wilderness and given state cabinet rank when Narain Dutt Tiwari took over as chief minister. Sain's induction into the prestigious department of environment, is obviously to cater to the Harijan lobby. Sain is another one who pays worshipful lip service to the Gandhi name. "Environment is an important subject for Rajivji. It is a rare privilege to work under a young and dynamic prime minister."

That Sain is a square peg in a round hole was quite obvious from the first day he occupied his plush office in Bikaner House. He displayed his total ignorance of the job when he summoned a meeting of his officials and asked them what steps were being taken "to preserve the dinosaur".

A similar rise is that of Hans Raj Bhardwaj, the new minister of state for law and justice. A Delhi-based advocate, Bhardwaj, 47, traces his Gandhi connection to the time when his father served Nehru as security officer. "I haven't a broad horizon in politics. What matters is my dedication to the family," he admits frankly. His ideas of bringing about law reform, simplifying the legal system, effecting speedy justice, cutting down the cost of litigation, are also notional.

A stout, jolly-faced fellow, he has the easy-going, expedient manner of a petition clerk perhaps, or a coffee-house buff. Between borrowing cigarettes, his hands remain folded on his belly. "The basic edifice of our laws is sound," he says. Still, some of the things he'd like to do include amendments to penal code and criminal code, set up a directorate to research laws and update jail manuals.

BHARDWAJ'S background is of a man undoubtedly self-made (as the eldest son in the family he supported himself with a variety of jobs, from journalism to export house salesman, to obtain his law degree) but somewhere along the way he relinquished the path of excellence for convenience. He was standing counsel for the Delhi administration between 1971 and 1977 and, when the Gandhi family fell on hard times, he was there. "I defended everybody, Sanjay Gandhi, Bansi Lal, V.C. Shukla. Sanjay used to be with me 18 hours a day. I even defended Dhirendra Brahmachari. "But," a small chuckle here, "as you know he has been eliminated by The Leader."

Another lawyer who has lately come to ministership is Margaret Alva, 42, one of the two ministers of state for parliamentary affairs. An elected member of the Rajya Sabha since 1974, she is an exuberant, intelligent and articulate woman who is also the national convener of the newly autonomous women's wing of the party, now called the Mahila Congress. "Let's talk about what we've done already," she says. "Parliament has been debating the Anti-Defection Bill for 12 years and, we, with the cooperation of the Opposition, have got it going in our first session." Does she plan any innovations in her job? Yes. She's planning to arrange study groups and seminars for MP's, coordinate with ministries to convert ordinances into legislation speedily, plus selecting speakers, setting up parliamentary committees and managing debates.

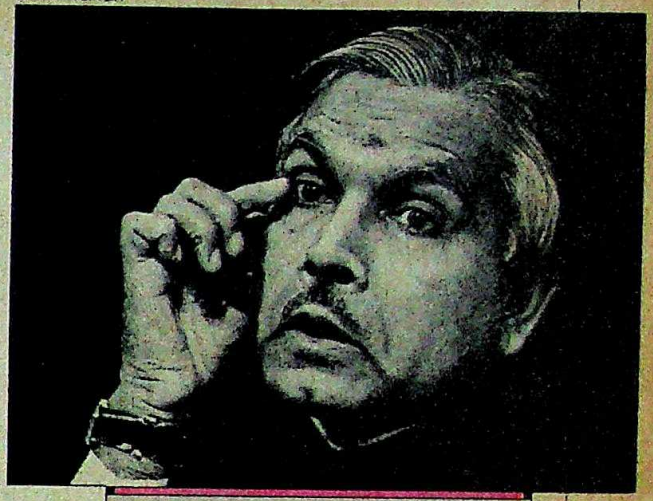
Compared to some of her colleagues, she is bursting with enthusiasm, idealism and new approaches—three words she uses repeatedly to describe the new Parliament. "Many things will happen. And fast," she says before being submerged from view by a tide of women ticket-seekers on her doorstep.

More of Alva's prescribed ingredients for action—enthusiasm, idealism—are available in a more relaxed encounter with Madhavrao Scindia, the new minister of state for railways. He adds his own adjectives of exciting, challenging and born-again efficiency to his job. "Other ministries may have more glamour, but railways gets you into the nitty-gritty of a challenge." Scindia argues vehemently for a restoration of resources to be able to "take Indian Railways into the next century". He's lucky, he says exuberantly. At least, he has Bansi Lal to work for. "With his reputation as a go-getter he'll be able to galvanise action. And I'll be there to assist him."

Meanwhile, Scindia has developed his own nine-point programme to restore the railways: punctuality, safety, cleanliness, passenger amenities, new technology, elimination of wastage, better man management et al. His second week in office, he began monitoring the movements of 60 trains selected at random to check out delays.

What about the Railway Ministry, itself one of the slowest, biggest, most in-

BHAWAN SINGH



"After being in the government, I have a slight advantage. I know how officialdom works. Officials can't pull any fast ones."

K. NATWAR SINGH,
minister of state for steel

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"Parliament has been debating the anti-defection bill for 12 years. We have got it going in our first session. Many things will happen. And fast."

MARGARET ALVA,
minister of state for parliamentary affairs

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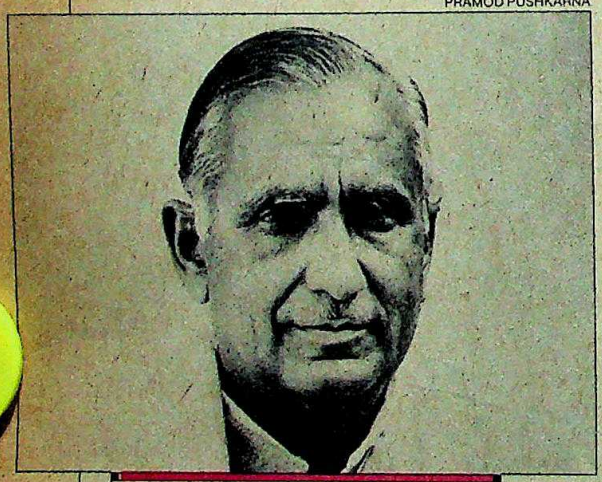

"Environment is an important subject for Rajivji. It is a rare privilege to work under a young and dynamic prime minister."

BIR SAIN,
minister of state for environment

trigue-ridden. departments of the Government? Scindia thinks it's a question of better man management. "The man at the lowest rung must feel part of the decision making-apparatus." To this end, he's going to introduce seminars and group discussions among the 1.8 million railway employees, introduce better working conditions, some system of rewards for efficiency and ensure that regional general managers are mobile to carry their instructions out.

His pet ideas are two; both have been suggested before, found untenable, and shelved. One is centralise railway catering, so that the hundreds of contracts and subcontracts are eliminated; and the other is to start a corporation, similar to Air-India's Hotel Corporation, which will establish cheap, clean and efficient hotels on railway land at major junction towns.

Of his dealing with the prime minister, he says: "You can take the guidelines from him, rather than bother him with details for implementation. We're here to produce results and will produce them."

As determinedly action-oriented as Scindia is the other new high-flying minister, Natwar Singh. Ambassador to Pakistan, secretary-general of NAM, chief coordinator of CHOGM, president of the Delhi Gymkhana Club and now MP from Bharatpur, he lists his hobbies as: "Reading, writing, tennis, walking and good conversation followed by prolonged periods of reflective silence."

Actually, he's a bit short on the last in life. He sits, all solemn attention and brisk repartee, behind a large desk with three low-slung steel lamps spotlighting his face. At 54, he's the long-standing, time-honoured bureaucrat who's successfully crossed the fence to become the man who issues orders. What does it feel like? "Quite nice," he replies, tilting back in his swivel chair.

One of the first actions he took upon assuming office was to ban the serving of tea. "Now no tea. No refreshment of any kind. Don't serve anybody," he says in his clipped Cambridge accent (Corpus Christi, circa 1951). Extraordinary as that may seem, Singh isn't planning to sit around in steel either. He's been visiting the steel plants (checking in his own baggage at the airport) and is about to restore the work ethic, discipline and punctuality in his ministry; action will be "result-oriented and accountable" from now on. "I mean," he expostulates, "we've sunk in crores and crores of rupees. My job is to turn it around from from red to black," he adds of an industry that continues to lose half a crore of rupees a day.

ASKED if there was a decision on the Government's proposal to decanalise steel imports (a high-ranking committee of secretaries hotly debated the subject last fortnight) Singh said he didn't know; he only read about it in the newspapers. His formula for a turnaround is to take a close look at the problems. He plans to arrange a round-table with men from the public and private sector. "Our chaps will just listen."

Later, speaking of his constituency, Singh enunciates the miseries of rural life: 75 per cent of the villages have no roads, 65 per cent have no electricity. "After being in the Government, I have a slight advantage. I know how officialdom works. Officials can't pull a fast one." For all that, Singh understands that the danger of his party receiving such a huge mandate is that the expectations aroused are so high. "I don't have an Alladin's lamp," he confesses. "People mustn't expect anything magical." What about the new prime minister—what is it like being in his team. "Oh, he's very quick," says Natwar Singh, "he keeps us on our toes all the time?"

Does he? It wouldn't seem so from meeting some of his ministers. Some may be trying to dig in their toes, others hardly have their toes touching the ground, they're so pleased being there. So what's new about the new ministers? Finance Minister V.P. Singh was right. Very little. On the negative side, there will now be seminars instead of committees, no tea instead of more tea, obsequies to Rajivji in place of Indiraji.

On the positive side, the prime minister has repeatedly said that his ministers will be watched, and dropped, if they fail to perform; and their grace period he promises will be short. But who knows. At least most of the ministers have begun talking about moving into the 21st century 15 years in advance. Something may even get done.

—SUNIL SETHI with PRABHU CHAWLA

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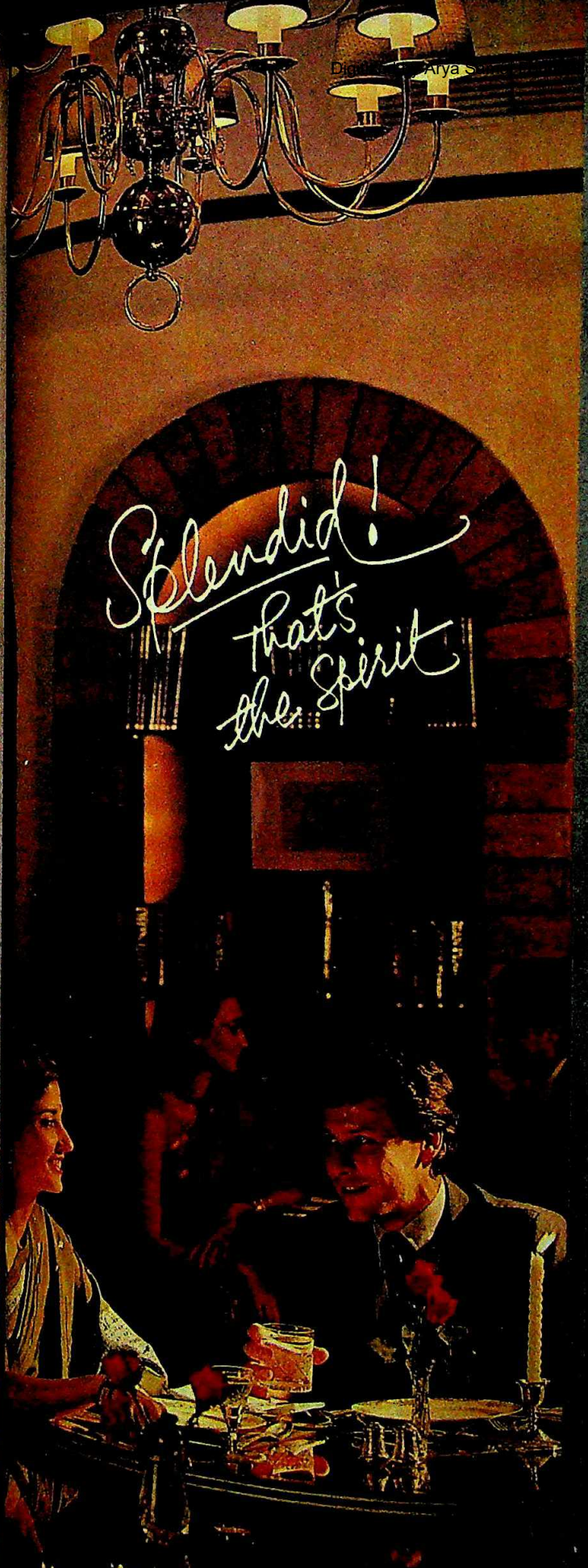

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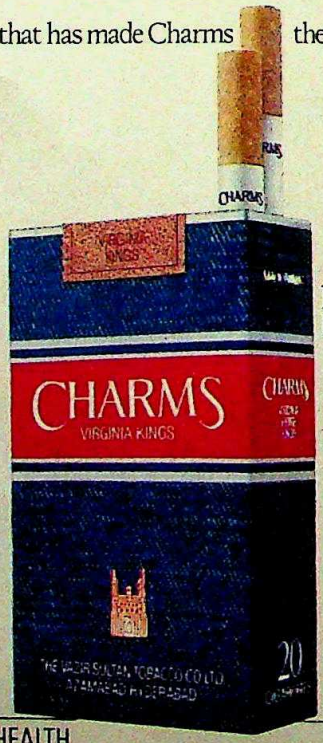

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SWITCHING SIDES

THE BELGIAN subsidiary of the US multinational, ITT, may walk away with the collaboration contract for setting up the proposed Bangalore factory that will manufacture switching equipment for telephone exchanges. Earlier, the Government had decided to sign up with the French giant, CIT Alcatel, on the lines of a similar agreement with CIT Alcatel for another switching factory coming up at Gonda in Uttar Pradesh. But the Bangalore collaboration issue is now undergoing reconsideration because of ITT's offer of its System 12. ITT has also proposed as part of a package deal that the Government buy 2 lakh switching lines outright. ITT's system is said to be more modern than the French counterpart, but any reconsideration is almost certain to raise a hornet's nest because other rivals in the business have not been allowed to submit fresh offers.

BUDGET BLUES

WITH preparations under way for finalising both the Union Budget as well as the Central and state annual plans for 1985-86, the Government has discovered that its financial position is bleaker than usual. The Central budget deficit is expected to be in the region of Rs 2,300 crore, against the original budget estimate of Rs 1,762 crore, while several state governments have run up overdrafts that total another Rs 2,000 crore. Meanwhile, annual plan discussions with the Planning Commission show that the plan outlays for next year will show no increase for several state governments as well as for quite a few Central ministries. In some cases, the outlays may even be smaller than the outlays for the current financial year.

RECORDER REVERSAL

THE GOVERNMENT is getting ready to do an about turn on its licensing policy for video cassette recorders (VCR's). Over the last couple of years, letters of intent have been handed out to virtually all comers, with the typical capacity limit being as small as 500 VCR's per annum. The new policy now being finalised is likely to be far more restrictive, with three or four large companies being allowed substantial capacities and everyone else being excluded from the field. A short list of applicants has already been prepared, and a final decision is expected in the next few weeks. If the revised policy goes through, the small-scale sector will be virtually excluded from the field in the future, and only large companies will be allowed entry.

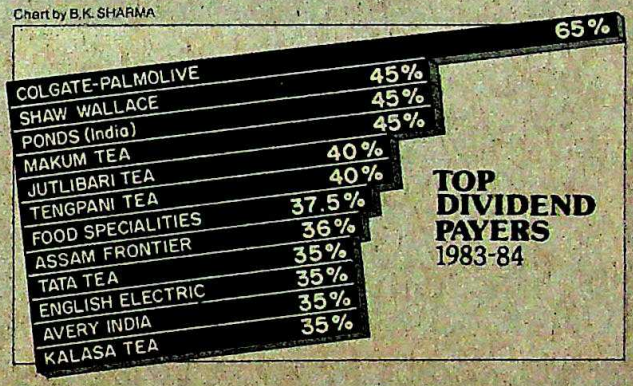
TYRE TROUBLE

WITH inadequate demand hitting the tyre industry and many producers registering either losses or only marginal profits, all those who had been considering an entry into the business with capacities of a million tyres each are unlikely to go through with their project proposals. Larsen & Toubro, considered a certain entrant at one stage, had in fact been negotiating a collaboration arrangement with the French tyre giant Michelin. But L&T has developed second thoughts on the subject, and government officials say their proposal is now not under active consideration. Meanwhile, Nirlon of Bombay is considering an entry through a joint venture with the Gujarat State Industrial Development Corporation (GSIDC), which already holds a letter of intent.

SHARING DIVIDENDS

TEA COMPANIES have done well by their shareholders during 1983-84, following the unprecedented boom in the industry. Most tea companies have stepped up dividend payments sharply, and an analysis of dividend trends by *Business Standard* shows that six of the top 12 dividend announcements during the year came from tea companies.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



These were Makum Tea (45 per cent dividend), Jutlibari Tea (40 per cent), Tengpani Tea (40 per cent), Assam Frontier (36 per cent), Tata Tea (35 per cent) and Kalasa Tea (35 per cent). None of these companies had declared more than a 25 per cent dividend during the previous year.

COMMUNICATION BREAKTHROUGH

NON-RESIDENT technical experts of Indian origin may be involved in a big way in several key technological and industrial programmes during the coming months. The first such programme involving a critical input from non-residents was the project to design and develop an indigenous telephone switching system, under the banner of the Centre for Development of Telematics (CDOT). Proposals have now been made for launching similar projects for the development of a microwave communication system that will obviate the need for troublesome telephone cables, and for improving the performance of the country's power stations. While the proposals are still in the initial stages of preparation, CDOT itself has made considerable progress in developing a switch that is expected to be infinitely simpler than the ones available with multinational corporations. The CDOT design allows for the use of far fewer types of printed circuit boards, for instance, and will cost half the price of equivalent systems developed elsewhere.

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LABOUR

The People Problem

EVERYONE has his pet theory about what is wrong with the Indian economy and what should be done to put it right. Businessmen are apt to believe that there would be a miraculous improvement in industry and allied sectors if only they were given a free hand with licences and finance, and they are probably right, though only up to a point. Farmers tend to think that their own sector would do much better if prices were right—prices of farm products as well as inputs like power, water, fertilisers etc and they too have a point. Those who manage the economy and are responsible for drawing up realistic five-year plans have often argued that they could have much bigger plans, and therefore much higher targets, if only they could lay their hands on more resources, which also seems fair enough. Since higher industrial output and more foodgrains are fully compatible with bigger resources what is it that is holding up the works?

Businessmen's impatience with controls is understandable but even if all controls were removed and the Industries (Development & Regulation) Act scrapped along with MRTP and other hurdles, I doubt whether industry would be able to make a quantum jump into the future. As far as I know, there are no controls in Britain and British businessmen are free to do what they like with their money, or other people's money they are able to lay hands on, but this has not made any difference to Britain's decline as an industrial power since World War II. On the other hand, agriculture in Europe is beset with controls of one kind and another, but the mountain of foodstuffs in that continent keeps on growing. Controls may be a nuisance, but the real reasons for our stagnation lie elsewhere.

If you look carefully at our national income table, you will see that there has been something of a sea change in the economy over the last 20 years, though we don't notice it. According to the World Bank—I am quoting World Bank figures as they are useful for international comparisons—the share of agriculture in India has come down from 50 per cent in 1960 to 33 per cent in 1982, which means that agriculture is not such a dominant sector as it used to be. The share of industry has gone up from 20 to 26 per cent and that of services from 30 to 41 per cent. India is no more an agricultural country in the strict sense of the word, as only a third of its national income is derived from that sector. There are not many such countries in the Third World and even in China agriculture accounts for 37 per cent of its gross domestic product.

> **It is obvious that we have a tremendous volume of surplus labour in agriculture which is acting as a drag on the entire economy.**

However, this transformation is not reflected in our labour force. The percentage of labour in agriculture barely moved from 74 to 71 per cent between 1960 and 1982, that is by less than 4 per cent in 22 years, and the change in other sectors was also more or less on the same minute scale. Actually real transformation takes place only when there are large-scale movements in the labour force, from one major sector to another, as also, within the same sector, from one industry to another. For instance, in middle-income economies like the Philippines, there has been a sharp diversion in labour force away from agriculture, from 77 per cent to nearer 55 per cent between 1960 and 1982. In upper middle-income countries, the drop is even sharper, from 50 to 30 per cent.

It is obvious therefore that we have a tremendous volume of surplus labour in agriculture, which may provide ready-made votebanks to Charan Singh and Sharad Joshi but is acting as a drag on the entire economy. Going by international trends, we should have no more than 60 per cent of our labour force working in agriculture instead of 70 per cent, which means that we have in our villages and elsewhere a surplus of 35 million people who should not be there at all and who should have been provided with jobs in other sectors. It is these people who migrate to towns and cities and turn them into slums. It is not their fault, of course, for they will go any place where they can find a living. By the end of the century, the number of such people will grow to something like 100 million, for going by past trends, it is unlikely that the labour force in farming will fall below 68 per cent, while it should be no more than 50 per cent.

It is wrong to think of economic growth as if it was just a question of producing more—more foodgrains, more steel, more oil etc. Production helps but the effort comes up against a big wall unless you take care of structural changes and move populations in large chunks from villages to towns, from towns to cities, and often within cities and towns. In India, such large-scale movements are not possible unless we have new towns, or new housing in old towns to take care of the exodus.

In advanced countries, about three-quarters of the population lives in cities and in England the percentage is as high as 90 per cent. Urbanisation is a worldwide trend and seems as inescapable as the change in the pattern of national income. We have to think of urbanisation as an inevitable by-product of development and plan accordingly. There are 65 cities in the United States with a population of 5 lakh and above while there are only 36 such cities in India, though we have more than thrice its population. China incidentally has 78 and Soviet Russia 50. We need maybe 120 by 1999, if not earlier, and if I were a member of the Planning Commission, I should begin with my first new town immediately. When you build cities, you need steel and cement and coal and power, and there is no better way of pushing your gross national product.

When you draw surplus labour away from farms, the farmers are forced to go in for mechanisation and labour-saving devices which indirectly help industries making farm implements, apart from increasing productivity on the farms. But you cannot draw labour away unless you provide them with jobs elsewhere and this can be done only in new townships, as the old ones are bursting at the seams and can no more accommodate the exodus. You just cannot keep an economy on the move without a mobile population and ours is anything but mobile. There are jobs by the thousand in Bombay but try getting a 10 by 10 room without making a big hole in your savings!

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EXPORT POLICY

Recommending Change

HEFTIER tax cuts. More replenishment (REP) licences to import raw materials and capital goods. A free rein to big business and foreign-controlled companies to enter export production areas hand-picked by the Government. Beefed up subsidies to compensate exporters more fully for taxes levied on raw materials. And an economy that may be thrown open to the winds of foreign competition.

To most businessmen, most of these goodies would have seemed a mirage a few years ago. But dream may turn into reality if two committes on export have their way. The committee on trade policy headed by former commerce secretary S. Abid Hussain has handed in a report to the Government which proposes sweeping changes in the rules of the export game and a sharp right turn in industrial licensing policy. Earlier, another committe on engineering and capital goods export chaired by D.V. Kapur, heavy industry secretary, submitted recommendations that meet many long-standing demands of businessmen.

The two reports together presage a formal break with the past that has been a long time coming. Out will go yesterday's ideological baggage. In will come what is viewed as a more pragmatic, results-geared approach in which exports will be viewed as part and parcel of total industrial activity instead of in isolation. As one exporter puts it: "You can't eat half a chicken and expect the other half to lay eggs." And Planning Commission member Abid Hussain adds: "We are in the post-Nehru era and the economy has to move into the 21st century."

High hopes are clearly pinned on the Hussain Committee report. For one, even before it was handed in bang on schedule on December 31, its contents were the object of intense media speculation. Secondly, it has pitched expectations of a radical revamping of the export and industrial system high. The 100-page report is under wraps, but the committee is believed to have advanced the following suggestions:

► Opening up the economy to foreign competition to create a strong, more competitive industrial base.

► Permission to exporters to import capital goods without paying duty on them, and to industry to import technology under the less restrictive open general licence (OGL).

► Full compensation to exporters for non-refundable taxes levied on export product inputs: the cash compensatory support (CCS) subsidy which the Government now pays exporters doesn't cover all such taxes, it is argued.

► Permission to exporters to maintain bank accounts abroad.

Hussain

Kapur

The reports submitted by both Abid Hussain and D.V. Kapur signal a formal break with the past, and the likely advent of a more pragmatic, result-oriented approach to exports.

► Export promotion councils should graduate into commodity boards, over which the Government exercises greater control.

The committee considered various options to smoothen the path to exports and increase export profitability: bidding farewell to the "red book" which lists items importers are barred from bringing into the country, devaluing the rupee and tinkering with tariffs. Some of these were shot down by Finance Ministry representatives on the committee and the more radical recommendations were watered down to arrive at a unanimous report. But a consensus was reached and a target set of doubling exports to the Rs 20,000 crore level by the next decade.

The Hussain and Kapur Committee reports overlap in at least one area—the perception that industry is backward and suffers from technological, qualitative and cost disadvantages compared with foreign competitors. Both committees therefore prescribe relaxed guidelines on buying know-how from abroad, keener competition among domestic companies and strengthening the subsidy system, even if indirectly, though the Hussain committee is believed to have suggested that subsidies be gradually phased out.

The Kapur report advocates selectivity or restricting export drives to a few countries that can buy engineering goods from India, and to a few domestic industries endowed with cost advantages. "There is a good chance of bringing these industries to internationally competitive levels through upgrading technology, introducing viable scales of production and ensuring greater domestic competition by generating substantial additional capacities in excess of domestic demand," the report argues. Included in a long, graded list of "thrust industries" are commercial vehicles, machine tools, auto spares and ancillaries, chemical and process plants, castings and forgings, bicycles and bicycle parts, industrial valves, air compressors, diesel engines and process pumps. The Kapur report is all for carrots being dangled before these 'thrust industries' to generate the export surpluses required—manufacturers should be allowed to borrow up to four times their equity capital, jump the queue for loans from financial institutions, and be provided rail fare subsidies. Other carrots indude more REP licences to import raw materials and capital goods and higher direct tax incentives linked to export performance. The report also backs the entry into thrust industries of big business and companies regulated by the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act.

The latest official initiative on the export front is underpinned by a third report on exports, a World Bank study titled *India: Light Industrial Export and Finance*. Drawing on the examples of the light engineering and leather industries, the report concludes that high rates of protection (import bans, quotas, tariffs, and industrial controls) in the domestic market, restrictions on capacity utilisation and expansion and on access to foreign technology have limited India's export performance and potential, and made local industry inefficient and technologically obsolete. With domestic sales being vastly more profitable than exports for manu-

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facturers, only residual production is exported. The bank's solution to the problem: allow firms of all sizes to grow naturally by not restricting domestic capacity, stop reserving the production of certain products for the small-scale sector, or at least of products with recognised export potential, and throw open the economy to increased foreign competition.

Some of the bank's recommendations have clearly struck a responsive chord in the Kapur and Hussain committees, some of whose proposals are less than original. Points out economist B. Bhattacharyya of the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade: "The need for competition in sectors of the Indian economy was commented on in the sixth plan draft document."

But for all that, the most concentrated official look at exports in recent years, represented by the Kapur and Hussain reports, has been triggered off by worrisome realities. First, as a government economist points out, the international soft loan era has drawn to a close. Secondly, repayment of the International Monetary Fund loan is scheduled to begin this year. Finally, the export track record has been lacklustre, despite government protestations to the contrary. A Commerce Ministry official informed the Estimates Committee of Parliament last year that exports had grown by 4 per cent, 16 per cent and 13 per cent in 1980-81, 1981-82, and 1982-83, respectively, in the face of declining or stagnant world trade. But the World bank report notes that Bank missions "found concern among key officials that strategies, policies and institutional measures that may have worked in the past are not yielding the desired results in industrial or export growth".

Some of the rise in exports reported can be attributed to inflation and the sharp upswing in the dollar in recent years. Indian exporters who are paid in US currency for the goods they sell abroad, have earned more rupees, thus inflating export statistics expressed in rupees. Concurs an economist: "Some of the rise in exports is a monetary illusion and the figures must be deflated by 10 to 20 per cent to arrive at a truer picture of our export performance." The country's share of total global trade is under 0.5 per cent, and almost a quarter of its exports go to the socialist bloc, much of this being paid for in non-convertible currencies.

A few economists, export promotion agency officials and frontline exporters endorse the World Bank diagnosis and blame the export and industrial system for the meagre export showing. "Policy formulation and implementation have so

"Unless reports are quickly accepted they lose their relevance."

BINAY KUMAR
vice-chairman, Foreign Trade Committee, FICCI

far loaded the dice against exports. The Government made sure that domestic profits remained high and markets were protected from competition. So business had no reason to export," says an economist who works for a government agency. And Binay Kumar, chairman of Benares House, who is also vice-chairman of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's foreign FICCI trade committee, points to the drawbacks built into the export structure. "Export houses are supposed to export 10 to 20 per cent more every year to be eligible for the wide range of benefits available to them. But they funnel exports borrowing export-billed items from small manufacturers and others. There is no real addition to exports."

"The idea that liberal imports and a more open economy will lead to more efficient production is not corroborated by the Japanese experience."

DR PRABHAT PATNAIK
economist, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Few would quarrel with such diagnoses; it's the prescriptions that are questioned. Says economist Prabhat Patnaik of New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University: "The idea that liberal imports and a more open economy will lead to a more efficient production point is not corroborated by the Japanese experience." Japan had a very strict import regime in the fifties, a tight labour policy, government controls that favoured business, and a carefully planned export drive—conditions that cannot be easily duplicated here since a degree of authoritarianism would be called for. The international trade climate is much more protectionist now, and liberalising imports to create efficiency will lead to higher import bills. "The quantum of exports that would be achieved by liberalisation is questionable and the short-term cost will be too high," Patnaik adds.

Nonetheless, with fewer hassles and a heightened status for exports in the air, the business world last fortnight was buoyed by the committees' proposals as reported in the press. Explains G. Chandrakant, secretary-general of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO): "Minimising controls would mean fewer procedures and fewer opportunities for administrative hindrances." But with questions such as how many of the recommendations would meet with government approval and how quickly remain unanswered, businessmen were nevertheless keeping their fingers crossed. Observes H.S. Sandhu, chairman of Chinar Exports Pvt Ltd, a trading house whose turnover may actually go as high as Rs 60 crore this year: "Very little follow-up action is taken on such reports and officials who implement them often do so half-heartedly."

The earlier Alexander Committee report and the Tandon Committee report on exports were only partially successful in nudging the Government down the road to liberalisation, in the latter's case because it adopted extreme positions. But this time round officialdom seems bent on trying out new prescriptions for an old ailment, flak or no flak. With economists pushing for efficiency in export sectors by setting up capacities in the public sector if the private sector is unwilling to oblige, and by setting up the rate of investment in plant capacity, with those in the industry who will be squeezed by the freer imports primed to kick up a storm, a debate on the Government's new export and industrial policies can be safely predicted in the months ahead.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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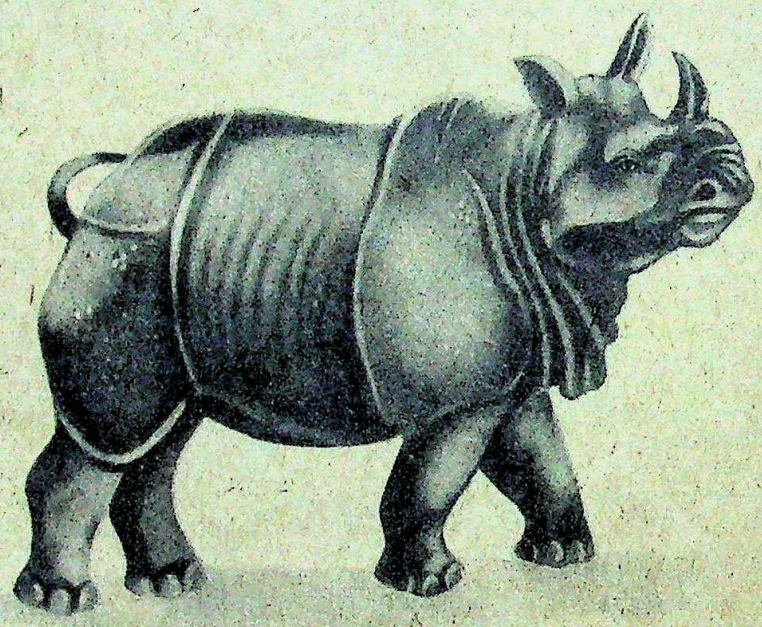

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CEMENT

A Mini Boom

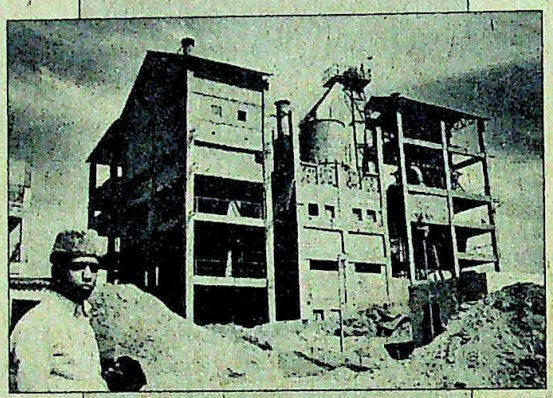
THE STILLNESS of the undulating wilderness of Hosadurga taluk in Karnataka is broken occasionally by the dull thump of a hammer mill. Puffs of smoke rise from one of the hillocks like Red Indian signals. And the smoke does indeed tell a story: of the coming of age of mini-cement plants.

The source of the activity in Hosadurga's no-man's land is Veda Cements, acknowledged in industry circles as the country's first successfully run mini-cement plant. Wiping cement dust from his white hair, Gurkar Puttabuddi, Veda's 50-year-old managing director, says modestly: "We make just about enough cement that goes out as waste from the chimneys of a large cement unit every day." But that quantity is enough to keep his company solidly in the black. Churning out an average of 50 tonnes daily, Veda has in its three-year existence produced 40,000 tonnes of cement, enough to build 11,000 two-bedroom houses. It now employs 300 people, has built up an investment reserve of Rs 30 lakh, expanded its capacity to 90 tonnes a day, and even shown a modest profit this year.

Veda heralds a belated mini-cement boom in Karnataka. Six years ago, the Janata government in New Delhi had tried hard to push the concept of mini-cement plants (with a capacity of less than 200 tonnes per day). It had extended excise concessions, tried to iron out technological problems, and in other ways pushed hard for a concept that was believed to be viable as a low-investment high-employment alternative to large plants. Mini-cement plants were supposed to be especially viable for tapping scattered limestone deposits in hilly and inaccessible areas, where cement would thus be locally available instead of having to be transported from long distances.

For a variety of reasons, the idea failed to gell. The government-owned financial institutions were not keen, and entrepreneurs were unwilling to invest in what seemed like a losing proposition. In fact, the Industrial Development Bank of India refused to provide any money to Veda Cements for over a year, and reluctantly agreed to the project on an "experimental basis". But Veda's success has changed all that.

Following close on Veda's heels was Lokapur Cements, located in the bush country of Bijapur district, 300 km from Hosadurga. Started six months after Veda, Lokapur too has turned the profit corner. And these two success stories have helped open the floodgates: three prospective entrepreneurs walk into the offices of the state government-owned Technical Consultancy Services Organisation (Tecsok) every day, wanting to start mini-cement units. Already, 132 proposed projects have been registered. And by the end of next month, three more mini-cement plants will begin production, to be followed by eight more



Gurkar Puttabuddi's mini-cement plant was considered a risky venture, but his success has heralded the current boom in mini-cement plants.

The state Mines and Geology Department is now swamped with applications for mining leases from entrepreneurs. In some areas there are more than a dozen applications for the same limestone deposit. And Movers Pvt Ltd, which set up the units for Veda and Lokapur on a turnkey basis, now has orders to set up 30 more plants all over the country. Says Movers Director T.S. Rajamani with underplayed satisfaction: "Business is good."

Jumping on to the mini-cement bandwagon are politicians, professors, civil engineers and even a marine biologist. Puttabuddi himself is a structural engineer who used to lecture in a local college of engineering. Those who have followed in his footsteps include S. Ravindra, who used to work in his family drug distribution firm, and Pratibha Patil, daughter of a state cabinet minister who preferred a mini-cement operation to garment manufacturing. Ravindra is setting up a 30-tonne plant in collaboration with six partners, while Patil has decided to invest Rs 4 crore in a 90-tonne plant.

The boom is essentially in Karnataka, which is only natural: the state has the country's largest reserves of limestone, estimated at 18 billion tonnes. But there is a rush of applications in other states as well, including Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. These four states account for more than 70 per cent of the limestone reserves in the country.

Behind the boom lie the pioneering efforts of the Cement Research Institute, which successfully demonstrated the viability of mini-cement plants by running one in Maduvathur in Tamil Nadu, using a modified version of the century-old vertical shaft kiln technology. The institute proved that mini-cement plants could be set up with a lower capital cost than large plants (Rs 652 per tonne against Rs 900 per tonne), with shorter gestation periods, greater employment potential (four people per tonne, against two in a large plant), and at a bearable cost. The production cost is estimated at Rs 315 per tonne, compared to Rs 300 for large plants, but this difference has been more than neutralised with the help of a crucial government concession.

These high prices are, of course, vital for the viability of the mini-cement plants. In fact, the Janata thrust in this direction failed essentially because of the low prices allowed then for cement. This changed with the introduction of dual pricing for cement two years ago, and the Government has in fact withdrawn the hefty excise duty concession that mini-cement plants enjoyed till March last year. In the prevailing market situation, this has made little difference, and the profitability of the operation is borne out by the rush of entrepreneurs.

The times may get more difficult towards the end of the decade, when the large additional capacities sanctioned by the Government come into operation and the demand-supply balance shifts. But at the moment, the smoke signals spell a mini-cement boom.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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'THE WIDEST DISTRIBUTION NEEDS WERE COMFORTABLY ACCOMMODATED'

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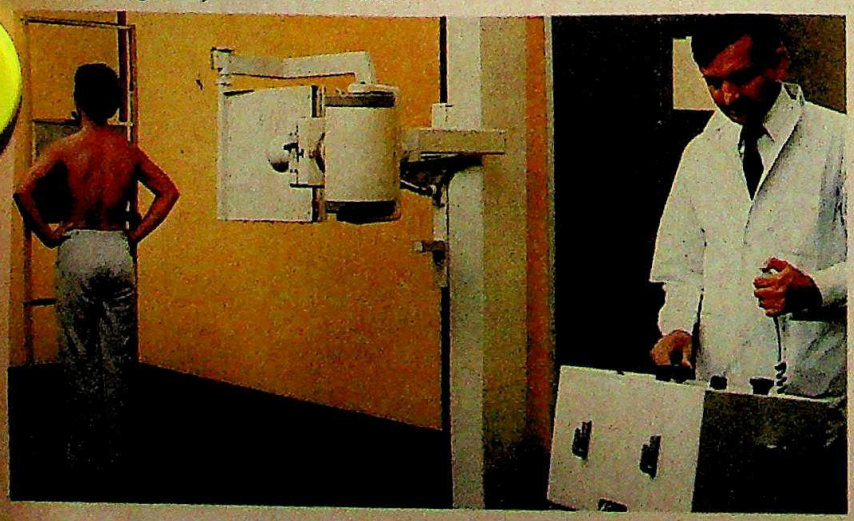

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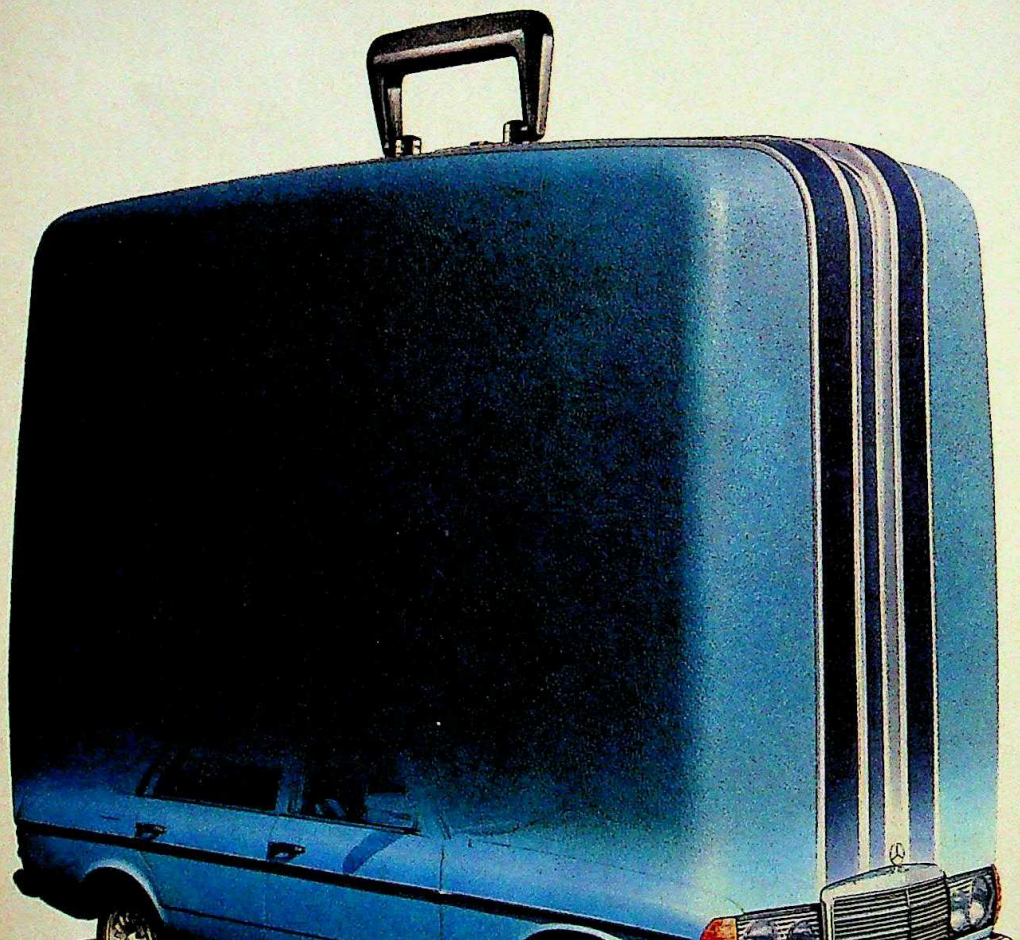

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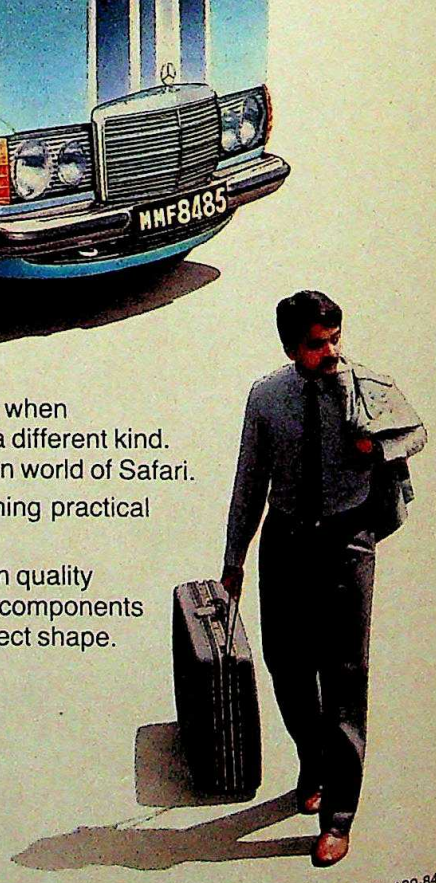

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SOFT DRINKS

Cola Pep

THERE might be fresh fizz in the Indian soft drinks market very soon: Pepsi Cola is making an entry, if the Government will allow it.

The leading American soft drink companies have been trying to penetrate the Indian market for the last year. Seven Up initially tried to strike a deal with the Modis, but nothing came of it. Coca-Cola itself has been trying to make a comeback after the company was asked to leave during the Janata Party rule, but without success so far. Now Pepsico has beaten both to the draw by striking a deal with an Indian company whose identity is being kept a closely-guarded secret. Speculation so far has centred on R.P. Goenka of the Duncan group and Voltas, but it is not yet certain which of the two is the chosen partner, or indeed whether any other company is involved.

The US soft drinks and snack foods giant, which ranks 43rd in the *Fortune* 500 list with sales of $ 8 billion (Rs 10,000 crore) last year (ahead of Coke, which ranks 48th), has already had initial exploratory talks with the Government, but a decision on allowing its entry into the country is expected to be taken at the Cabinet level.

The proposal is understood to be a complex one, tailored to deflect opposition by focusing on national priorities. Pepsico will form a new company in collaboration with its Indian partner to undertake not only the production and marketing of Pepsico's three mainline drinks (Pepsi Cola, an orange drink called Mirinda and a lime-lemon flavour called Teem) but also the export of non-traditional agro-based products from India. The US company is scouring the country for suitable export products, and has fixed on canned fruit drinks as the first possibility. It has proposed to the Government that it will undertake such exports in return for being allowed to supply imported soft drink concentrates to bottling agents, who will turn out the final product. An assurance has been given to the Government that the foreign exchange earnings on exports will be more than what is spent on importing the soft drinks concentrates, so that the country has a net foreign exchange gain on the deal.

The proposal is expected to have major political implications. The domestic soft drink manufacturers are certain to voice their opposition. On the other hand, it is argued that allowing Pepsico into India will serve to give a signal to the US Administration and American businessmen, and undo the 'damage' done by expelling Coke and IBM in 1978. The Government's decision on the Pepsico proposal will therefore have to be in essence a political one.

Two other advantages are listed in favour of the Pepsico proposal. One is that it will bring new food processing, packaging and water treatment technology into India. The other is that Pepsico's entry into the soft drinks market will not take away business from the existing manufacturers and that everyone with a presence in the industry will benefit because the total market for soft drinks will grow.

The American company's calculations show that the Indian soft drinks market is vastly under-tapped. Annual sales now total between 60 million and 80 million cases (each case has 24 bottles), which works out to two bottles per Indian per year. If the effective market (defined as those people who have the purchasing power) is assumed to be 150 million people, the per capita annual consumption is around 12 bottles. In contrast, countries like Pakistan, Egypt, Malaysia and Indonesia have a per capita consumption of 40 to 90 bottles. On the basis of this comparison, it is predicted that the Indian soft drinks market should treble in the next four to five years: Pepsico's entry into Egypt saw a doubling of soft drinks consumption, from 28 to 55 bottles.

A trebling of the market from 60 million cases annually to 180 million cases in the next five years will mean additional business worth Rs 480 crore. Most of this will go to the bottling companies, the retail agents, and to the Government (the tax revenue is expected to be over Rs 200 crore).

Whether the Government will buy these arguments remains to be seen. But the proposal will have to clear several hurdles in a number of ministries. One hurdle will be presented by the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act, under which any company with a foreign shareholding of more than 40 per cent must be in certain specified areas of activity. But the Pepsico proposal will stay clear of this because the proposed joint venture will have a foreign shareholding of less than 40 per cent. But clearance for foreign collaboration is mandatory, and it remains to be seen whether the proposal fits into the Government guidelines.

Another hurdle will be presented by the Government's policy of discouraging the use of foreign trade marks. But this is not expected to be a problem because Pepsico was in India from 1951 to 1957, and its trade marks Pepsi Cola and Mirinda are already registered in India. However, the lime-lemon flavour Teem is not registered in India, and will therefore have to clear this hurdle.

Finally, there could be problems caused by the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act if a large Indian business house is involved, and by the industrial licensing policy. Getting past these will depend on the Government's assessment of the importance of sending a signal to international business.

Whichever way the decision goes, the issue is bound to hit the headlines in the world's financial press, in the same manner as Coke's ouster did seven years ago. And the trade-off will almost certainly be between the perceived advantages of sending a positive signal abroad and facing the storm of protest that is inevitable within the country if the Government is seen as promoting junk food. Pepsi Cola is known to be both sweeter and fizzier than Coke, and the big question now is whether this will be a sweet deal or a proposal without any fizz in it.

—T.N.NINAN

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NATIONAL SILICON FACILITY

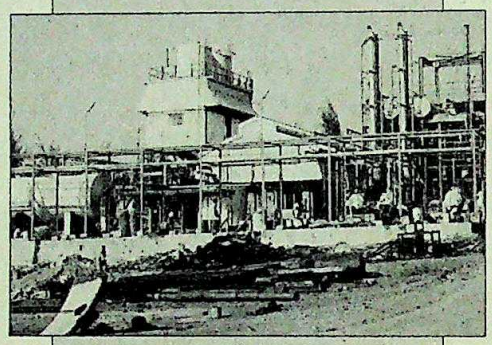
Messy Controversy

THE PAPERS had been signed, the decision taken, and the deal clinched. Everything about the collaboration with Hemlock Semiconductors Inc suggested that the American company would help the Government set up the Rs 92 crore National Silicon Facility (NSF)—a project designed to produce 200 tonnes annually of the one key material required for the electronics and solar energy programmes: silicon.

Suddenly, however, everything was wide open. Last month, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ordered a review of the collaboration decision on the ground that it was too expensive, and wanted a second look at whether Indian scientists could deliver the goods on their own. That split the country's scientific establishment down the middle, while Hemlock's East German rivals quickly reached Delhi for fresh negotiations. The German offer, though cheaper than Hemlock's, had been rejected earlier because it came too late in the day. But last month's unexpected developments now offered them a fresh chance to clinch a prestigious contract.

The Germans, however, figured only on the periphery of what had blossomed into a messy controversy, with the two main options being the Hemlock collaboration and a wholly indigenous effort that would build on the work already done by the Bangalore-based Indian Institute of Science and Mettur Chemicals, and by the National Chemical Laboratory in Pune.

The domestic option had been rejected by an official committee last year (INDIA TODAY, May 31, 1984) as being unproven, but this situation changed a couple of months ago when Mettur Chemicals submitted to the department of electronics some polysilicon that it had produced. Subsequent tests showed that the material met the required quality and purity specifications. This was followed up by some deft lobbying by the director of the Indian Institute of Science, C.N.R. Rao (awarded the Padma Vibhushan on Republic Day) and by A.R.Vasudeva Murthy, who headed the research team at the Institute. The Government's department of non-conventional energy resources, which is in charge of the solar energy programme and which therefore will be the most important user of the silicon produced by the National Silicon Facility, also put in a strong word against the Hemlock collaboration. The department argued that the Hemlock technology would be outdated quickly, once a cheaper method using the amorphous silicon technology was fully developed.



The Mettur Chemicals plant: indigenous claimant

Rajiv Gandhi questioned the wisdom of investing Rs 92 crore in the project. Also, Mettur Chemicals already had a small plant that could be scaled up with a little investment.

Rajiv Gandhi himself is believed to have questioned the wisdom of investing Rs 92 crore in a project whose initial output would be worth no more than a few crores of rupees annually. Those opposed to the Hemlock deal argued that the interest on Rs 92 crore could be used to import and stockpile all the silicon that the country would need for the next few years, till the amorphous silicon technology became fully developed. Also, Mettur Chemicals already had a two-tonne pilot plant that could be scaled up to 20 tonnes with a relatively small investment of Rs 9 crore. Until the solar energy programme takes off (there is uncertainty as to when this will happen), this capacity would be large enough to meet the full domestic demand.

If all these arguments made sense, a number of heavyweights in the scientific establishment continued to push for the Hemlock collaboration. S.Varadarajan, director-general of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), who headed a new team asked to study the options, was believed to be in favour of Hemlock, though when asked by INDIA TODAY he declined to comment. Also, the director of the National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) in Pune wrote to Varadarajan saying that his scientists were not in a position to deliver the goods. But insiders said that this verdict was at least partly influenced by NCL's in-house politics.

The arguments put forward by those in favour of staying with Hemlock were several: it would not be easy to stockpile imported silicon for the simple reason that its export was regulated by the US government, and most sellers were in any case fully booked; the domestic option was of dubious merit because both the Bangalore and Pune scientists had a long way to go before their work was completed; and the amorphous silicon technology would not sweep aside the Hemlock technology for a long time to come.

With the controversy threatening to become a major issue concerning the importance attached to domestic work in research and development, the several leading actors in the drama seemed to be taking entrenched positions and extreme stances. Said a well informed and impartial observer of the scene: "This has become a political issue, and the relevant questions are not being debated dispassionately. I think the final outcome will really depend on who has more influence in the Government."

Some of the prime minister's aides, meanwhile, were working on the possibility of pooling the entire national expertise in polysilicon by forming a new outfit that would then be given charge of producing not just polysilicon but also other vital raw materials required by the electronics industry. If necessary, the new team would rope in non-resident Indian experts, as had been done in the setting up of the Centre for Development of Telematics. The feasibility of the proposal was being worked out last fortnight, and unless Varadarajan was able to register his strong support for the Hemlock option, it seemed likely that the Government would ultimately go for the domestic option.

—T.N.NINAN

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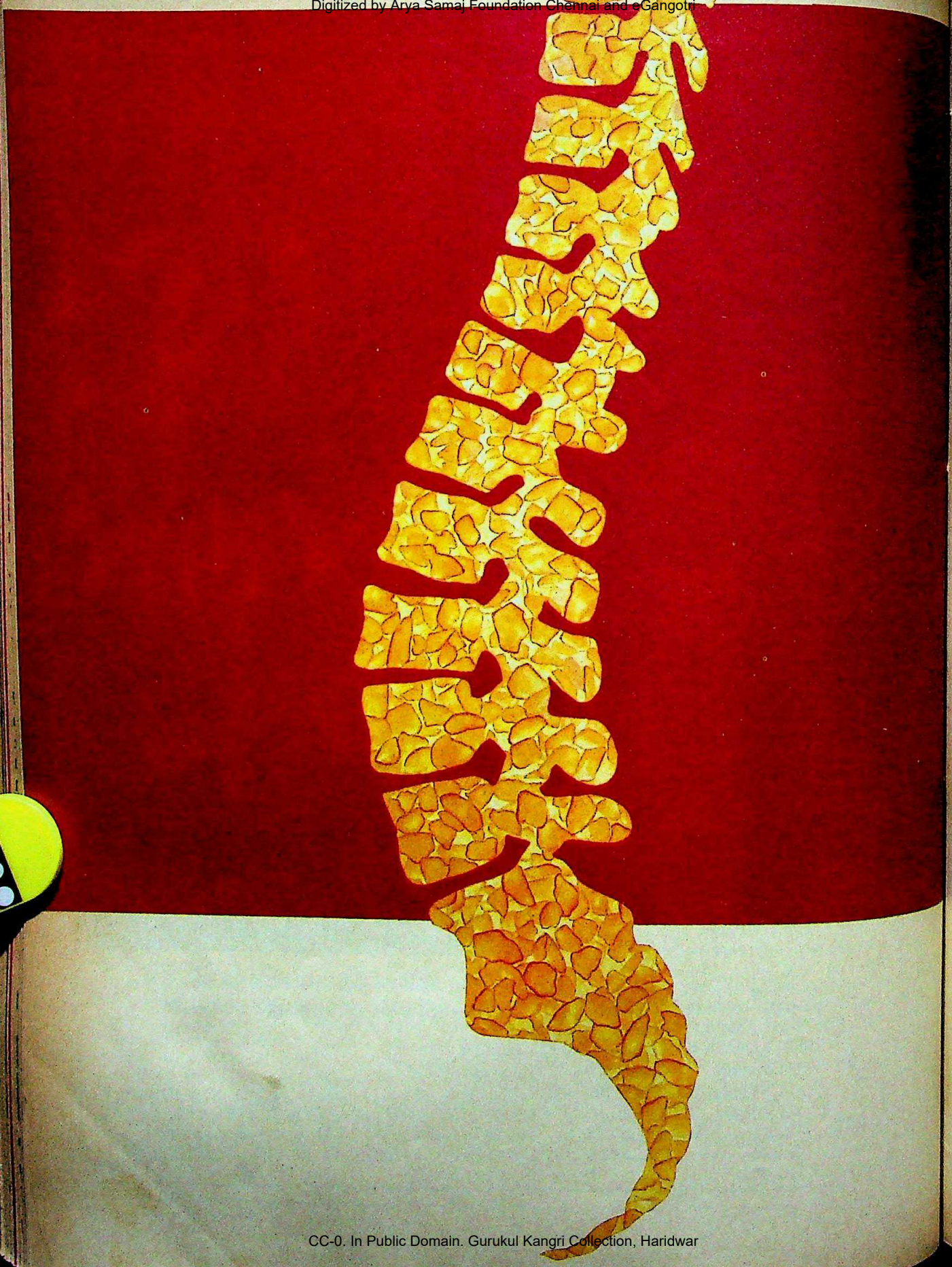

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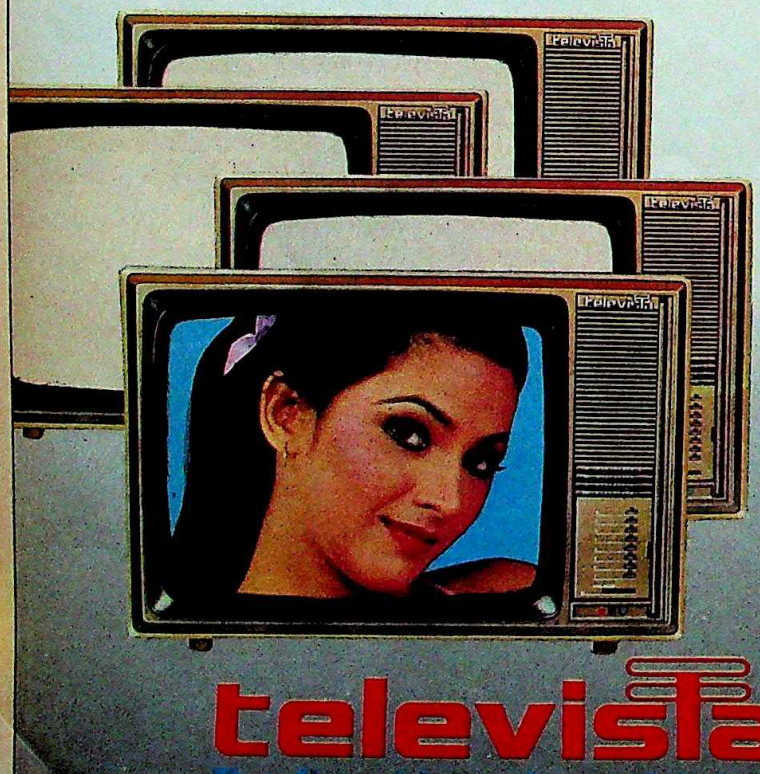

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GROFED

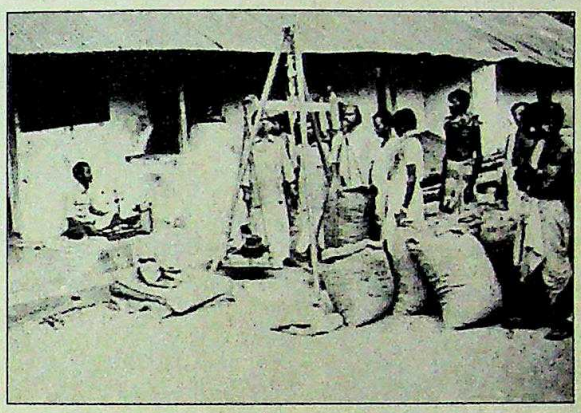
Uphill Battle

CHALLENGES are a temptation that the intrepid milkman of Anand, Dr Verghese Kurien, just can't seem to resist. Ever since he captured the milk industry in Gujarat and brought it into the cooperative fold with the help of Operation Flood, he has been looking for new worlds to conquer. Six years ago, he thought he had found one in the mammoth edible oils industry which was—and is—under the constricting control of a group of powerful traders. "I will take on all the oil kings in Saurashtra, stop fluctuations in oil prices and ensure that groundnut farmers rule the roost," he had vowed. But that is one promise he now finds hard to keep.

Kurien's Gujarat Cooperative Oilseed Growers Federation (GCOGF), also known as Grofed, has undoubtedly made something of a beginning. It has set up massive oil milling plants in the state at Jamnagar, Junagadh, Vapi, Dissa, Bhavnagar and Jagudan—all with up-to-date equipment to give them an edge over the tired and run-down mills owned by private millowners who have so far been raking in fantastic profits. In fact the project has gone as far afield as Madhya Pradesh, where Kurien's energetic promotion of soyabean cultivation has enabled farmers to get, for the first time, a good price for their crops this year. The movement is catching on in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh as well, due to the efforts of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) of which Kurien is the chairman.

The new awareness among the farmers and the better prices offered by the cooperative have forced the middlemen and traders to raise their offers too. This has drastically cut into the profits of the middlemen. Mukesh Shah, a major trader of edible oils in Bhavnagar, says: "In the long run, Grofed may be able to wipe us out. They have the resources to grow." He points out a trifle bitterly: "Just one mill of the federation can afford to buy 40 trucks of groundnut a day. How many of us will be able to do that?" And Haroon Vali Mohammed, who runs a small mill says: "This business has no attraction any more. Our profits have come down from Rs 4 a tin to Re 1." It is no surprise that in the past five years, the number of oil mills functioning in Saurashtra has fallen from 1,300 to about 850.

The farmers are jubilant, though. "Till now we were forced to accept prices set by the trader. Now farmers will dictate the prices," Says Popatbhai Patel, a farmer. The idea of a cooperative is catching on surely, if slowly. Now there are over 1,100 societies of farmers who grow groundnut, and it has an impressive 93,228 members spread over 1,484 villages. The popularity and presence of Grofed are thus escalating—in 1979-80, it managed to procure 3,888 metric tonnes of groundnut, in 1983-84 the figure jumped to 1.12 lakh metric tonnes, which included groundnut, soyabean, rapeseed and mustard.



Farmers selling their produce and (below) Kurien: cautious optimism

But that's not the whole picture. Grofed's plants, however sophisticated, are running below capacity because the federation is simply not geared to collect enough produce, and neither are the farmers giving them all they have. As a result, of the total 14 lakh tonnes of groundnut produced this year, Grofed managed to corner just 64,000 tonnes. If it is to effectively help farmers command their prices, Grofed would have to bag at least 20 per cent of the total produce in the market. This does not seem possible for another 10 years.

Even otherwise, Grofed has to contend with a powerful cartel: the entire Rs 500-crore groundnut oilseed business, for instance, is controlled by just 16 families. A well-oiled communication network linking key markets like Bombay and Calcutta ensures price changes simultaneously all over the country. Merchants have traditionally resorted to such tactics as flooding the market with crushed groundnut during the harvest to deflate prices, then buying up the oilseed at lower prices and completing the cycle with another spell of hoarding to create a bigger demand so that the price of oil increases. A Bhavnagar oil merchant gloats brazenly: "We have many trump cards like evasion of excise, tax and adulteration which Kurien does not have".

Indeed, adulteration threatens to be one of the biggest headaches for Grofed. In the past three years, groundnut oil has been increasingly adulterated with cheaper substitutes like palm oil, soyabean oil and castor oil. Acknowledging that "Kiran", marketed by Grofed, is the purest groundnut oil in the market, defensive millers nevertheless justify their lapses by saying that adulteration has become inevitable ever since the Government began to levy heavy taxes on them and brought them under the purview of the Essential Commodities Act.

Fortunately for Grofed, it is exempt from the Act because it is a cooperative institution. As for adulteration, NDDB's tests showed that 44 per cent of refined groundnut oil and 81.5 per cent of groundnut oil taken from the market is adulterated. However, there has been no consistent governmental support to Grofed— in Tamil Nadu, for instance, the state Government has not turned over even one oil mill to NDDB.

Kurien faces yet another problem: funds. Grofed has been able to make ends meet so far by selling soyabean and rapeseed oil gifted by the US and Canada. In the past four years, it has been able to make Rs 136 crore from such sales. But the Reagan Administration in its second term plans to slash expenditure on food aid to make up part of the $200 billion budget deficit. Though Cooperative League of US has promised to give 1.6 lakh tonnes and its Canadian counterpart has offered crude rapeseed

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oil worth Canadian $ 75 million (Rs 70 crore) it might not be enough. An evaluation team of the Cooperative League said another 37,000 tonnes of oil would have to be gifted if Kurien's project is to make any impact. Kurien himself acknowledges that this could be a problem. And in any case the American aid ends in another three years. But Kurien is optimistic. "By that time," he says, "we would have set up enough processing facilities on our own."

However, what Kurien has going for him is the increasing popularity of the cooperative movement. "More and more of us will join the cooperative as it is the only way to keep traders and millers out," says Kalyan Patel, a groundnut farmer. This has directly affected millowners. Says Chandrakant Panjwani, owner of the Shri Rajeshwari Oil Mills in Bhavnagar: "My turnover has come down from Rs 1 crore to Rs 25 lakh. All of us in this business will have to think of diversifying."

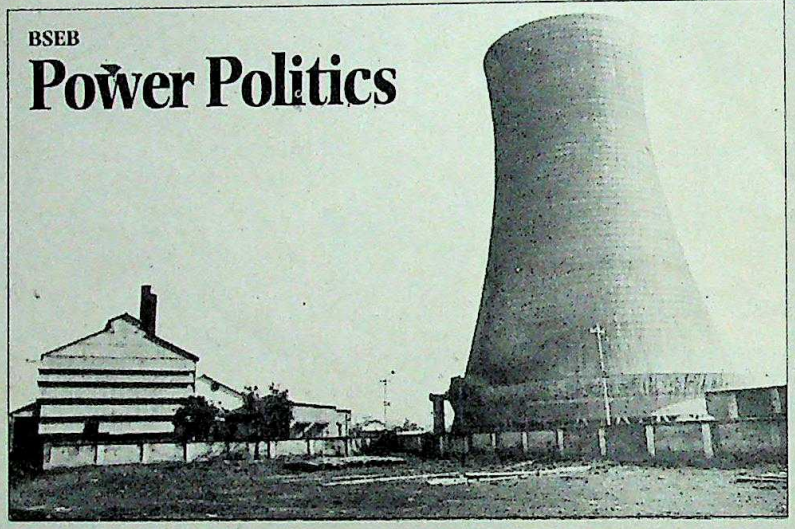
Kurien's own aims for Grofed are modest. "If we can just stop our import bill from rising and succeed in levelling our imports, it will be a major achievement," he says. Realism of this kind and the do-or-die spirit at Anand, the nerve-centre of NDDB and Grofed activity, are the real strengths. But even then, Kurien will find the road to success uphill all the way.

—RAMESH MENON in Bhavnagar and Rajkot

K.M. KISHAN

BSEB

Power Politics



The closed Karbigahiya plant

SIX MEGAWATTS of power is not very much to make a noise about, and the closure of a plant which supplies that would not normally hit the headlines. But when the small Karbigahiya plant in Patna shut down last October, it triggered shock waves that ended up shaking the state's entire power establishment. Last fortnight, the influential Minister of State for Power at the Centre, Arun Nehru, stepped into the act following a series of representations from workers and engineers of the Bihar State Electricity Board (BSEB), and the state Government was forced to revamp the BSEB ousting well-entrenched and powerful officials. But the reshuffle notification itself was held in abeyance for a week, during which the old board hurriedly held a closed door session to order the transfer of no fewer than 150 engineers. At least 65 of them belonged to one particular caste.

While this series of events hit the headlines in the local press, with allegations being made about caste-based politics coming to the fore, the state government was also forced to order a major review of the state's power performance, resulting in the revelation that the BSEB had generated only 1,964 million units of electricity between April and December, against the target of 2,964 million units.

Much of the action revolved around the controversial personage of D.P. Singh, who was not only the most powerful member of the BSEB holding charge of the crucial portfolios of distribution, purchase and rural electrification among others, but also a close relative of Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh. Singh had been made a member of the board superseding four chief engineers, essentially because he had the open support of the powerful Rajput lobby in the state's caste-based politics. And in the face-off that resulted in the BSEB, its Chairman N.Nagmani had gone on leave in disgust. This resulted in Abhimanu Singh, an IAS officer, holding dual charge as power commissioner and as chairman. Singh, meanwhile had become the de facto chairman, and he was given extensions after he reached his normal retirement age last April.

Matters came to a head with the unexpected closure of the Karbigahiya plant last October. Although the plant itself is tiny, it was crucial because it supplied electricity to local hospitals, the Patna airport and railway station, to All India Radio and other key facilities. Enquiries after the closure showed that the plant had been continued in operation despite maintenance being overdue. Contracts for maintenance work had been held up by Singh despite three tenders being floated. And although the BSEB chairman was warned that the plant might have to be shut down, endangering critical organisations in the city, no action was taken. A post-mortem report said "the closure of the plant is a result of undue interference".

That was the last nail in Singh's coffin. Various memoranda concerning his activities had started reaching Delhi, which finally stepped into the act to order a reshuffle of the board.

The review of the board's functioning that has since been ordered has shown that, apart from power generation being well below the target, several power projects in the state are years behind schedule, that large quantities of wires have been stolen, and that a number of transformers have been burnt out. Faced with the inevitable public outcry, the state Government has responded with quick announcements about locating a super-thermal power station as well as an atomic power plant in the state. But there is little doubt that, despite Singh's ouster and the review of the BSEB's functioning that has been ordered, power politics will continue to periodically raise its ugly head in the state.

—FARZAND AHMED

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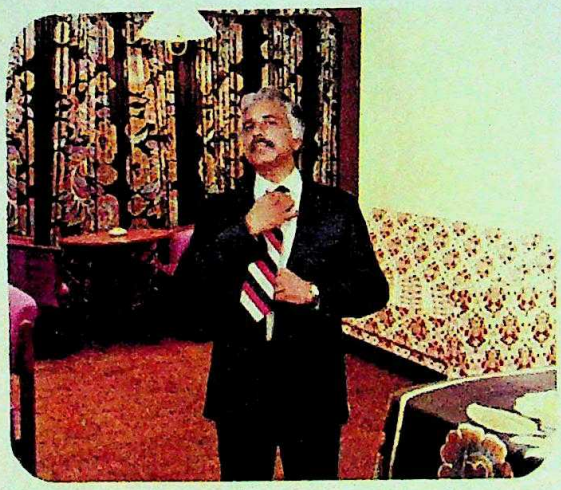

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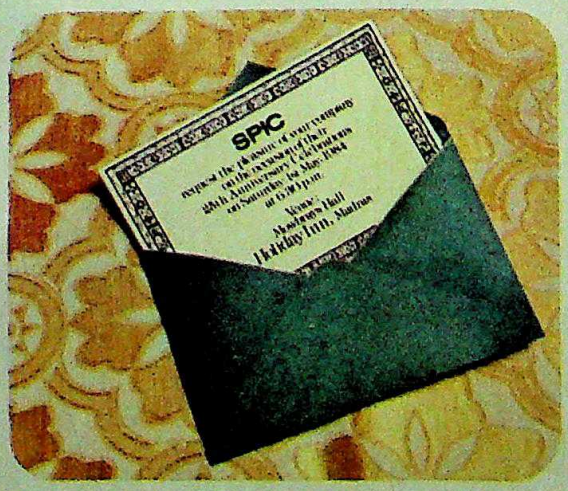

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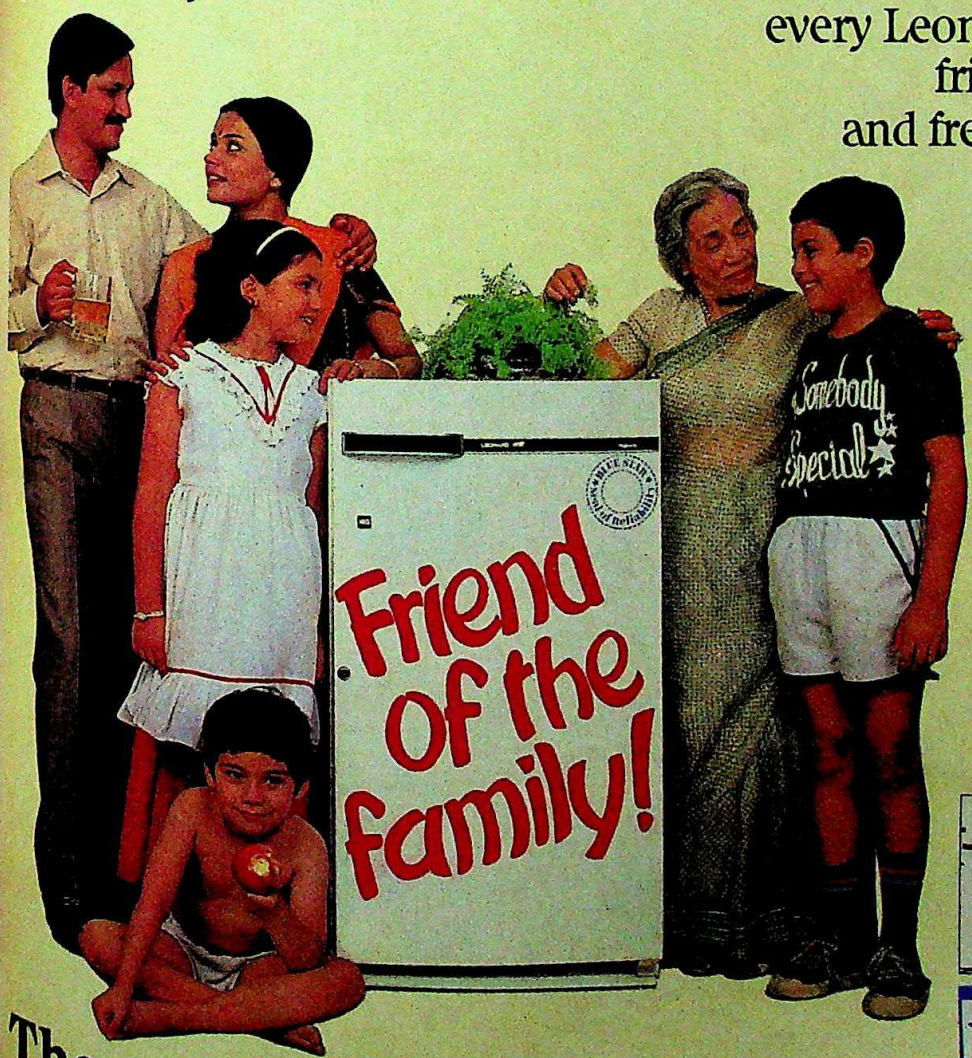

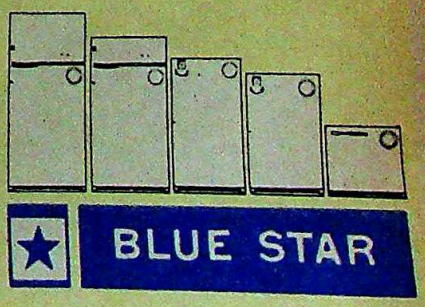

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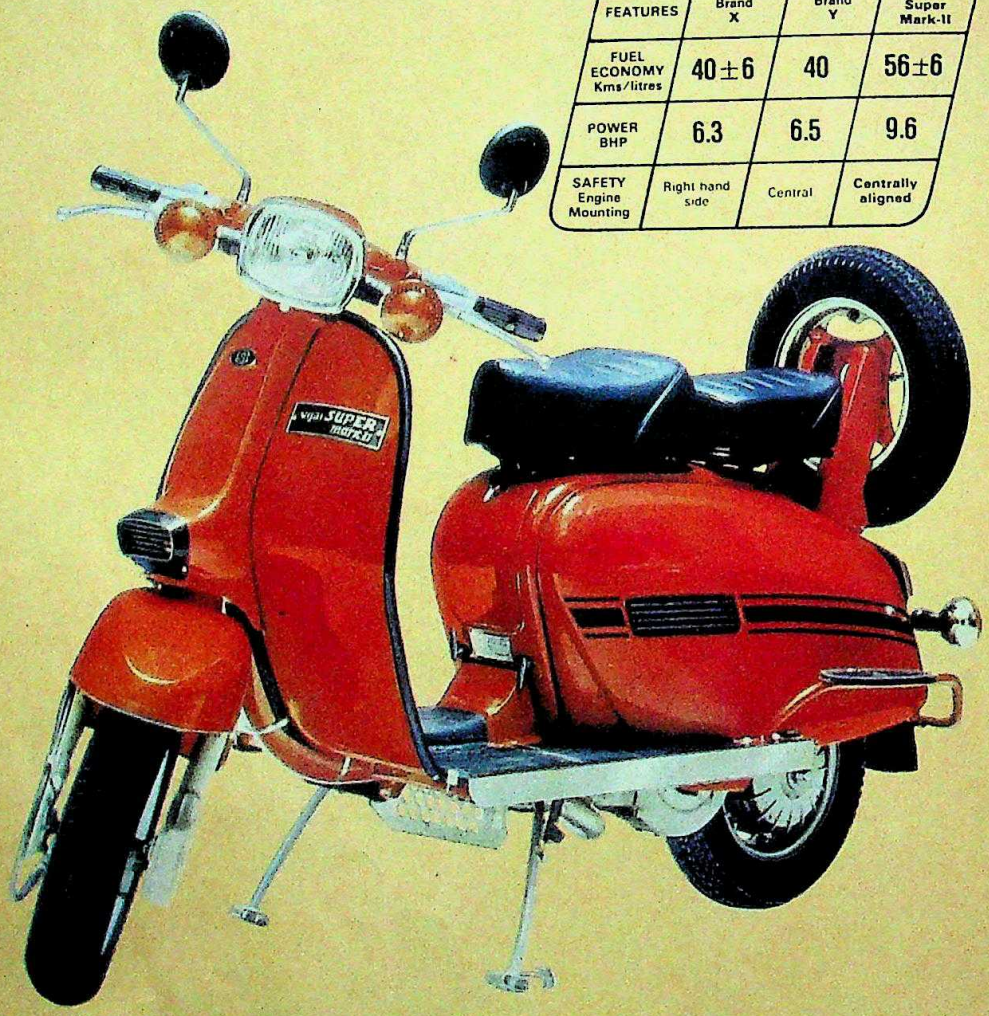
THE NEW

Vijai SUPER mark II

Scooters India Limited

There's no 150 cc scooter to match it for ECONOMY POWER SAFETY.

FEATURES	Brand X	Brand Y	Vijai Super Mark-II
FUEL ECONOMY Kms/litres	40±6	40	56±6
POWER BHP	6.3	6.5	9.6
SAFETY Engine Mounting	Right hand side	Central	Centrally aligned



Its here. New Vijai Super Mark-II. The latest model from Scooters India Limited — successors to Innocenti of Italy. Pioneers in scooter manufacture. Vijai Super. The winner of Grand Prix in India and abroad.

Super Economy: 56±6 kms per litre

A new variable venturi carburettor, improved cylinder design, increased compression ratio and modified gear ratio impart optimum fuel economy. **SAVING FUEL.**

Super Power: 9.6 BHP

Goes from 0 to 60 kms in 12.75 seconds flat. Negotiates gradients with ease. And keeps ahead of others.

Super Safety

Centrally mounted engine, low centre of gravity and wider wheel base make it safer even at high speeds, on curves with load

Super Durability

Modified material composition of cylinder, chrome plated piston rings and the use of solid lubricant enhance engine life. That is why it carries a warranty of 15 months or 10,000 kms (whichever is earlier) — the longest on any two wheeler.

It undergoes over 1,000 quality checks before it leaves the factory.

Vijai Super Mark-II. Distributed and serviced countrywide through 225 outlets.

Exported to many technologically advanced countries including Italy — its birth place.

THE NEW

Vijai SUPER mark II

The best deal on wheels

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SYNTHETIC FIBRES

Wearing Thin

THE PRE-BUDGET season is a time for petitions to the decision-makers in Delhi, and few have been more assiduous this time than the synthetic fibre boys. Showering everybody with petitions, warnings and advice, the nylon fibre industry in particular has raised the spectre of a number of companies going under unless the Government takes quick, corrective steps.

That a problem exists cannot be denied. Hemmed in on one side by high duties on both imported raw materials and the finished goods, and squeezed on the other by a liberal policy that allows unrestricted imports of the fibre, industry spokesmen say that companies are losing money—and because of lopsided government policy. The profits of Nirlon Synthetic Fibres and Chemicals, which produces nearly a sixth of the country's nylon filament yarn, have dipped from Rs 25.4 crore in 1982-83 to Rs 10.9 crore in 1983-84, despite sales climbing from Rs 132 crore to Rs 147 crore in the same period.

It can be argued that the earlier profit level was too high in relation to sales, and that greater competition through imports was necessary. But most companies are now incurring cash losses on their sales, with the prices of both nylon filament yarn and nylon tyre cord falling short of the break-even point by Rs 10 per kg. There is a demand recession, inventories have trebled in the last two years, and there is increasing competition from polyester yarn. Complains P.N. Maitra, secretary-general of the Association of Synthetic Fibre Industry: "Most of the plants are very old and working with labour-intensive, conventional machinery, and uneconomic capacities. It is neither possible to pass the increased burden on to the consumer, nor to absorb it."

Pointing all this out, the industry has asked for concessions from the government. These are:

► Reduction in the customs duty on caprolactum, the basic raw material, from 90 per cent to 25 per cent, the decanalising of imports and the abolition of the excise duty of 15.75 per cent on domestic production.

► Nylon filament yarn should be taken off the open general licence (OGL) for imports, which should be canalised and the customs duty raised sharply.

► The duty differential between nylon and polyester should be maintained at Rs 20 per kg.

► Since the industry association represents companies manufacturing both nylon and polyester yarn, it has also asked for a series of concessions for the polyester industry, including a reduction in the duty on the two basic raw materials DMT and TPA from 140 per cent to 25 per cent, and the canalisation of finished product imports (on which a higher customs duty should be charged) while domestic duties should be reduced.

"Polyester is taxed more heavily than nylon, but this talk of a war between us and them is silly".

KAPAL MEHRA
chairman, Orkay Silk Mills

"We get raw materials in erratic surges or nothing at all. So we get hungry one month and indigestion the next."

ASHOK GARWARE
vice-chairman and managing director, Garware Nylon

But these demands have opened up a fresh war front, with the nylon and polyester manufacturers squabbling over the question of preferential tax treatment for nylon. Within the association, there was a tussle over the joint charter of demands. The polyester representatives said that they were being taxed more than nylon, and that parity should be restored. The nylon boys countered that this would only result in polyester swamping nylon. However neither side is fully correct. For though polyester is taxed more than nylon, it continues to make profits unlike nylon. Market forecasts show there is room for both. As Kapal Mehra of Orkay Silk Mills argued, "Polyester is taxed more heavily than nylon, but this talk of a war between us and them is silly."

Even the list of demands sounds like the familiar industry litany. There is also little doubt that the protest over imports has little meaning. Imports of nylon filament yarn dropped from 4,464 tonnes in 1981-82 to no more than 1,800 tonnes last year, while domestic production has risen from 23,136 tonnes to 30,365 tonnes. Similarly with polyester.

However, the nylon sector is in a bit of a mess. To keep going the current production levels of nylon yarn and tyre cord, the industry needs 68,000 tonnes of caprolactum, of which 75 per cent has to be imported because the sole domestic producer, the Gujarat State Fertiliser Corporation, makes only 16,000 tonnes. But rising prices abroad and an increasingly muscular dollar have boosted the imported cost from Rs 18,000 per tonne three years ago to Rs 40,000 today. The industry argument is that this can be at least partly remedied by stopping the canalisation of imports through the State Trading Corporation(STC). Its very presence as the sole buyer has led to what one manufacturer calls "cartelisation" of the five or six sellers abroad. Its service fee of 7.5 per cent "for sending a few cables" is another cause for complaint, as is its practice of shopping on a quarterly basis. Says Ashok Garware, vice-chairman and managing director of Garware Nylons: "The industry consumes 5,000-odd tonnes of caprolactum a month. But "we get raw material in erratic surges of 10,000 tonnes or nothing at all. So we get hungry one month and indigestion the next. This also means large costly inventories." The polyester industry faces similar problems.

But while the battle in Delhi continues, the skirmishes in Bombay are no less fierce. Many of the nylon producers, for instance, have been trying to diversify into polyester, but counter-lobbying has denied them licences or permitted only very limited capacities. And the scene last fortnight of a divided industry fighting battles within its borders while at the same time trying to get a hearing in Delhi suggested that the nylon industry's case might go by default.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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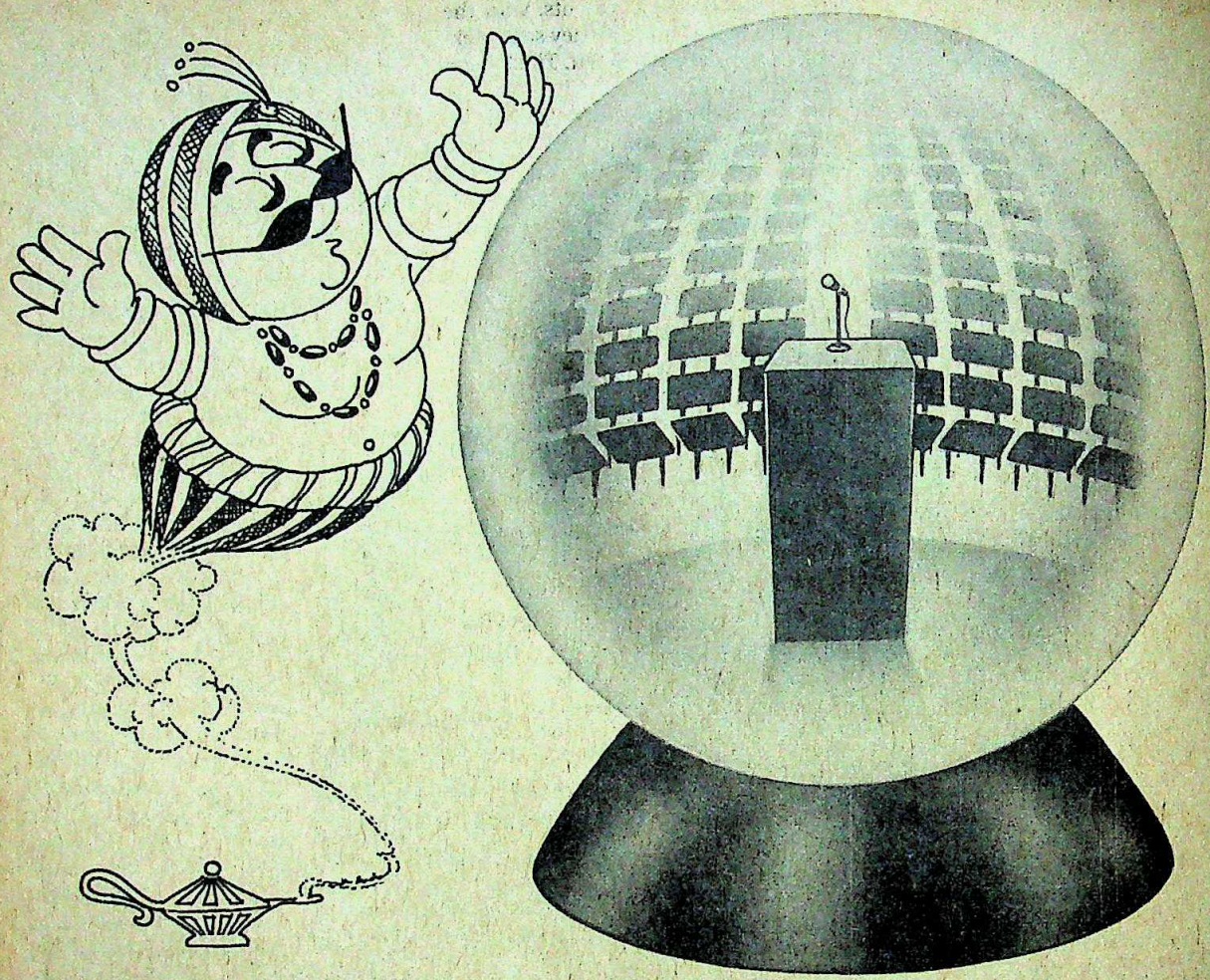

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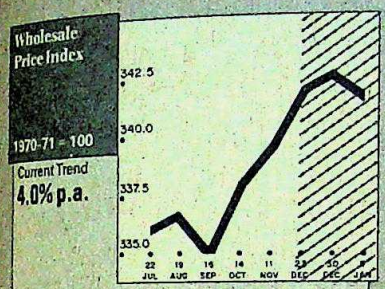
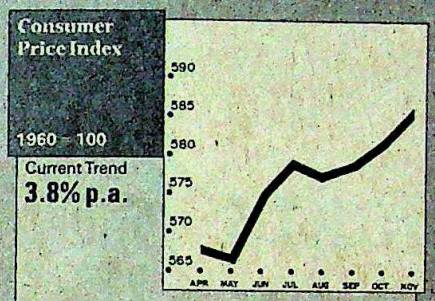
CONSUMER and wholesale prices recorded contradictory movements, with the former speeding up sharply and the latter dropping marginally. Money supply expansion showed signs of braking and bank credit to firms was down. The foreign trade gap has widened nominally.

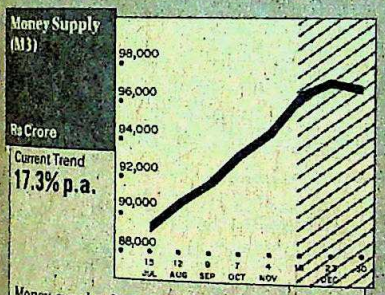
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months' data to which a regression is fitted.



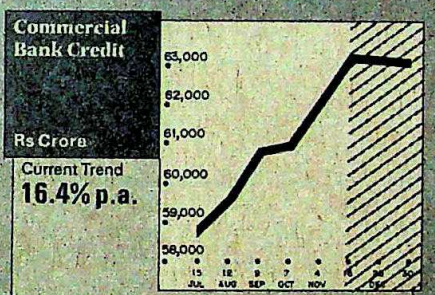
Wholesale prices dropped marginally by 0.1 per cent last fortnight mainly due to a fall in primary products and minerals.



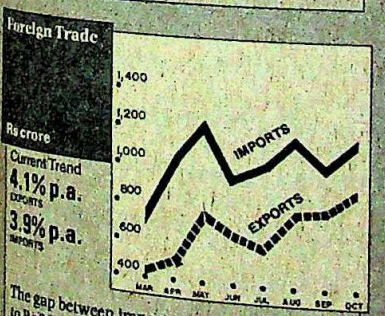
Consumer prices speeded up in November to record a 0.7 per cent increase, more than double the trend rate of growth.



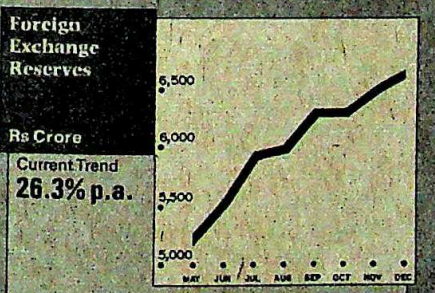
Money supply slowed down last fortnight expanding only 0.4 per cent, due to a fall in RBI credit to the Government and bank credit to firms.



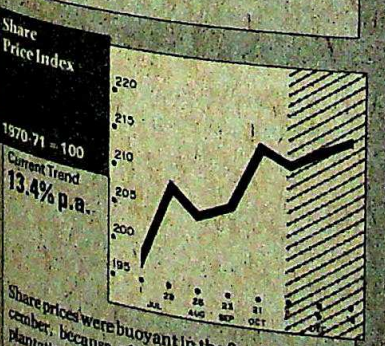
Bank credit to firms was down marginally by 0.3 per cent last fortnight after several weeks of uninterrupted increase.



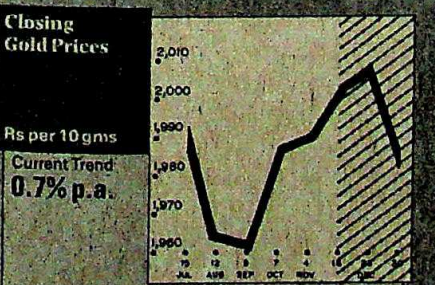
The gap between imports and exports widened to Rs 258 crore in October, increasing by about Rs 32 crore in a month.



Foreign exchange reserves were up 2.7 per cent last month, well above the long term trend rate of growth.



Share prices were buoyant in the first half of December, because of bullish tendencies in tea plantation and transport equipment securities.



Bullion prices declined nearly 1 per cent last fortnight in keeping with, but sharper than the long term downward trend.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with highest inflation in December, 1984

	% Growth
Coir Yarn	12.77
Oranges	11.44
Chillies	9.57
Urad	6.38
Jute Textiles	6.32
Turmeric	4.87
Meat	3.86
Groundnut Seeds	3.42
Broilers	3.28
Gur	3.26
Masoor	3.03
Tapioca	2.69
Artificial Yarn	2.34
Gram	2.30
Rubber	2.11
Hides Raw	2.01
Copra	1.85
Solvent Extracted Oil	1.82
Coffee	1.61
Moong	1.53
Vanaspati	1.37
Aviation Spirit	1.17
Polythene Moulding Power	1.12
Transformers	1.12
Petrol	1.11
Coal	1.09
Milk	1.09
Soda Ash	1.03
Bolts & Nuts	0.98
Tobacco Raw	0.98
Diesel	0.97
Atta	0.97
Tubes	0.95
Groundnut Oil Cake	0.94
Pig Iron	0.92
Rails	0.90
Cycles	0.90
Coir Fibre	0.85
Aluminium	0.85
Industrial Instruments	0.83
Eggs	0.82
Rice	0.82
Lubricating Oil	0.81
Tyres	0.77
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	0.75
Machine Tools	0.75
Camel Black	0.67
Pet. Crude & Natural Gas	0.65
Ceramic Tiles	0.65

Of 139 important series considered, 73 with a weight of 49.8 accelerated, while 66 with a weight of 36.8 decelerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1984	1983
Coal Thousand Tonnes, December	14145	13998
Saleable Steel Thousand Tonnes, December	648.8	602.3
Cement Thousand Tonnes, December	2558	2516
Electricity Generated Million Kwh, December	14006	12530
Call Money Rate Percent, December	10.00	8.95

—Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP, ICIM

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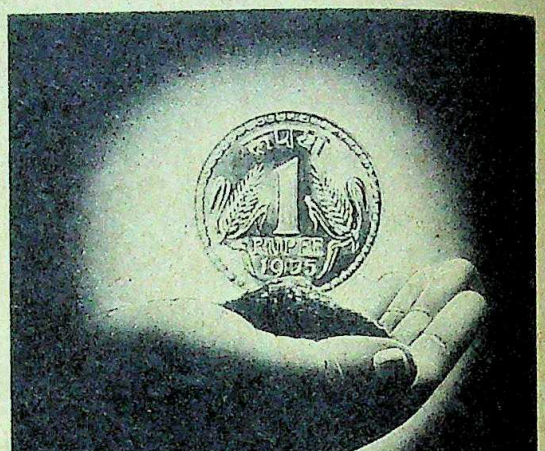
Where sophisticated technology in a priority sector ensures evergrowing demand and bumper yields

VARINDER AGRO CHEMICALS LIMITED

a fertile investment opportunity



An assured, ever growing demand

The project, in a priority sector, is fast coming up near Barnala in Punjab . . . in a region where the current and the projected fertilizer demand is the highest in the country . . . ensuring a ready and growing market.

Self-sufficiency in power

The significant feature of near-total captive power generation will help the Company reduce production costs, ensure continuous operations and maximise capacity utilization.

Capacity and Capital

Going into production in early 1985, the project, being set up with assistance from PSIDC at a total estimated cost of Rs. Rs. 660 lacs, will initially manufacture 200 tonnes of Granulated Single Super Phosphate and 100 tonnes of Sulphuric Acid per day.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

* High priority fertilizer project in the richest agricultural area.
* Uninterrupted and low cost power supply-a captive power plant to recycle the waste heat.
* Ideal location. Consumption of chemical fertilizer in the project area being the highest in the country.
* Assured and growing market–sizeable orders already in hand.
* Project completion without time overrun; without cost overrun.
* Excellent track record of promoters in the fertilizer trade for over 2 decades.
* Board consisting of eminent professionals and technocrats.
* No gestation period. First phase of commercial production already started.
* Income Tax benefits under Section 80CC, 80L & 80M and Wealth Tax exemption for 5 years.
* Handsome return assured on account of the Government formula for subsidizing superphosphate plants.
* Easy liquidity; shares to be listed on Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad and Ludhiana Stock Exchanges.

Issue Managed By
STATE BANK OF INDIA
Merchant Banking Division

of growing interest to investors

VARINDER AGRO CHEMICALS LIMITED

Regd. Office: 85 Industrial Area 'A'
Post Box 339 Ludhiana-141003

Issue opens

For Non-Resident Indians on
11th February 1985

For Indian Public and Agriculturists on
18th February 1985

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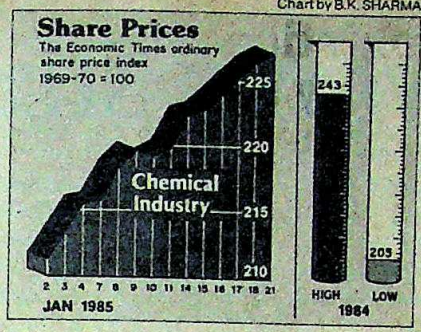
THE MARKETS

Budget Doubts

WHEN the new Government took over, the stock exchanges were full of people tossing their hats in the air but they were apparently tossing them too soon. There are still some doubts about the budget timetable, whether the Government should come forward with a proper budget next month or just a vote-on-account. None of Rajiv Gandhi's ministers has spoken out so far but it is generally felt that the Government will have an 'open' approach to problems and will not be unduly bothered by ideological hangovers from the past. The Government is after all writing on a clean slate. But what it will write is anybody's guess.

Things will not be clear until the planners have decided what to do with the plan draft which the departing members of the commission have left behind. There is some talk about the crunch and fears have been expressed that the plan size may have to be cut down to make do with whatever is available. This is not as bad as it sounds. A small plan means more money with the taxpayer and therefore more money in the stock-market. But a smaller plan may also mean lower rate of growth.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Cement shares have dipped as cement prices in the open market are apparently coming down following what is said to be a momentary glut. Steel prices, on the other hand, are edging upwards on rumours that a price hike across the board is on the cards. Even textile shares have suddenly come to life following the setting up of an expert committee to look into its affairs. In the meantime, the Government has promptly raised the import duty on viscose staple fibre, which seems to have impressed the market. The next industry for closer attention may be drugs and pharmaceuticals which is perhaps the most highly controlled industry in the country. There are reports that some reliefs are on the way and investors would be well advised to add some drug companies to their portfolios.

Engineering shares also deserve a second look and there are signs that better things are on the way. Usha Martin, which makes wire ropes, has picked up 30 per cent in a couple of weeks and Peico, which is not exactly an engineering company, nearly as much. Those who are always looking for something special might have a look at companies specialising in anti-pollution equipment — Hindustan Dorr-Oliver is one of them — for the Government seems to be serious about its plan to cleanse the Ganga and the new board is going to spend something like Rs 50 crore next year. The Bhopal tragedy seems to have alerted the powers that be into looking into similar traps elsewhere, including a large number of fertiliser companies, which should make pollution a good business, even if it means capitalising on someone else's troubles.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 18.1.85	Change on Fortnight
Asian Paints	84.00	43.00	92.00	8.00 +
Ashok Leyland	38.00	25.50	29.25	0.25 +
Associated Cement	467.00	293.00	409.50	0.50 –
Atlas Copco	43.00	29.75	39.00	1.50 +
Ballarpur	54.00	41.60	45.90	1.65 +
Baroda Rayon	295.00	241.00	293.00	1.00 +
Bata India	50.75	32.50	50.25	1.25 +
Best & Crompton	57.00	35.75	64.50	6.00 +
Birla Jute	62.50	51.10	53.80	1.50 +
Blow Plast	50.00	34.50	39.50	1.50 +
Blue Star	34.00	29.50	36.50	3.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	73.00	54.00	73.50	3.50 +
Britannia Industries	47.00	33.00	50.00	1.75 +
Brooke Bond	48.00	33.95	47.80	0.45 –
Century Spinning	920.00	772.00	905.00	2.50 –
Chloride India	59.50	49.50	59.00	nil
Coates of India	30.87	23.00	25.50	0.50 –
Colgate	145.00	98.00	166.00	8.00 +
DCM	76.12	47.00	47.00	1.50 –
Dunlop	28.70	20.30	23.75	1.05 +
East India Hotels	40.25	25.50	27.25	0.75 +
Escorts	76.00	50.25	50.25	nil
Food Specialities	92.50	69.00	90.00	nil
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	18.50	20.25	1.55 +
Gwalior Rayon	58.50	47.25	56.00	2.25 +
Hico Products	34.00	28.50	30.00	1.00 –
Hindustan Aluminium	53.00	44.00	52.30	0.80 –
Hindustan Cocoa	60.00	31.00	66.50	5.00 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	48.00	54.50	3.00 +
Hindustan Motors	48.00	40.40	42.30	0.74 –

	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 18.1.85	Change on Fortnight
Indian Aluminium	26.80	18.40	26.20	0.40 –
Indian Explosives	33.20	25.00	35.10	0.80 +
Indian Organic	51.00	31.00	56.25	3.50 +
Indian Oxygen	44.50	33.00	43.75	0.25 +
Indian Rayon	75.50	54.50	67.00	3.00 –
J.K. Synthetics	53.50	38.20	55.25	1.75 +
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	51.50	0.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	160.00	115.00	136.00	8.50 –
Kothar Industrial	27.00	20.50	21.50	0.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	81.00	65.00	79.50	7.00 +
Lohia Machines	86.00	48.50	46.50	1.50 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	74.75	45.00	50.50	2.00 +
Modi Rubber	30.31	19.50	22.62	2.37 +
National Organic	243.00	176.50	272.50	30.00 +
Nirlon	40.00	32.00	41.00	1.50 +
Oswal Agro	95.00	51.75	61.50	3.13 +
Otis Elevator	87.00	54.00	92.00	2.00 +
Premier Automobiles	321.00	244.00	338.50	12.50 +
Ranbaxy	55.00	44.00	60.00	8.00 +
Raymond Woollen	69.50	51.00	67.50	0.50 –
Reliance Textiles	144.00	110.00	129.00	4.00 +
Shriram Fibres	38.75	30.37	36.00	0.50 +
Siemens	47.50	41.00	46.00	2.00 +
SPIC	42.65	26.75	46.25	1.81 +
Sylvania Laxman	32.00	20.00	27.00	0.50 –
Tata Chemicals	72.50	53.00	66.00	0.50 +
Tata Steel	355.00	224.50	396.50	2.00 +
Telco	433.00	385.00	411.00	16.00 –
Texmaco	70.80	48.30	61.25	1.25 –
Union Carbide	30.75	18.90	18.80	1.10 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	10.3760	10.1708
Austria	Schilling	100	57.1328	56.0962
Bahrain	Dinar	1	32.1221	31.9620
Bangladesh	Taka	100	46.7602	45.9221
Canada	Dollar	1	9.6047	9.4297
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1216	1.1011
Egypt	Pound	1	13.2340	13.1120
France	Franc	1	1.3083	1.2849
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6288	1.5993
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1000	1.0911
Iran	Rial	100	12.8001	12.7993
Italy	Lira	100	0.6521	0.6503
Japan	Yen	100	5.0116	4.9212
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7901	0.7893
Kuwait	Dinar	1	39.5920	39.1113
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1064	5.0101
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.7892	0.7870
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6901	0.6893
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5480	3.4832
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7720	0.7709
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.7838	5.6753
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0725	0.0701
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4510	0.4508
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3946	1.3682
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.7663	4.6779
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6800	0.6799
Thailand	Baht	100	44.7100	44.7000
UK	Pound	1	14.2775	14.0409
USA	Dollar	1	12.7625	12.4925
UAE	Dirham	1	3.2210	3.1821
USSR	Rouble	1	13.8520	13.6922
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.9936	3.9335

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 22.1.85.

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BHOPAL TRAGEDY

Survivors' Struggle

THE DEAD may not have been so unlucky after all. Their end came horribly, it is true, choking on air that had suddenly gone vile. But at least the nightmare was brief. And then it was over. But for those who survived the poisonous methyl isocyanate (MIC) leak from the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, release will not come so quickly.

Thousands of the seriously affected survivors have suffered such extensive lung damage that they can no longer apply themselves physically. Their vision often gets blurred, spells of dizziness overtake them and walking briskly for even a few minutes sends them gasping to their knees, their chests aching. There are women who have peculiar gynaecological problems. And there are others—particularly children—who keep reliving those awful hours over and over again: they have yet to get over the trauma of that winter night. Bhopal Correspondent SREEKANT KHANDEKAR *spent several days last fortnight interviewing survivors, people who are still bewildered by the events of that night, and filed this report on their subsequent helplessness.*

SURESH, 13
"I can't play for long like the other boys: I turn breathless very quickly."

ACTUALLY I'm 13, but my mother told me that I must say that I'm only 11 years old when anyone asks me," says Suresh innocently. He needn't be careful now because his mother is dead. So are his father, a construction worker, and two of his younger brothers.

"Please don't ask him about the night of the disaster. The doctor feels he is still mentally disturbed and can go into a depression quite quickly," requests S.M. Awasthi, head of the Children's Relief Centre, which has been Suresh's home for the last eight weeks.

"We found him after searching for three days," says his uncle Phagu, who is a *kotwar* in Bhaisa, a village in Raisen district, about 150 km away. They made a bed to bed search through the city's main medical centre, Hamidia Hospital, before locating him in the children's ward where he had been admitted.

Suresh, a dark, painfully thin—and clearly undernourished—boy who looks younger than his 11 years, is delighted to talk about the highlights of life at home as it used to be. He recalls clinging to his father during a night walk through the jungle at Bhaisa; a visit to a local fair and the thrill and fear of sitting in a Ferris wheel; animals performing extraordinary acts in a circus. But most of all, he remembers two visits to the airport at Bhopal where his father took him "to watch planes vanishing into the sky", he says with wonder.

"My mother used to beat me for no reason," he says, but draws some satisfaction from the fact that his father used to beat her in turn. He hated the fact that his father used to sweat so much for so little income, that their shanty was small and leaked in the rains.

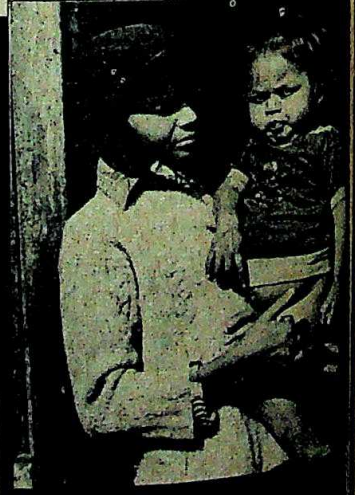
He turns silent and then points to a poster of unidentified dead peeling on a nearby wall: "My younger brother's photograph is there." Suddenly, he undergoes an abrupt change of mood, and his voice starts quivering: "I miss them all so much. But where can I go?" It is a difficult question to answer for Suresh as well as for Awasthi and Phagu. His uncle is making repeated trips to Bhopal, wondering if he will be better off at Bhaisa, but Awasthi and his superiors are not sure if Phagu can be entirely trusted: after all, Rs 40,000 will be deposited as ex-gratia relief from the state Government—Rs 10,000 for each dead—in Suresh's name. The little orphan is torn between staying at the centre, with other little boys, and going to Bhaisa.

Another source of worry is his health: "I can't play for long like the other boys: I turn breathless very quickly," he says matter-of-factly. What he does not know is that an X-ray has shown patches on his lungs, where MIC has burnt the tissues. Suresh will have to learn to live with this.

■ Though there are no exact figures, the affected localities possibly have a few dozen orphans. Three of them belong to a single house in Jayaprakash Nagar, opposite the Carbide factory: Sunil, 16, Mamta, 14, and Sanjay, two years old, are the only survivors of a family of ten.

Among the dead are their father, Kashi Prasad, a carpenter, and their mother, Kusum Bai, who was seven months pregnant; their eldest sister, Pushpa, 22, five months pregnant, Santosh, 12, Kiran, seven, and Sanju, four. Sunil is still hopeful about the survival of his brother Anil, 19, who is still missing but has not been identified among the dead.

Sunil, another victim who can no longer exert himself physically, describes



SUNIL, 16
"People are looking for my elder brother in the wild hope that they will find him. But that possibility is dying out each day."

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his escape quite unemotionally: the flight from home, separation from others in the melee, forcing himself into someone's van, the drive out of Bhopal, turning unconscious in a hospital in Hoshangabad, 70 km south. He was spotted there by Pushpa's husband, Visheswar Dayal, who is employed in an investment company in Lucknow. Says neighbour Narayan Das: "Sunil has been behaving so normally that I wonder if he has truly understood the enormity of his tragedy."

Dayal, Sunil says, is hunting for his elder brother Anil even now in the wild hope that if he is alive, he can take the responsibility of looking after his three younger brothers and sisters. But with every passing day, that possibility is gradually dying out. If he is not located, their future may have to lie with their young brother-in-law whose own wife and unborn child have died.

■ In a home two kilometres away, near Sarai Sikandari, in the dead of night, four-year-old Adil goes into convulsions and screams: "*Pyari ben, mujhe bacha lo! Papa bacha lo!*" After about 15 minutes of tossing and turning, Adil wakes up sweating to cling to his mother, Nusrat Bano Tabassum. The scene has been repeated every few nights regularly since the MIC leak. According to a Bhopal paediatrician, there are innumerable children on whose minds the horrors of the gas disaster have left a deep impression. She says that nightmares followed by bed wetting even among older children are not unusual now and she has seen at least one case of a child who is in such a state of shock that he wouldn't talk coherently even a month after the catastrophe.

Adil, who won't venture into the dark alone any more, but is perfectly normal during the day, says in a small voice: "I can see a *haua* (evil spirit). My friend Gabbus sees it at night too." Adil's mother Nusrat, a chatty young woman—"pyari ben" to her children—led her four young ones to safety since her husband Syed Abid Ali was away in Hyderabad, trading in chicken and eggs. She says that ever since she inhaled MIC, her menstruation cycle has been distrubed and she now gets her periods twice a month: it is a complaint common enough among her friends in the area. She says that some of them also have a white discharge from the vagina every couple of days, accompanied by pain in the joints.

■ Reports of possible brain damage to the foetus have also perturbed many pregnant women. Says Ramesh Kumar, whose wife Nirmala Kumari is four months pregnant: "We are really in a fix. We want our first baby very much but we are scared about its condition: if it has suffered damage..." his voice trails off. He describes their frustrating rounds of government hospitals and their visit to a private doctor, finally, who has suggested abortion—just to be on the safe side. The young couple is still undecided.

And that is not the end of their problems. Ramesh, who was employed with a tractor trolley body manufacturer for Rs 300 per month, has not been able to rejoin duty. The doctor's slip describes his complaints as "breathlessness, pain in chest, bodyache, burning in eyes and blurring of vision". Now he just sits out in the sun outside his home and worries. For the time being his brother supports them.

■ Not being able to return to work and earn money they sorely need is the most immediate problem among the survivors, most of whom are manual workers. Fifty-year-old Sukhram, one of the 200 coolies at Bhopal railway station, keeps lying in his tiny room most of the time.

SUKHRAM, 50
"I could carry 50 kg of luggage. But which passenger wants a coolie who can barely carry only half the weight?"

On December 3, early morning, desperately ill, he crawled into the Grand Trunk Express from Delhi, and got off at Itarsi. He lay at the station there for several hours unattended before someone helped him board the train for his home town Pipariya, some 125 km from Bhopal. He was admitted to the government hospital there for 12 days. Says Sukhram: "I have been a coolie for 30 years. And even at this age I could transport luggage weighing more than 50 kg and move easily. But which passenger wants a coolie who can barely carry only half the weight and walks like an old man?" He claims that his earnings have more than halved from the Rs 600 per month that he got earlier. He is so tired after a day's work that he can't get himself to visit a hospital. He has received no financial assistance from the state Gov-

ADIL, 4
"I can see a *haua* (evil spirit). My friend Gabbus sees it at night too."

RAMESH KUMAR
"My wife and I are really in a fix. We want our first baby very much but we are scared if it has suffered damage..."

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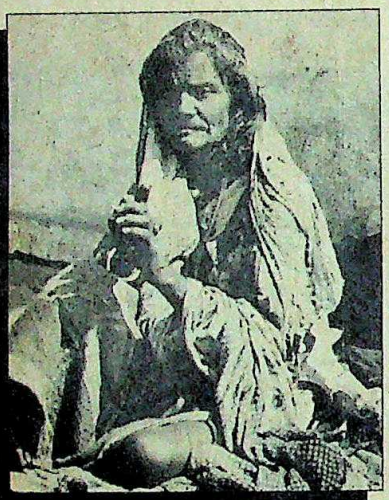
ernment, and does not get the free ration being distributed because he has no ration card. "I'm just very tired now," he says hopelessly.

■ Among the poor, it is quite common to be careless about health, but this indifference may well prove fatal now. "No, no, no, you're not taking me to hospital," insists Mebabai hysterically half laughing and half sobbing: "Ghosts of the dead still roam free!" "She has gone slightly mad," explains her brother Darshan Lal apologetically.



MEBABAI
"No, no, you're not taking me to hospital. Ghosts of the dead still roam free."

Mebabai lives in the district headquarters of Sehore, 40 km to the west, but was in Bhopal on December 2 to meet her four brothers who live near the Carbide factory in an area called Chhola Mandir. During the panic, she got separated from her brothers but didn't seem too much the worse for it the following day. On December 4, still perfectly normal she boarded a bus for Sehore. But three days later she experienced a numbness in the left hand and leg. Within a few hours it had spread and now her left side is paralysed.

Mebabai says that she has had no such problem before. She is not sure if the paralysis is the effect of MIC inhalation, particularly because of the delayed reaction. But there have been other isolated cases of nervous disorders, and in at least some of them, the effect showed only after two days or so.

Mebabai talks quite sensibly until medical treatment is mentioned. And then her weird laughter breaks out. The terror of what she underwent is yet to pass.

■ But among horrifying experiences, few can compare with that of Kalabai, in her mid-40s and a resident of Subhash Nagar on Chhola Road. She was separated from her husband Bihari Lal, a cloth mill worker, on the morning of December 3. Recalls Kalabai: "Some of us were taken in a police van to Hamidia Hospital. That is the last thing I remember before I fell unconscious." Adds Bihari: "That whole day we went through the hospital but just couldn't find her."

They couldn't have. "When I recovered consciousness," recalls Kalabai shyly, "I couldn't open my eyes because they couldn't tolerate light (a condition called photophobia). I couldn't understand where I was. I felt a weight on my back. What could it be? Was I at home? I pushed it off and blinked my eyes open to see what it was: it was a man's body. The whole room was full of bodies." She had been taken for dead in the chaos and dumped in the mortuary. Kalabai staggered out of the room and was so petrified that even when her relatives found her she wouldn't let them come near her. It took several hours before she would quieten down. Says Kalabai: "I don't think I'll ever forget it."

■ Surely among the more cheerful of the seriously hurt people is V.K. Sharma, deputy chief controller in the railways: Sharma was admitted to hospital for a full three weeks and MIC has left such a bad affect on his lungs that the doctors who saw his X-ray first thought it was tuberculosis. Sharma rejoined duty a month and a half later on January 17, but "got totally out of breath and underwent a sensation of falling", so that he has been confined to bed again. Though few people know it, Sharma also played a pivotal role in those crucial hours. He was in charge of the railway control room which monitors the movement of trains. At 2.30 a.m. himself seriously ill—the station is close to the Carbide plant—he issued orders to nearby stations that all trains approaching Bhopal be stopped until further orders: two passenger trains were due. It was a hard decision to take because there was no superior to check with before halting traffic on the important Delhi-Madras main line. At 3 a.m. Sharma fainted. Says he modestly: "I don't think it was such a great deed. It may have saved many lives but I was too far gone to think clearly. I issued orders only by instinct."

V.K. SHARMA
"I may have saved many lives, but I was too far gone to think clearly. I issued orders only by instinct."

KALABAI
"I couldn't understand where I was. I opened my eyes and discovered I was in a mortuary. I don't think I can ever forget it."

The desire to survive may have saved the lives of many during those dangerous hours. But in the future, unless purposeful assistance comes from the Government, Suresh and Sukharam, Adil and Mebabai may find that the instinct of self-preservation is not enough to carry on.

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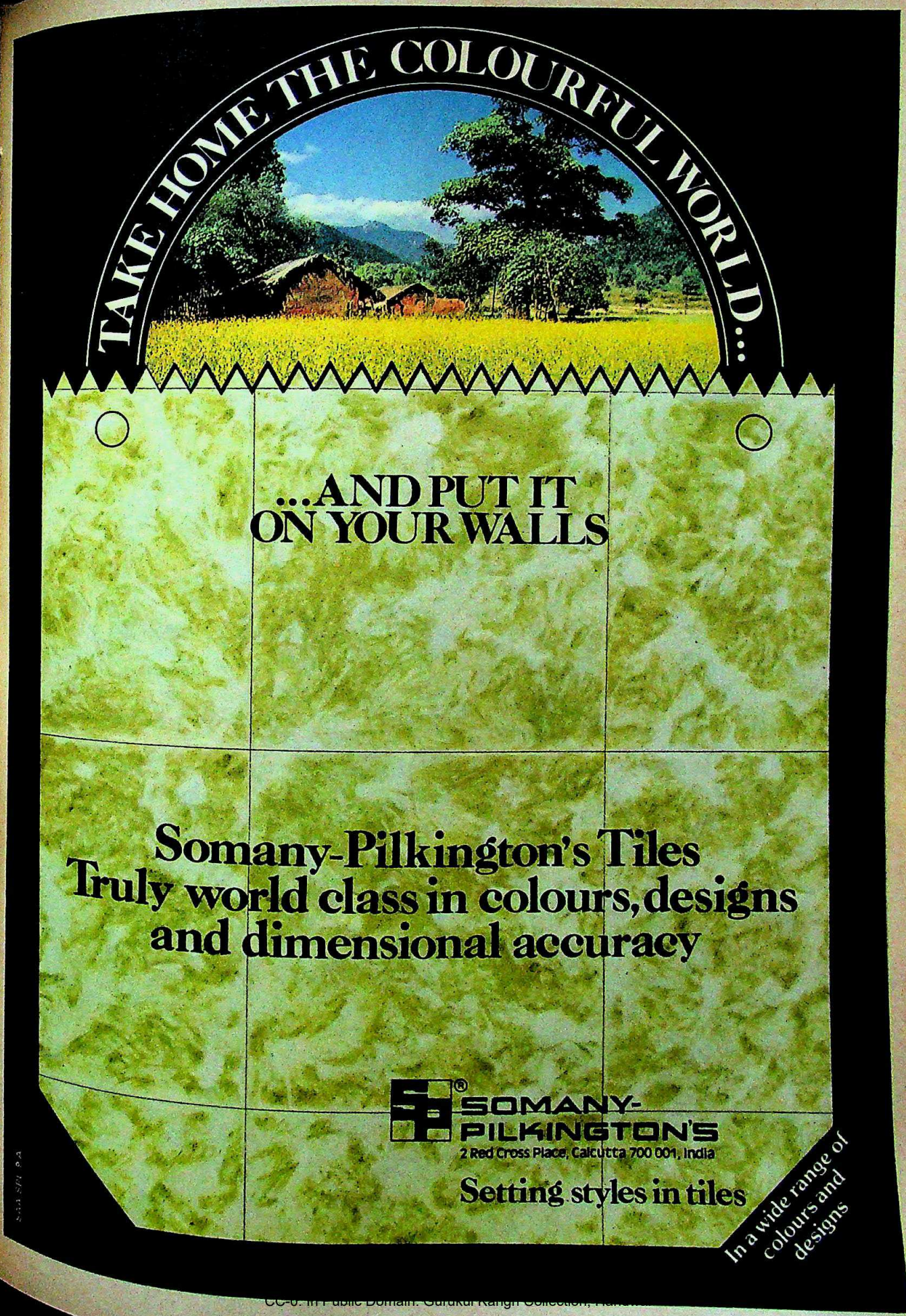

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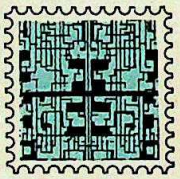

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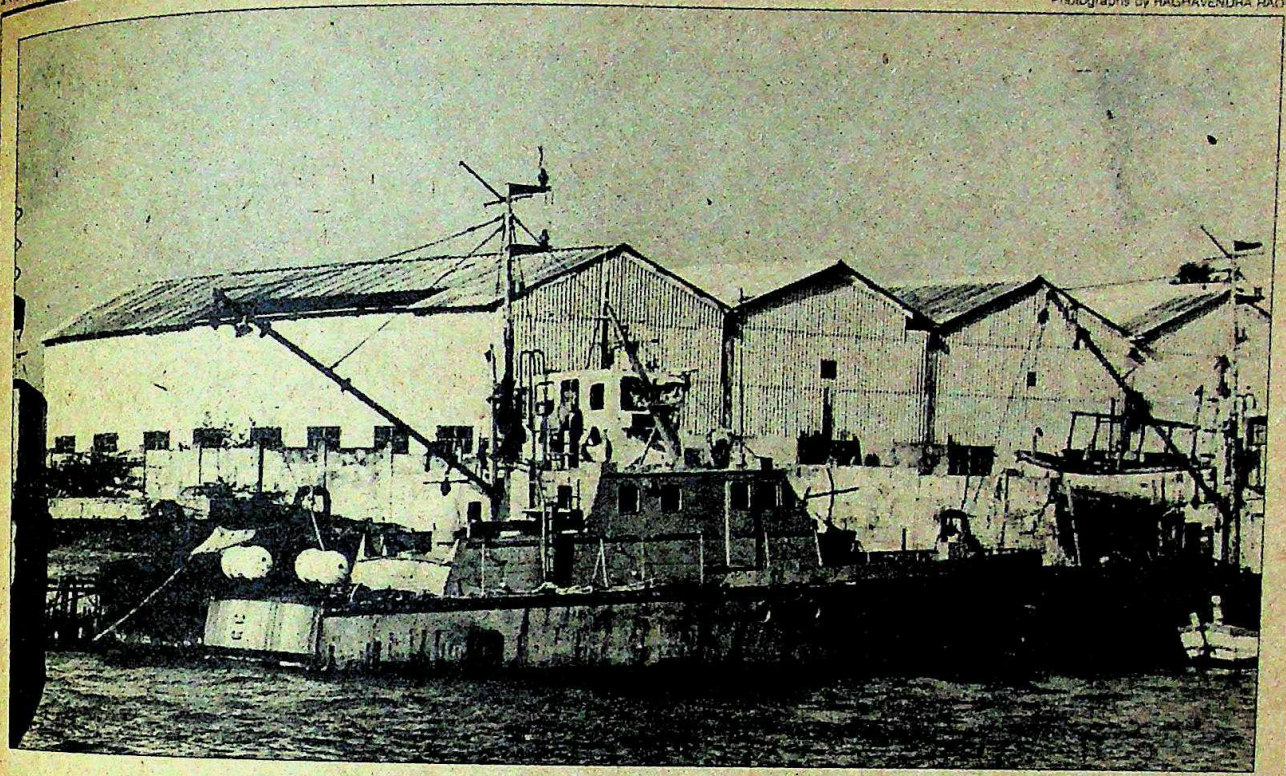

The captured Sri Lankan Navy gunboat: escalating cold war

SRI LANKA

Gunboat Diplomacy

THE CONSTANT fluctuations in the temperature of the diplomatic cold war between Colombo and New Delhi over the vexatious Tamil issue continues unabated. Rajiv Gandhi's swearing in as prime minister witnessed an immediate thaw which was quickly frozen over by the capture of a Sri Lankan naval vessel along with its seven-member crew by the Indian coastguard last fortnight. The Sri Lankan boat was taken into custody after it had fired upon Indian fishing trawlers and looted them of their catch. When the boat was overhauled, it was at least five miles inside Indian territorial waters.

Colombo lost no time in voluble expressions of outrage which were quelled somewhat when the Indian Government offered to release the boat if Colombo in turn released 17 Indian fishermen held in Sri Lanka since last October on charges of poaching. Then, last week, the sun shone once again on Indo-Sri Lankan relations when Colombo ordered the release of the fishermen and New Delhi reciprocated by handing back the captured naval vessel.

But that was clearly only a surface gain. Behind the diplomatic facade, the real war on the ground showed no signs of abating. Sri Lankan President, J.R. Jayewardene flatly stated in a *Newsweek* interview last fortnight that there was no question of having any further negotiations with the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the most moderate of the Tamil groups battling for Eelam, or a separate state.

The other groups, meanwhile, were continuing their war with Sinhalese security forces with increased aggression. On January 9, a major crackdown by the Sri Lankan army in the Jaffna peninsula left 14 Tamil guerrillas dead and 44 others arrested. The separatists belonged to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Ten days later, 22 Sri Lankan soldiers and 16 civilians died when guerrillas blew up the Colombo-bound Yaldevi train 300 kilometres north of the capital. A defence ministry spokesman candidly admitted that it was the most serious strike by Tamil activists against security forces to date. The same day, guerrillas also blew up a road and rail bridge at the approach to the northern Jaffna peninsula.

The off-shore battle also showed no signs of abating despite the capture and release of the Sri Lankan patrol boat—a direct result of the increased Indian naval and coastguard presence off the coast of Rameswaram. In Rameswaram, the rejoicing that accompanied the capture of the Sri Lankan vessel was a natural outpouring of relief after having been virtually terrorised by marauding Sri Lankan vessels. The one that was eventually captured was on one such mission. The three occupants of a fishing vessel that set off from Rameswaram that night, Antony Adamai, Dhanushkodi and Arumugam, were the targets. Dhanushkodi, recounting the unnerving experience, said: "It was around 9.30 at night and we were north of Rameswaram Island well inside Indian waters when the sky was illuminated by a flare and we saw a Sri Lankan vessel in front. We froze and before we could do anything there was a volley of machine gun fire. A bullet hit Antony in his right leg. We lay prostrate and an hour later another Sri Lankan ship appeared and coolly picked up our prawn catch, ropes and oil cans and left. We got back to shore and took Antony to the hospital."

In the wake of the incident and the subsequent capture of the Sri Lankan

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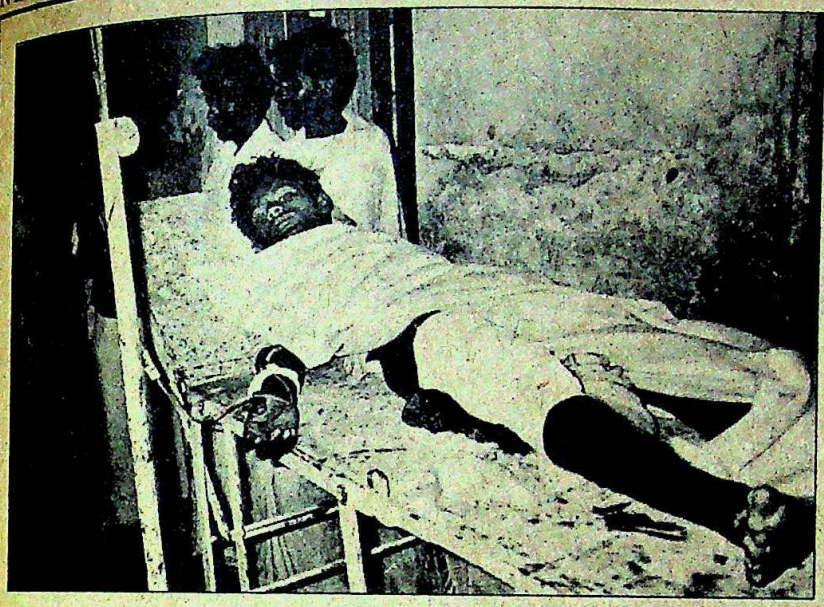

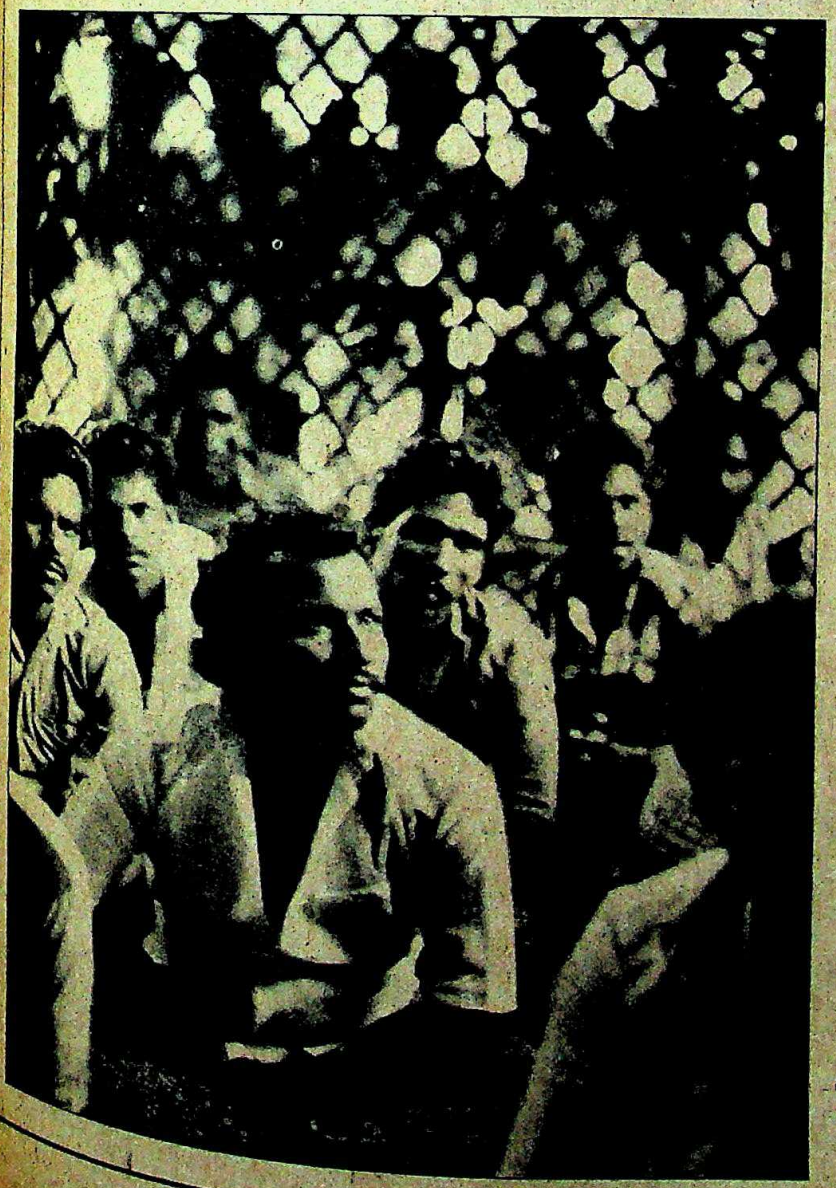

The injured Antony in hospital; and agitating Rameswaram fishermen

vessel (with 54 kg of purloined prawns), the Rameswaram fishermen are in a violent mood. The crew were whisked off to Madurai under heavy guard to prevent reprisals against them by the fishermen. Said Deputy Inspector General of Police of Madurai range, G.Veeraraghavan: "We have not arrested them. We have only given them police protection. If we had not, the Rameswaram fishermen would have attacked them."

But the tension still simmers. Very few fishermen from Rameswaram, Pamban or Mandapam have dared to venture out, a situation that has existed for over a year now. The result has been acute hardship for the 10,000 families who depend directly on fishing for their livelihood and the thousands of others who depend on it indirectly.

However, though the stories of Sri Lankan atrocities and harassment are innumerable, coastguard officials say that many fishermen ask for trouble by crossing the maritime boundary. They also say that patrolling off Rameswaram has been stepped up and more and faster patrol boats deployed.

Elsewhere, however, it was clear that the cold war between the two countries is not going to be confined to the seas. In Madras, spokesmen of the diverse guerrilla groups are desperately searching for closer unity to counter "state terrorism" in Sri Lanka. "Right now, the pressure for unity is being felt more and more," admits a spokesman for the LTTE. Even the TULF is actively canvassing for greater unity now. TULF Secretary General Appapillai Amirthalingham told INDIA TODAY last fortnight: "We are planning to bring about unity and evolve a common programme of action. There is now a general realisation among all sections that this is the most crucial juncture in the history of our people. The moves have been fuelled by the realisation that the Sri Lankan strategy is to wear out the Tamil militants and keep them on the run. Militants believe that staying power will be the most vital factor for the continuation of their war and groups that have been at each other's throats all this while are only helping the common enemy. But if some semblance of unity is achieved, that can only mean that the war of attrition will escalate, rendering the dim prospects of a political settlement of the problem even dimmer."

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Rameswaram

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MOTHER TERESA

Passing on the Mantle

'I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the First and the Last,
the Beginning and the End'
Revelation 22:13

THE PRAYERS, the rosary, the obligatory silence and the loving service of Christ in the poorest of the poor: if these were the hallmarks of the Missionaries of Charity, the world-famous Catholic congregation with its headquarters in Calcutta, then nothing is really amiss. But, beyond the ring of joy in service, there is lately a deep undercurrent of anxiety: the concern is over the health of Mother Teresa, 1979 Nobel Peace Prize-winning missionary who founded the congregation 35 years ago.

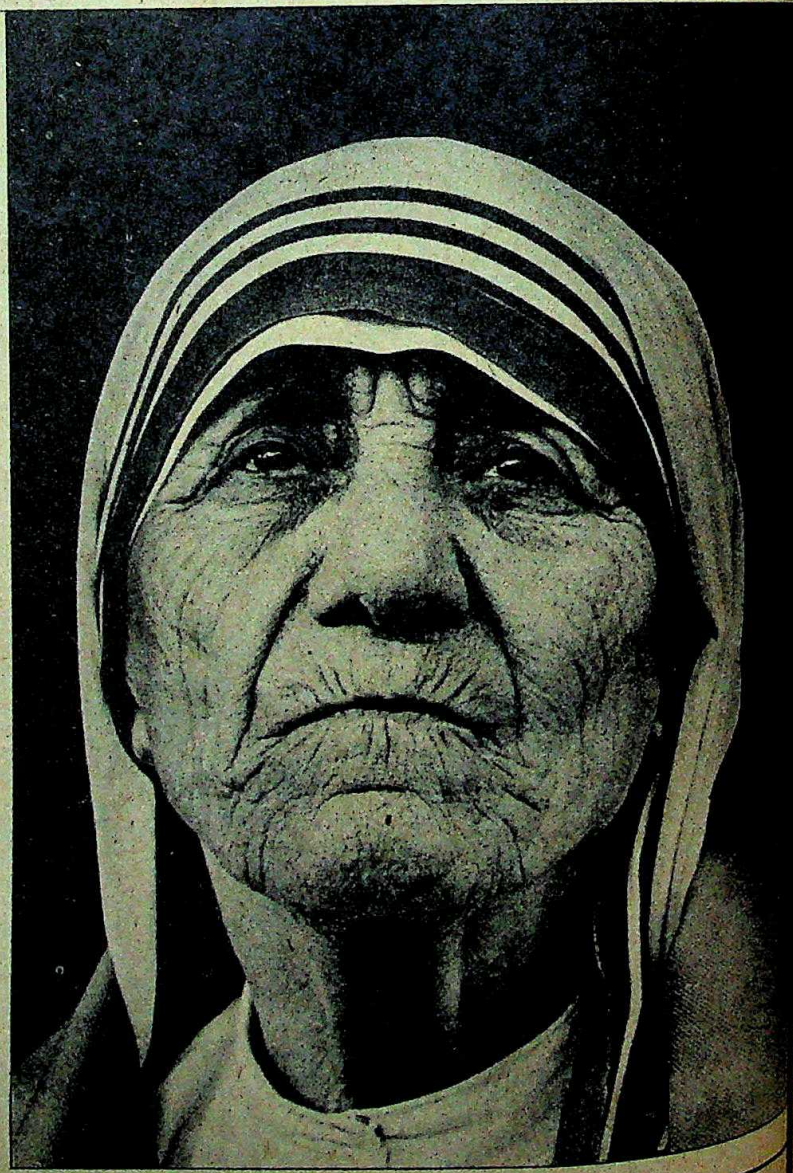
At 75, her spirit is still willing to be God's "instrument of love" but the body is clearly getting weak. She is now a pale shadow of her ebullient self. The familiar stoop has got more pronounced, caused by a vertebral problem which she refuses to have medically examined; her sprinty gait is lost forever; and, as fellow-nuns confide, she runs a temperature every single morning.

In May 1983, during her meeting with Pope John Paul II in Rome, she suffered a cardiac arrest and now suffers from angina pectoris. In Rome, she was going ahead with her scheduled trip to Germany and Poland regardless, but the Pope had to intervene with the words: "Mother, obey the doctor." She took that as an order and was bed-ridden for a month in Rome, her first-ever period of rest since she heard the divine call one day in 1946. But she is out on her routine grind again. On Christmas Day, she left for Ethiopia, where a calamitous famine is raging, despite having a fever. And, last fortnight, she was off again for a hectic month-long tour of China, Hong Kong and Macao.

The inevitable question is: how much longer can she continue? And—after Mother Teresa, who? She does not answer beyond saying: "God will find another person, more humble, more devoted, more obedient to Him, and the society will go on." But, however unthinkable, the question of succession has inescapably arisen because of the frail nun's personal charisma and the world-wide attention focussed on her.

Over the years, and bit by bit, Mother Teresa has overshadowed her creation—the Missionaries of Charity. So confident is her position in the world community today that she can convey her requests directly to heads of superpowers—and they are seldom dishonoured. Last month, she sent a message for assistance directly to President Reagan from communist-ruled Ethiopia and the US President promptly despatched US $64 million though with the rider—in a personal letter to Mother—that he feared the Ethiopian regime might not distribute the aid effectively to the people. Even her trip to China was a coup of sorts: the Chinese Association of Patriotic Priests and Bishops, surfacing as late as 1978 after being pushed underground during the Cultural Revolution, sought and promptly obtained from the authorities permission to invite Mother Teresa.

The nuns loathe to show it, but they are just as much concerned as the rest of the world as to what happens to the small (2,500-strong) but extremely high-profile congregation after her. And the question has gained a frightening poignancy this year. Though guarded as one of the spiritual secrets of the society's life, the chapter general of the Missionaries of Charity is due to meet this year to elect, by secret ballot, the new superior general (or re-elect Mother Teresa) and six councillors general.



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The chapter general is really the electoral college which meets once every six years according to the constitutions of the society consecrated by the Holy See. It met last in December 1979. The date of the 1985 chapter general has not been fixed yet. But the preliminary exercise—that of electing the regional delegates who will take part in the final voting—will begin this month at all the 233 foundations of the congregation. The nuns blush to admit it, but there is a distinct election tempo quietly building up in the organisation whose mission is to "quench the thirst of Jesus Christ for souls and for the love of men".

The constitution of the Missionaries of Charity says that the superior general may be elected for a second but not for a third term without the special approval of the Holy See. In the case of Mother Teresa, the Vatican has repeatedly waived the two-term regulation because she is the founder of the congregation. And Mother Teresa of course has never had to cope with a rival at the chapter general. "If she wishes to be re-elected this time round," says an insider, "the Holy See is most likely to respect her desire; but the question is, will her health permit any more arduous travelling and working."

JUST how all-consuming her passion for work is can be shown from her itinerary in 1983 and 1984: travels to Bangladesh, Tanzania, Kenya, Italy, Germany, England, the US, Latin America, Poland, Australia and Hong Kong. In India, she has visited nearly 50 of the 118 foundations last year alone. Moreover, her duties and responsibilities as superior general include representing the society officially before the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, which is really an euphemism for some vexing paper-work. Says Fr E. Le Joly, vicar of the Sacred Heart Church in Calcutta: "By the constitution of the Missionaries of Charity, the superior general is the guiding spirit and the fighting arm of the society, both rolled into one."

Mother Teresa is silent on her future plans, nor will she speak on whether she intends to seek election for a fresh term. "God's will must be fulfilled," is her terse reply. Her close aides point out that there is not the remotest possibility of someone from within the society contesting against her as superior general because of the esteem in which she is held as the congregation's helmswoman, but also because of her "excellent rapport with the present Pope". Last year, during Mother Teresa's visit to Rome, she and the Pope sang together, and, as many of the sisters recall, "the Holy Pope took personal interest in her health and well-being and her ability to continue to shepherd her flock".

Still, Mother Teresa has to offload more and more of her daily responsibility, naturally, to the second tier of leadership in the Missionaries of Charity—the six councillors general. It is from among them that the future superior general has to emerge when the septuagenarian evangelist is unable—on account of "impaired health, advanced age or any other good reason" (Article 150)—to provide the necessary leadership.

It is at the level of the councillors general that a measure of ecclesiastical rivalry is discernible. Like the superior general, the councillors too are elected by secret ballot by the chapter general which comprises the superior general, the earlier councillors, the delegates representing the regions, the regional superiors and some other functionaries. Altogether, the strength of the electoral college this time will be about 250: it was a little over 200 in 1979.

For nearly two decades since the inception of the congregation, it was regarded as a largely Calcutta outfit with predominantly Bengali Christians or members of the Anglo-Indian community being drawn into it. That was the time when Sister Agnes, the seniormost of the sisters, rose along the hierarchy, first supervising Nirmal Hriday, the home for the dying and the destitute at Kalighat in Calcutta, then looking after Shishu Bhavan, the children's home close to Mother House, finally to become Mother Teresa's right hand and the first councillor general—or the councillor to have gathered the maximum first preference votes.

But, as the congregation began opening up in the '70s, spreading itself out and opening more and more foundations (there are 233 now spread over six continents), the electoral college also acquired an international character and the quiet Bengali nun, who, according to some versions, "makes up for her lack of efficiency with her devotion and loyalty", slid down the ladder to become the fifth councillor general in 1979. Sister Agnes, however, always enjoyed a special affection from Mother Teresa because she was her student at Loreto Entally long before the congregaton had begun: the two were together from the first day of the society.

While Sister Agnes represents the old times at the Missionaries of Charity, the nun with the best credentials to lead, and the highest popularity, is the present first councillor, Sister Frederick, an Anglo-Maltese in her early 60s who taught for years in France as a missionary and speaks virtually all the European languages. Rigid, disciplined and tough as nails Sister Frederick now officiates as the society's spokesperson in Mother Teresa's absence.

Unlike most others in the society, Sister Frederick did not begin her missionary life in India but was drafted by Mother Teresa in Rome in the '60s when Mother appealed to the heads of some other Catholic congregations for personnel because she was short of nuns "who can be superiors". Sister Frederick responded to the call and did her novitiate in Calcutta, finally to become the "mistress of novices"—a post comparable to the principal of the spiritual school. She initiated the operations of the Missionaries of Charity in Latin America and func-

RAGHU RAI

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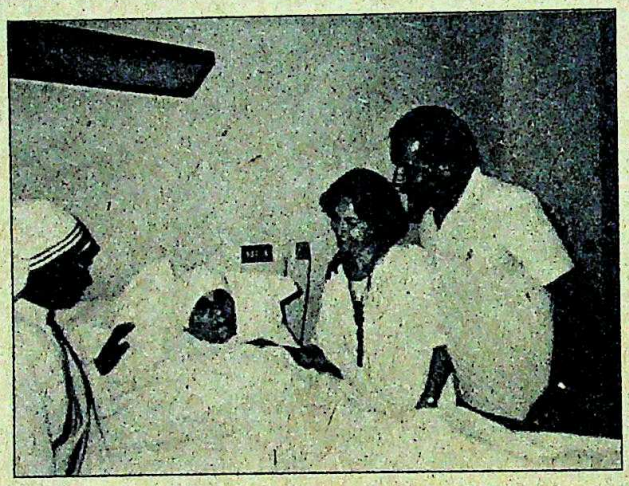
tioned for several years as the superior of their foundation in Rome, in the shadow of St Peter's.

In a way, Sister Frederick represents the internationalist trend in the Missionaries of Charity, testified by the fact that in 1983-84, of the 16 new foundations opened by the congregation, only one—in Jalandhar, Punjab—was in India, while its activities reached shores as distant as Seychelles, Burundi, Rwanda, Hong Kong, the US and Australia. As the society reaches more and more outwards, the electoral college will also progressively acquire a more global outlook. And, as one of the senior sisters summed it up, "Sister Frederick is perhaps the best qualified to lead the society in changed times."

There is of course no scope for competition as it is understood in the lay context in reaching the important berths in the council, whose members are "one mind and heart with their superior general, sacrificing their own ideas for those of the Lord, and help the superior general to make more accurate and efficient decisions". Still there are others in the race—if that's the word—for evangelical supremacy, such as:

■ Sister Joseph Michael: the Goan nun educated in Calcutta who became the second councillor in the 1979 general chapter. Daughter of a tailor-father with 12 children, Sister Joseph Michael has been Mother Teresa's secretary for over a decade and is most up-to-date on all office matters, administrative subjects and Canon laws. But, as insiders remark with some insight, "she may not be best leadership material".

■ Sister Shanti and Sister Andrea: both are doctors, and, according to the number of preference votes polled by them, are third and fourth councillors respectively. Shanti is a Goan from Bombay while Andrea belongs to a German-speaking refugee family from Poland. Sister Shanti is also the present superior of Mother House whereas Sister Andrea is in charge of Prem Daan, the large home for unwed mothers and orphans on the eastern outskirts of Calcutta.



(From top left) Sisters Agnes and Frederick; and Teresa after a heart attack in Rome; the succession poser

■ Sister Damian: the round and chubby Calcutta Anglo-Indian who is the sixth (or the last) councillor. Educated by the Loreto nuns, Sister Damian made her mark with tireless work in the disputed Gaza strip. She speaks fluent Arabic and is now in charge of the foundation in Beirut.

■ Sister Gertrude: though no councillor, Sister Gertrude, who is now in Yemen, is also a doctor like Shanti and Andrea. The three nuns were sent to Calcutta Medical College together by Mother Teresa. Gertrude, however, was at the top of the class and was awarded a gold medal at the finals, which she promptly passed up for the next in line. She also speaks Arabic and began her work mostly with the leprosy patients in West Asia. Rated among the most intelligent of the lot, Sister Gertrude is a sure contender for councillorship this year.

Most parish heads in Calcutta's Catholic society agree that, despite their relative strength and shortcomings these women are all endowed with exceptional qualities as highly motivated nuns wedded to the ideal of serving Jesus Christ in the poorest of the poor. But church movements—like all movements in history—often follow a serpentine course, ingesting contemporary ideas in varying doses without necessarily compromising basic goals and ideals.

The Missionaries of Charity is far from being either the most numerous or the oldest congregation in India, its span being only 35 years while the Jesuits came to India over 400 years ago. Compared to only 2,000 sisters and 500 brothers of the Missionaries of Charity the world over, the Jesuits again can boast of well over 26,000 missionaries, many of whom are impeccably educated in the best institutions of the world. But the Missionaries of Charity has been able to carve out a very special niche in the Catholic world in such a short time because of two reasons: its opposition to all forms of elitism, and its iron discipline. In 35 years, only 20 nuns or novices have so far dropped out of the society's life of unrelenting hardship.

To a very great extent, this has been possible because of the strength and personality of its foundress. The crucial election this year will show whether Mother Teresa thinks the time has come to lighten her load, and, if so, whether the next generation of the society's functionaries can pick up the mantle from her. Either way, it involves the future of the world's most celebrated charitable organisation in the name of Jesus Christ.

—SUMIT MITRA in Calcutta

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SIX NATION SUMMIT

Voices from the Wilderness

CERTAIN international realities are indeed frightening. One of these is that only two powers are to decide whether the planet will continue to race towards ultimate nuclear annihilation or whether the genie is going to be leashed and humanity delivered from the threat of a long, all-freezing, lifeless nuclear winter. As far as decisions to run or halt the nuclear arms race are concerned, the two powers have reduced the rest of the world to a vast impotent wilderness. But this is not to say that voices from the wilderness do not try to reach the eyeball-to-eyeball dyad. There have been two successive sessions of the UN General Assembly on disarmament, the second in 1982, but with little or no impact on the blind runners of the nuclear arms race. There have been powerful mass movements in the United States and Western Europe for a nuclear freeze and against the deployment of medium-size American missiles in several European countries.

But the ringmasters of the nuclear arms race have remained unmoved. In May last year, heads of governments of six non-aligned countries assembled in New York at the invitation of Indira Gandhi as chairperson of the Non-aligned Movement. The countries—India, Tanzania, Mexico, Argentina, Greece and Sweden—were chosen by her not only to make the group representative of the four continents but also to raise the voices of a set of middle powers outside the two cold-warring blocs in support of nuclear disarmament. There is no evidence that the appeal issued by the six leaders of the non-aligned world, which was described in India as "stirring", had any impact on Washington and Moscow.

The six leaders met for the second time in New Delhi on January 28 and issued yet another "stirring" appeal. More voices from the wilderness of international nuclear politics. It was nice to see India's young telegenic prime minister preside over a summit of the non-aligned six. It was his debut in summit diplomacy, and it went very well—as far as it could go, which couldn't be very much. The pristine concepts enshrined in the summit's ringingly worded appeal were barely noticed in the American press and received only marginal media coverage in Western Europe. The appeal will surely be taken note of by the White House and the Kremlin. But it will hardly influence the strategic arms control and limitation talks which are now scheduled to begin between the two superpowers in March after a break of almost six years.

At the Geneva conference of 1968, the nuclear powers did promise positive movement towards nuclear arms control and disarmament. They got their desired treaty which sought to create forever a caste system amongst the nations based on nuclear weapons. Since then, the two nuclear superpowers have stockpiled thousands and thousands of nuclear warheads. These warheads can destroy the world 10 to 20 times over. Under Ronald Reagan, the United States has sought to legitimise "limited" nuclear war. Reagan's fancies have propelled him to allocate billions of dollars for research on anti-missile space weapons. The lunatic nuclear arms race is being run despite the grim warnings repeatedly given by scientists drawn from all countries and vivid portrayals of what would happen in a nuclear war shown on the major television networks all over the world.

Amongst the non-aligned six who met at the summit in New Delhi on January 28, three—India, Mexico and Argentina—are near, or rather crypto-nuclear powers. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made it clear to a cold-warrior US senator recently that the explosion of a nuclear device by Pakistan would make it impossible for India to maintain its posture as a peaceful nuclear power. If Pakistan and India drive themselves into a nuclear arms race, the next candidates for the dubious status would be Mexico, Argentina and Brazil.

BHAWAN SINGH

The six: worthwhile effort

The leaders of the three threshold nuclear powers need a sharp and convincing build-down of the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers to be able to prevent nuclearisation of South Asia and Latin America. The voices raised from the wilderness on January 28 for rapid and decisive progress towards nuclear disarmament had therefore an edge which the superpowers can ignore only at the peril of inevitable nuclear proliferation. It may well begin in South Asia and spread to other regions of the world.

In his first term as US President, Reagan appeared to have reconciled himself to proliferation. Some American strategic writers even projected the concept of "the more nuclear nations, the merrier." However, in his second term, Reagan is believed to have developed a genuine satiety for nuclear arms and has promised his countrymen and his allies solid progress towards nuclear arms control and limitation. He is even said to have given Secretary of State George Shultz considerable freedom to sculpt an American nuclear arms control policy and design a negotiating mechanism, both of which were lacking in the first four years of his administration. However, the US President is clearly not in a mood to abandon his star wars concept. In any case, there is a very long haul ahead before the negotiations produce one or more treaties. The time is therefore more opportune than ever before for the nations in the wilderness to raise their voices for nuclear disarmament and also to back the voices with deeds. In this context, the New Delhi summit last fortnight was not entirely a waste of resource and effort.

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RAYALASEEMA

Crusade for a Cause

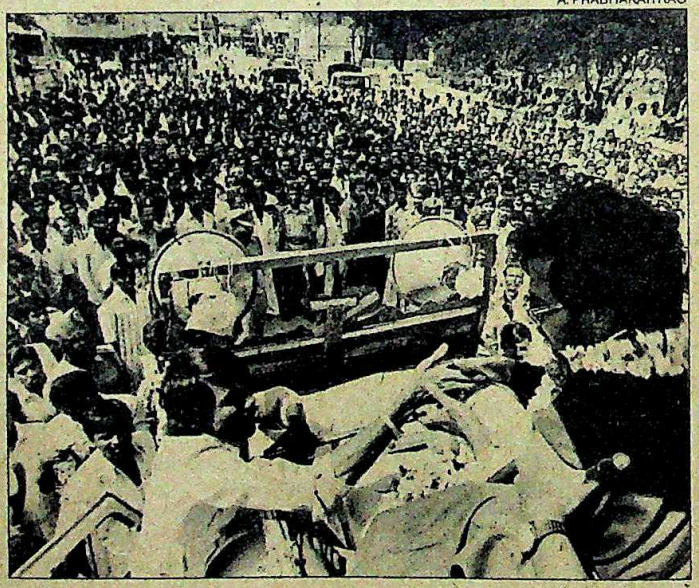
IN THE pathetically backward Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, the people's hero is not N.T. Rama Rao, the saffron-clad crusader for Andhra self-respect. For a people who live from drought to crippling drought, self-respect is too much of a luxury—and the man who articulates their basic demands for more governmental attention to the long-neglected districts of Chittoor, Cuddapah, Anantapur and Kurnool, is the deceptively soft-spoken maverick Telugu Desam member of the dissolved state Assembly, Malla Venkata Ramana Reddy. The scholarly Ramana Reddy, 40, a former Naxalite activist and member of the ultra left-wing writers' forum, Virasam, clearly means business. He began the new year with an indefinite fast and called for a general strike throughout the region on January 22 and 23. But on the dawn of January 22, he called it all off after the chief minister sent state Cooperation Minister Karanam Ramachandra Rao to assure him that the Government would sincerely study his demands. Even if after the regional leader's gruelling eight-day tour aboard a grey matador, named the "Rayalaseema Vimochana Ratham" —in an ironic echo of NTR's Chaitanya Ratham—seemed anticlimactic, a point had been made.

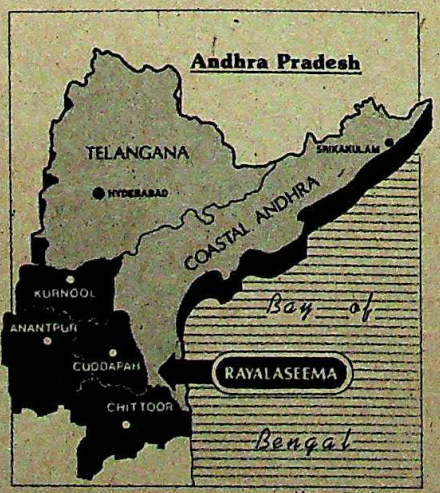
The popularity of his agitation had worried leaders of the Telugu Desam who were in a quandary about how to deal with this obvious breach of party discipline. But untactful moves could cost the party dearly in the January 28 by-elections to the Rajampet —which covers parts of Cuddapah and Chittoor—and Srikakulam constituencies. The polls are crucial because only if the Telugu Desam wins both seats can it bring its strength in the Lok Sabha up to 30 and thus qualify for official recognition as a separate parliamentary group—making it the only party after the Congress(I) to deserve this status. Accusing the Congress(I) of fomenting trouble, Chief Minister NTR said: "It is unfortunate that our own MLA's have begun this type of agitation and are cooperating with those who want to create regional feelings."

"We have enough of our own work with the assembly elections round the corner," retorted Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy, who comes from Cuddapah district as does Ramana Reddy. But he adds: "Ramana Reddy has taken up a good issue and the democratic manner in which he is focussing on the problems of this backward region should be welcomed." N. Bhaskara Rao's breakaway Democratic Telugu Desam supports the agitation and Ramana Reddy has found enthusiastic followers amongst both government employees and students, as well, who have successfully organised bandhs. Nevertheless, there is a move within the party to expel the activist, but such hints have only hardened Ramana Reddy's stand: "The cry must be shrill if it is to be heard all over the state. This is a struggle for the mere existence of the Rayalaseema people."

Ramana Reddy fasting atop his "Ratham": legitimate demands

A. PRABHAKAR RAO





Map by B.K. SHARMA

The four districts of Rayalaseema comprise 69,299 sq km of land with a population of 102.1 lakhs. But they have received a disproportionately small share of the development cake, and Ramana Reddy hopes to reverse the situation drastically over the next few years. His six-point charter of demands:

- allocation of 350 billion cu ft of Krishna waters out of the total 800 billion cu ft awarded to the state by the Bachchawat tribunal;
- spending half the state budget over the next ten years for the development of Rayalaseema's four districts;
- reservation of two out of every five government jobs for the people of the region;
- scrapping the corpus fund rule for starting schools and colleges;
- installation of a 250 mw thermal power station at Muddanur to improve power supply; and
- the construction of a statutory Rayalaseema Development Authority.

Though at least half these demands seemed unattainable, NTR responded with a five-page explanation of what his government was doing for the region. He outlined measures to provide water to irrigate an additional 1.28 lakh hectares in Rayalaseema through the ambitious Rs 687-crore Telugu Ganga project. On the demand for increased spending up to half the state's budget, NTR pointed out that Rs 10 crore had been sanctioned to tap available groundwater and store the run-off during the occasional rains. He also pointed out that more funds were being made available during the Seventh Five-Year Plan.

On the question of jobs, he said the one-man V. Sunderesan Commission was looking into the implementation of a 1[illegible] accord which provides for a sharing of government jobs in the ratio of 42:36:[illegible] between the Andhra, Telengana and Rayalaseema regions. The chief minister agreed to waive the corpus fund rule [illegible]

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starting new educational institutions, and called for a feasibility report on the thermal power project. But he ruled out a separate regional development authority on the plea that planning had already been decentralised with the introduction of district-level planning.

The Rayalaseema leader was not impressed. "This is a repeat performance of what NTR told me when he asked me to meet him after I began the fast," he said. Indeed, a week after Ramana Reddy had begun his fast at Prodattur, the headquarters of his Cuddapah constituency, NTR summoned him to Hyderabad and assured him of fair treatment to every region of the state. But Ramana Reddy insisted on a written assurance, which the chief minister refused. Ironically enough, NTR himself had whipped up the sentiments of the people of Rayalaseema during his election campaigns before the historic 1983 assembly elections which swept a non-Congress(I) party to power in the state for the first time. He had then taken great pains to remind them that the Congress(I) government had decided to give water to Madras in 1976 while the people of Rayalaseema did not have enough water to slake their thirst.

THE PROBLEMS of the people of Rayalaseema are very real. Anantapur, for instance, is the driest district in the country, next only to Jaisalmer in Rajasthan. Irrigation is certainly a major problem, and Rayalaseema's share of it is pathetically small. Irrigation covers 56 per cent of the cropped area in coastal Andhra, 31 per cent in Telengana, but a mere 4 per cent of Rayalaseema. Calling it a "distorted" picture of development, an engineer explains that of the 2,920 billion cu ft of water available to the state, this region gets only 257 billion cu ft. The Telugu Ganga and Srisailam right canal projects will give the region an additional 50 million cu ft, which is hardly adequate. Says the engineer: "Even if that is taken into account, it will hardly make up 10 per cent of the total water resources which is far less than the 24 per cent Rayalaseema deserves on the basis of a comparative analysis of the cropped area in the three regions."

A perspective plan for drought relief in the region showed that only 26 per cent of the sown area of Rayalaseema could be irrigated even if the entire water potential there were tapped. Three-fourths of the area would have to depend on monsoons and chance rains. And rains are very uncertain here because Rayalaseema is too far from the east coast to attract the north-east monsoon, and the high ranges of the ghats in the west cut off the south-west monsoon too effectively. Thus farming is something of a gamble. "When we sow groundnut, we are uncertain whether we will be able to get enough to eat and keep for the next year's sowing," says Anjanappa, a farmer in Kambadur. "If we get something more to sell, it is God's mercy."

All these factors have contributed to an alarming situation: "The desert is edging forward in Rayalaseema," warns K. Ananthacharyulu, retired government economist and president of the Rayalaseema Employees Association. He points out that the area under farming is dropping dangerously with the net sown area down from 75 lakh acres in 1953-54 to 64 lakh acres in 1982-83. Thus depending on agriculture could be suicidal for Rayalaseema. "The economic strategy for development may be reduced to one of survival unless industrialisation is planned in a big way," cautions a senior bureaucrat.

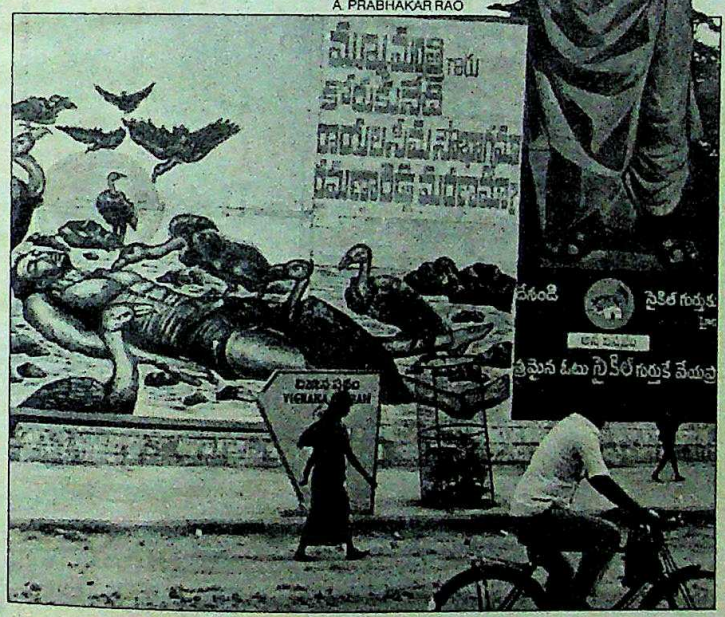
In fact, an official of the state planning department suggests that farm labour could be dispersed in other industries including dairying, because the returns from farming are likely to be poor for at least another 10-15 years. But Ramana Reddy argues that this wouldn't solve the problem at all. "There are at least 12 lakh farm workers and another eight lakh persons on the waiting lists of employment exchanges," he says. "More ways should be found to irrigate the land and more water brought to the drylands."

Evidently, the Government at least is keen on industrialising the region. Last fortnight, the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation announced a massive plan for starting industries in Kurnool district. Letters of intent were issued to 11 units with a total investment of Rs 86 crore to manufacture cement, caustic soda, paper, industrial hard oil and other goods. At present, though, the only major government-owned unit in Rayalaseema is the Cement Corporation of India's factory at Yerraguntla.

Reddy calling off his fast on the very same day for which the general strike was called did serve to avert some embarrassment for the party and the Government. But Ramana Reddy is a rallying point, and a symbol of the restlessness of the people of Rayalaseema and their dissatisfaction with the way they have been treated so far. This is despite the fact that the state's first two chief ministers Neelam Sanjiva Reddy and Damodaram Sanjivayya were both from Rayalaseema. They, however, did little for their people. This is because the other regions in the state have a far greater representation in the state legislature.

All this could be changing now. As a Rayalaseema bureaucrat remarked: "We are regarded as people with big hearts and small brains—essentially emotional, and highly volatile on issues concerning us." Unless NTR's promises prove more substantial than before, Andhra Pradesh might again be treated to a display of the volatile Rayalaseema spirit.

—AMARNATH K. MENON



A. PRABHAKAR RAO

A graphic hoarding of the agitators next to an NTR cut-out: ironic situation

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DOORDARSHAN

The Sitcom Success

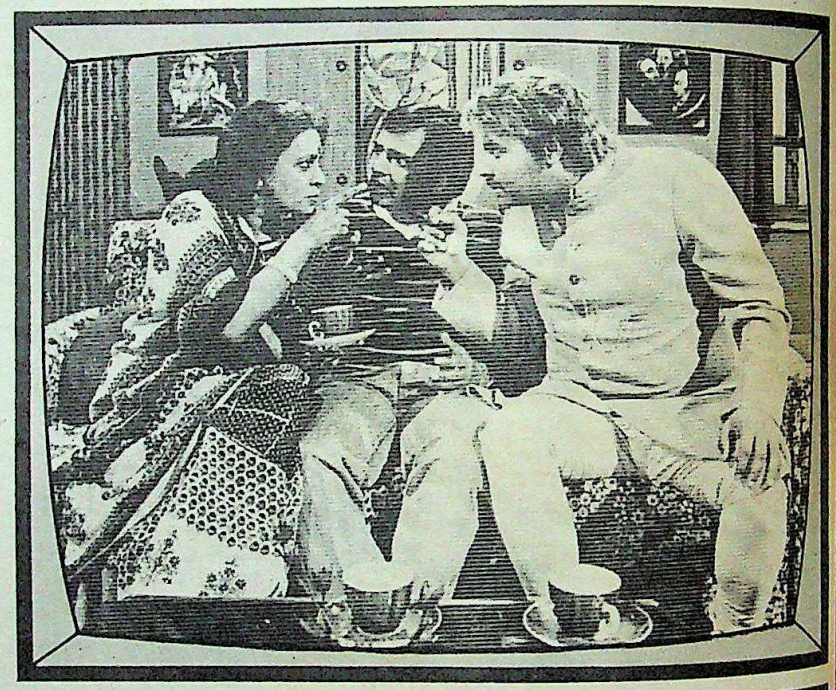
IS MAJLI still going to be languishing in jail? And is Lallu definitely getting married? At cocktail parties and dinner tables all across the country, such questions are being debated and discussed with as much animation as the current juicy spy scandal. Thrice a week, at prime time, viewers huddle round television sets to find out the answers in *Hum Log*, the melodramatic and slightly morbid soap opera that has captivated an ever-growing audience since it was first aired last July.

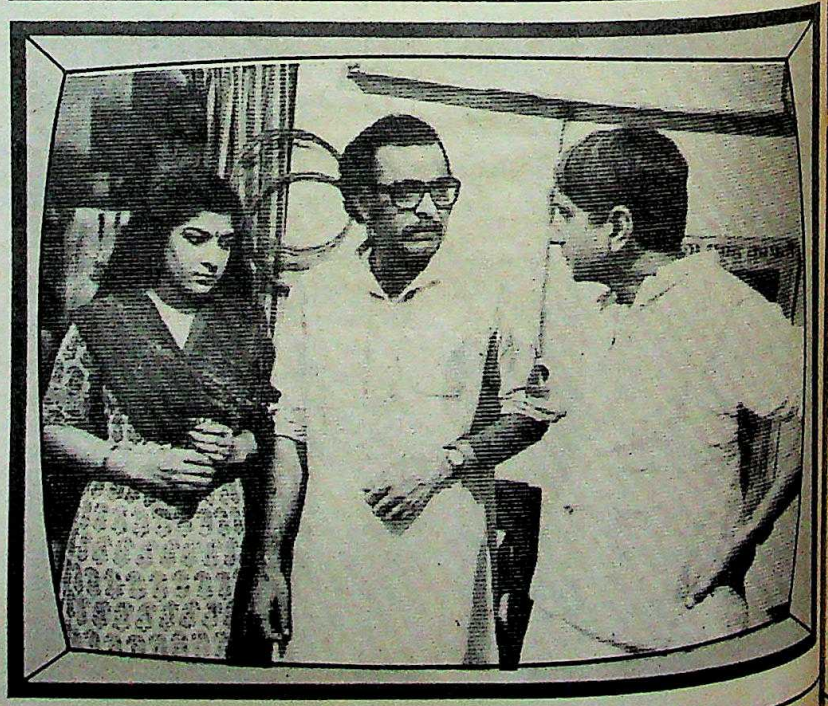
Hum Log, however, is also a symbol of the entertainment boom that has swept away the cobwebs from Doordarshan programming, heralding the arrival of sponsored indigenous television serials. Boom is literally the right word. The initially popular foreign serials like *Lucy*, *Diff'rent Strokes* and *Star Trek* are being rudely elbowed out by a host of locally-produced serials that are appearing on Indian television screens with metronomic regularity.

After the July debut of *Hum Log* came September and the launch of *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, a light, slick comedy which has garnered a large slice of the audience in remarkably quick time. October saw *Mashoor Mahal*, the Indian equivalent of *Double or Quits* which had audiences puzzling over questions like the composer of the national anthem or Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's most famous song. December ushered in Basu Bhattacharya's *Anveshan*, offering an insight into rural India through the eyes of a young boy and girl on a motorbike.

The entertainment avalanche, says Doordarshan Deputy Director-General Shiv Sharma, is deliberate. "People need good clean fun so we are putting a lot of stress on pure entertainment." With that has also arrived a breed quite new to Indian shores—the television star. Lallu and Majli, the two characters from *Hum Log* were virtual unknowns who have now become household words. *Mashoor Mahal* is deluged by an average of 5,000 letters a week and cartoonist Mario Miranda was stopped by scores of people on the street after appearing as a guest on one of its shows.

The enthusiastic audience response has prompted others to get into the act. Says Manjul Sinha, one of the directors of *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*: "Six months ago, nobody was willing to take the plunge, now everybody wants to jump on the bandwagon." Already, dozens of similar productions are in the pipeline, and, with advertising agencies and the film industry feeling the recession pinch, both professions are making a beeline for the small screen with unconcealed glee. "You can't close your eyes to advancement. It's better to get a piece of the action which is what we've done," says Ravi Chopra, son of film director B.R.Chopra who has just launched production of a sitcom series starring Asrani and Paintal as two amiable bumblers. His firm, B.R.Ads has three





Scenes from *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* (top) and *Hum Log*: the new boom

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other serials on the drawing-boards.

Not far behind is director Sai Paranjpye who is busy filming *Ados Pados*, a comedy series starring Amol Palekar as a divorcee struggling to bring up his young son and another soap opera titled *Love Story* which will feature her daughter Winnie Paranjpye Joglekar. "I've jumped on the TV bandwagon," admits Paranjpye unabashedly. And, almost inevitably, Doordarshan's own Tabassum of *Phool Khilen Hain Gulshan Gulshan*-fame has plans to script, direct and act in yet another sitcom, *Banno Rani* which, she confesses, is "an Indianised version of *Lucy*".

THE LIST seems endless and the cast increasingly better-known. Former Doordarshan director-general Kamleshwar has signed on Suresh Oberoi, Poonam Dhillon, Parikshit Sahni and Dipti Naval for his own comedy venture about a family guest-house run by a husband and wife team. The advertising world is hardly lagging behind in the soap opera stakes. Hindustan Thompson Associates is in the midst of filming *Khandan*, a big-budget serial about a self-made tycoon based on the popular American serial, *Dynasty*, and stars Sreeram Lagoo, Rohini Hattangady, Girish Karnad and Jalal Agha. However, one reason for the boom is also the abnormally high rates charged by Doordarshan for spot announcements on its own shows and for sponsorship of foreign programmes. The current rate works out to Rs 2,02,500 for a 60-second spot announcement on 'Super A' shows (popular prime time screenings like *Chitrahaar* and the Sunday movie). For sponsorship of foreign serials, the price tag is Rs 1,10,000 for a 40-second commercial while for sponsorship of indigenous programmes the bill is only Rs 35,000 for a two-minute spot announcement.

Consequently, a serial like *Zindagi* costs around Rs 1.5 lakh per episode which is a cheaper proposition for the sponsors Vicco Laboratories, than booking a spot announcement on Doordarshan's Sunday film where a two minute ad would cost Rs 4.05 lakh. The cost of purchase per episode for foreign programmes varies between $55 (Rs 690) and $400 (Rs 5,000) for ordinary serials and can be as high as between $10,000 (Rs 1.25 lakh) for special events like the Oscar presentations.

Though the boom is obviously in comedies and soap operas, other producers are breaking into yet uncharted territory. Actress Simi Garewal will host next month a regular half-hour programme

SERIALS

Catching On

BARELY 14 episodes old, *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* is, by Indian standards, a smash hit. Doordarshan bosses are, in fact, holding it up as an example of the kind of serials they would like to screen. "It is good, clean fun," says Doordarshan's Shiv Sharma, and TV commentator Anil Dharkar rates it "by far the best indigenous production on television." Already, it has started spawning imitations with a host of producers claiming they are making a "*Zindagi*-type comedy".

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

HEMANT PITHWA

Shobha Doctor (above) and Manjul Sinha: contrasting styles

Till now, local-made comedies have fallen flat on the small screen as witnessed by the efforts of I.S. Johar and Atma Ram. But current fears are that the success of *Zindagi* will usher in a surfeit of comedy serials and the show's co-director Kundan Shah warns against "assembly line productions". According to Shah, the reason for the serial's success is that when ideas start drying up, they hire new script-writing talent. The other is the meticulous attention to detail and no stinting on special effects. S.D. Oberoi, the show's producer, hung around Kishore Kumar's house for days before he managed to persuade the eccentric star to sing the catchy theme song.

The show was originally conceived by Kundan Shah and Manjul Sinha for a leading advertising company. When the firm got cold feet and backed out, adman S.D. Oberoi signed them on without even consulting his client, Vicco Laboratories. So far, 22 episodes have already been cleared and Doordarshan is reportedly quite content to let the show run for a year.

The serial has already made instant celebrities of the serial's main cast. Shafi Inamdar, who plays the absent-minded Ranjit, has received several film offers and Swroop Sampat who plays the combative wife, Renu, is the former Miss India whose attempts to make it as a movie actress have been given a new lease of life thanks to the show. Rakesh Bedi, who portrays Renu's brother, Raja, says street urchins stop him at traffic lights to yell "Raja, Raja".

In contrast, *Hum Log*, the soap opera jointly sponsored by Doordarshan and enterprising Bombay businesswoman Shobha Doctor's Time and Space Video Communications firm, is wallowing in troubled waters. Doordarshan had originally contracted for 200 episodes but is now demanding that the show be wound up. Doctor feels that the show is a victim of its own success with an influential lobby working to sabotage the serial. But television critics feel that *Hum Log* suffers from indifferent acting and painfully slow story lines. But for that the fault lies partly with Doordarshan. The serial was the brainchild of Information Secretary S.S. Gill who wanted a family planning message conveyed through a family serial. Doctor was provided with the story board and a Doordarshan script-writer and Doordarshan also maintains overall supervision and control. Still, the serial has managed to attract a faithful following but with the plethora of new serials awaiting release, *Hum Log* will have to try much harder if it is to retain its ratings.

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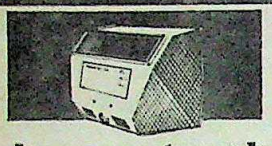

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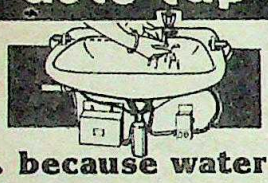

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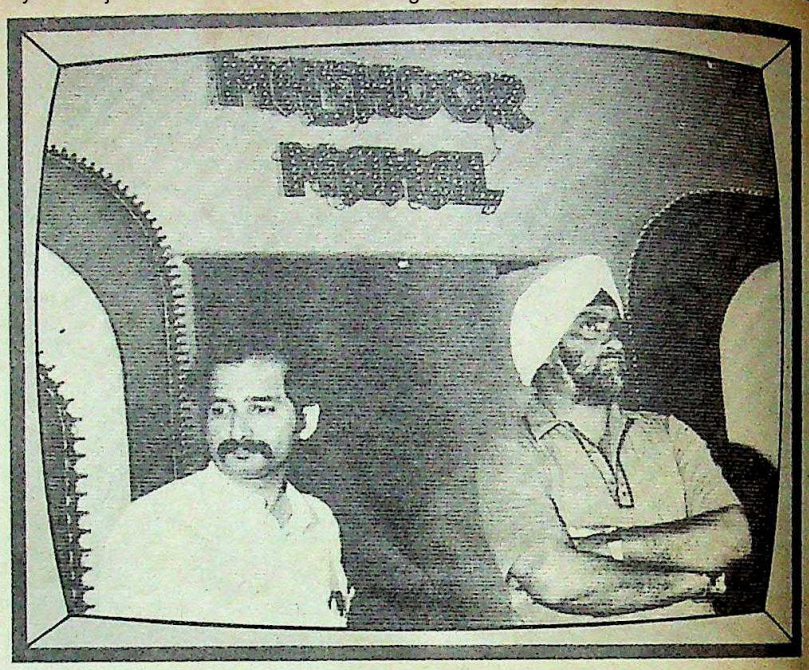

Cricket star Bedi as guest on *Mashoor Mahal*: jackpot

Woman's World segmented into issues concerning women, a leading textile company in collaboration with two magazines, plans a news round-up and a corporate programme, and director Ramesh Sippy and writer Amit Khanna are working on a quiz show.

The deluge may be welcome for an audience starved for entertainment but, as Shiv Sharma cautions: "Frankly, we may have created a Frankenstein. Such a vast instant audience has also given us tremendous responsibility." Adds Manjul Sinha: "Television is a different ball game from films. You can't build a dream world. There has to be a greater closeness to reality." The other problem with soap operas is that sponsors are unsure when Doordarshan will cry 'enough'. Shobha Doctor, co-producer of *Hum Log*, was surprised to receive a letter from Doordarshan last September informing her the serial could not run endlessly. Doctor, who was originally contracted for 200 episodes, says indignantly: "If soap can't go on for three generations then what's the point." She had plans to carry on till Lallu's son grows up into a technocrat. Doordarshan's new guidelines which give approval to only 13 episodes at a time have also stymied Doctor's plans for *Idhar Udhar*, another serial she has in the works. The future of *Mashoor Mahal* is also in doubt with bureaucratic objections that it is not educational enough.

But all this means that the future of the sponsored programme boom remains an uncertain question mark. Independent Television, which produced the widely-appreciated Election Specials, is producing 18 TV dramas for various sponsors but, according to a company spokesman: "We are expecting a lot of fatalities on the way."

Secretary of Information and Broadcasting S.S.Gill says the real guidelines for selection will be quality. The clearance limit of 13 episodes, he says, is only to ensure that producers do not get complacent about quality.

Meanwhile, signs are that sponsorship of foreign serials is not being too favourably viewed by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. *Diff'rent Strokes* had several sponsors in the queue after Campa Cola backed out but Doordarshan opted to take it off the box. Similarly, serials like *MASH* and *Sesame Street* suggested by sponsors have been vetoed for being too alien. Most sponsors, confused about the yardsticks, are opting for single events like the Oscar and Grammy Awards and the Nobel Prize ceremony. Though one-sixth of TV time is allotted for foreign programmes, Gill says that entertainment will have to take a back seat to education, information or shows that are stylistically superior. But the reduction of foreign serials has laid the field wide open for the Indian variety and for the moment, at least, the sponsors are merrily warbling "Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi".

—COOMI KAPOOR with SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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BIHAR UNIVERSITY

Degrees of Fraud

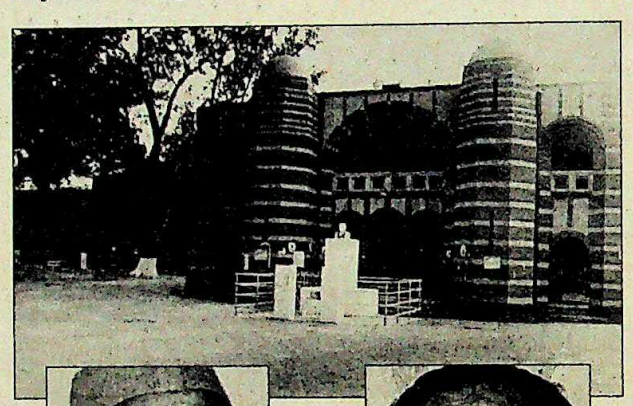
IT WAS strange arithmetic that confronted Bihar University officials. Only 288 students had been admitted to the Intermediate (science) course in Langat Singh College, but 500-odd "regular" students were up for examinations. Last year there were only 32 students in the physics honours class but 96 appeared for the examinations. Even by Bihar's notorious educational standards, something was definitely fishy. Students who had never set foot in class were appearing for examinations and going on to acquire a university degree.

The lid was finally blown last fortnight on the decade-old racket when Controller of Examinations K.P. Sinha found that the name on one of three late application forms for the B.Sc. pass examination tallied with that of a student who had been expelled from the political science examination only the previous day for cheating. Enquiries revealed that the 'student' had never been on the rolls of the university. With that the university authorities quickly restrained about 60 examinees from taking their science and arts honours examinations and withheld the admit cards of a large number of pass course examinees.

But the most disquieting discovery of all was the involvement of teachers in the scandal. The Principal of Langat Singh College, S.L. Das-Verma, found his forged signature on one of the forms cleared by a senior teacher. "It seems to be a deep-rooted and widespread conspiracy and only a thorough probe can unravel it," he says, adding that about 130 fake students were detected from his college alone.

At the same time that the university authorities were coping with the fake examination forms, Vice-Chancellor L.K. Mishra received a report saying that a large number of forms had been accepted without the necessary "no-dues certificates", implying that a great many of the students either were not genuine or had no records in the college. A preliminary enquiry showed, said Mishra, that many students appearing at the examinations had forged signatures on their forms or did not have their names in the admission register at all.

Langat Singh College: breeding ills



"We are convinced that such rackets cannot thrive without the active support of teachers and clerks."

L.K. MISHRA, *vice-chancellor, Bihar University*

"It seems to be a deep-rooted and widespread conspiracy and only a thorough probe can unravel it."

S.L. DAS-VERMA, *principal, Langat Singh College*

University sources say this racket has blossomed from small beginnings into a big business run by a caucus of teachers and clerks with caste and muscle power. And Langat Singh College—which once boasted Rajendra Prasad and J.B. Kripalani as teachers—seems to be its centre. A past principal of the college had brought in many of his cronies from the Begusarai-Monghyr belt who eventually formed the "syndicate" which runs the "business".

The modus operandi is simple. Clerks supply the forms to the students. The forms are filled up with bogus roll and registration numbers and then sent for "verification". This is where the teachers play their role. The forms are "checked" and sent to the university. Since everything seemed genuine on the surface, the university then issues the necessary admit cards. In some cases, said Das-Verma, students even attended classes without being enrolled. A parallel college administration of the racketeers admitted such students and issued them fake roll numbers—for a "fee".

Vice-Chancellor Mishra, who has been struggling to create the proper academic atmosphere in the caste-ridden and criminal-infested university, told INDIA TODAY: "We have asked the pro vice-chancellor to conduct a thorough enquiry regarding the involvement of teachers and clerks as we are convinced that such rackets cannot thrive without their active support." But Mishra has his work cut out for him. Informed sources say the university's colleges and headquarters are controlled by a particular caste and some toughs who run the institution in their own fashion. "Anybody trying to break their control is just eased out," says a teacher, who also points out that in the 24 years of its existence the university has seen 13 vice-chancellors.

Police sources say three of the university hostels are under the control of toughs and known criminals. Recently when Police Superintendent Randhir Verma raided a hostel after the murder of a criminal he found a cache of arms there. Nearly half-a-dozen teachers have been assaulted on campus when they tried to check examination malpractices, and Das-Verma was mobbed in his office after he detected the latest racket.

Bihar University seems destined to be always rocked by controversy. Two years ago its reputation was tarnished due to large-scale manipulation of results. Then came a controversy about the regular appointments of teachers. As a retired professor of the university says, "The new Government at the Centre may talk about delinking degrees from jobs, but here teachers and racketeers have delinked degrees from teaching."

—FARZAND AHMED

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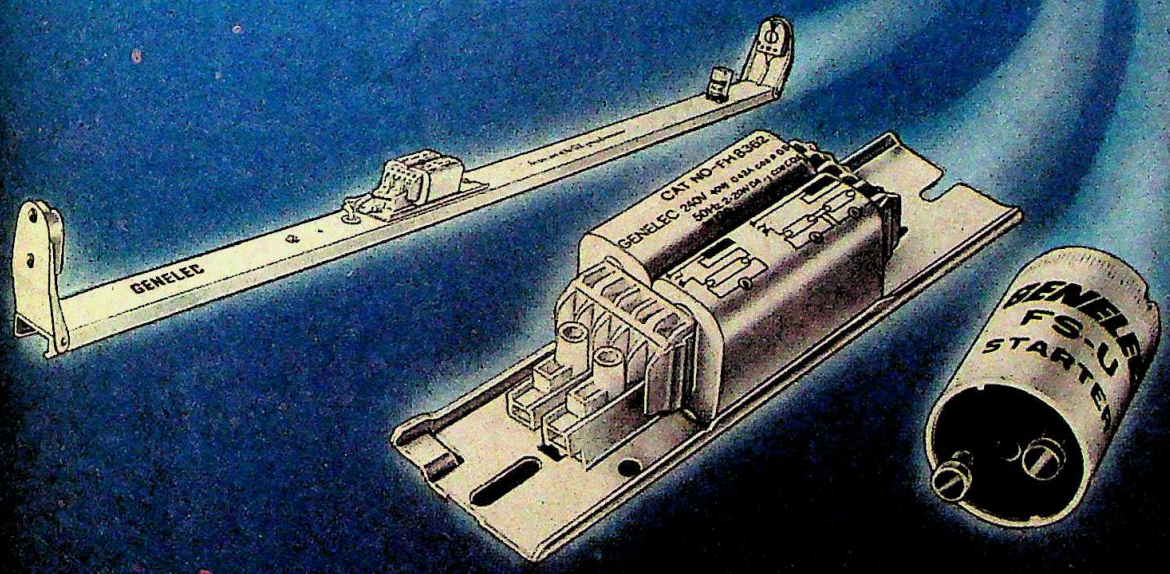

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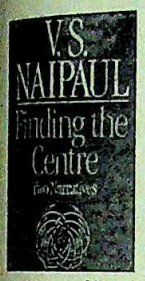

POLITICAL and military biographies are often justifications for actions taken and lives killed. Science biographies are a record of achievement. By and large, an autobiography is only an attempt at self-congratulation, bits and pieces of life tied together in a hurried, last ditch effort at immortality.

But the autobiography of an artist is different. And for an artist like Naipaul whose every word is delicately measured and weighed for style and content, whose every phrase and sentence is punctuated with just the right number of colons, whose simple narrative produces such profound complexities—any attempt at self-evaluation must be a painful exercise.

All art, be it painting, writing or sculpture, is a process, often a long and agonising one, stretching perhaps to a lifetime. With Naipaul it began with his choice of career: a writer. "From the earlier stories and bits of stories my father had read to me," writes the author, "I had arrived at the conviction—the conviction that is the root of so much human anguish and passion, and corrupts so many lives—that there was justice in the world. The wish to be a writer was a development of that."

Naipaul has sought, through his writing, to find his own centre. In every book he has attempted, under a thin veil of fiction, an introspection. In *An Area of Darkness*, the meanness of India, the squalor and filth of its people, the corruption of civilisation became expressions of Naipaul's own agony expressed through the medium of India, expression perhaps of his own lost identity, which he had hoped to find there.

In *Prologue to an Autobiography*, he has gone a step further. It is an assessment of all his earlier introspections. "A writer's work," he writes, "is the discovery of his subject. And a problem for me was that my life had been varied, full of upheavals and moves; I didn't know where to focus. Step by step, book by book, I eased myself into knowledge. To write was to learn. Beginning a book, I always felt I was in possession of all. At the end I was always surprised. The book before always turned out to have been written by a man with incomplete knowledge."

"Prologue" he begins, "is not an autobiography. It is an account of something less easily seized: my literary beginnings and the imaginative promptings of my many-sided back-ground." It is about the writing of *Miguel Street*. "Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the bannister of his back verandah and shout across, 'What happening there, Bogart?' Bogart would turn in his bed and mumble softly, 'What happening there Hat'. Bogart, a fictional character in Naipaul's *Miguel Street* is a real character in Naipaul's Trinidad.

Naipaul: painful exercise

"The first sentence," writes Naipaul, "was true. The second was invention. But together—to me, the writer—they had done something extraordinary. Though they had left out everything—the setting, the historical time, the racial and social complexities of people concerned—they had suggested it all: they had created the world of the street. And together, as sentences, words, they had set up a rhythm, which dictated all that was to follow."

"Over the next few days the street grew. Its complexities didn't need to be pointed; they simply became apparent. People who had only been names in one story got dialogue in the next, then became personalities; and old personalities became more familiar. Memory provided the material."

And despite having a beginning which was dictated by inspiration, the narrative floundered and the author groped for a middle and an end. "The technique became more conscious; it was not always possible to write fast. Beginnings, and the rhythms they established didn't always come naturally; they had to be worked for. And then the material, which once seemed inexhaustible dried up."

The process of creation itself, for Naipaul, remained elusive. For every inspiration, for every beginning he had to turn to his own life. It is easy to see how, for Naipaul, fiction and biography had overlapped. As always, the incidents and personalities of his real life acted as inspiration for those he imagined. In *A House for Mr Biswas* a Hindu family migrates to Trinidad. The hero of the book ends up as a journalist in a local paper. The story is about a fictitious Mr Biswas, but closely resembles the life of Naipaul's father. In *The Mimic Men*, a fictitious Ralph Singh, exiled from the Caribbean sits in his dingy London hotel room and attempts an autobiography. How different is that from Naipaul himself sitting at his old BBC typewriter in a tiny room attempting his first book.

Finding the Centre is an incomplete autobiography, and also an incomplete book. The hundred odd pages of *The Crocodiles of Yamussoukro*, the second narrative that follows *The Prologue to an Autobiography* are out of place in a book that begins as a highly personal account of a writer's life—its misgivings and deeply felt anguish, the pain of writer's block the tentativeness of the first effort—then goes into a travelogue. Why the two are together is unclear. Naipaul offers only a clue. "I travel to discover other states of mind," he says, "and live...in a novel of my own making."

Finding the Centre may be about the process of writing, and his narratives. Naipaul may even have succeeded in admitting the reader to that process but *The Crocodiles of Yamussoukro* is only a record of a traveller's experience—however skilled. It seeks to admit the reader only to the process of travelling, seeing and recording alongside the author, no more and no less.

Naipaul's book, however, is only the beginning of his search—recording the beginning of his career as a writer in England and the beginnings of family life in Trinidad. The bitterness of his Indian experience needs sounder justification. The continuing anguish of a writer's life, the successes and failures of an accomplished one, will make for more valuable reading in a more complete autobiography. For that we will have to wait till Naipaul finds his centre.

—GAUTAM BHATIA

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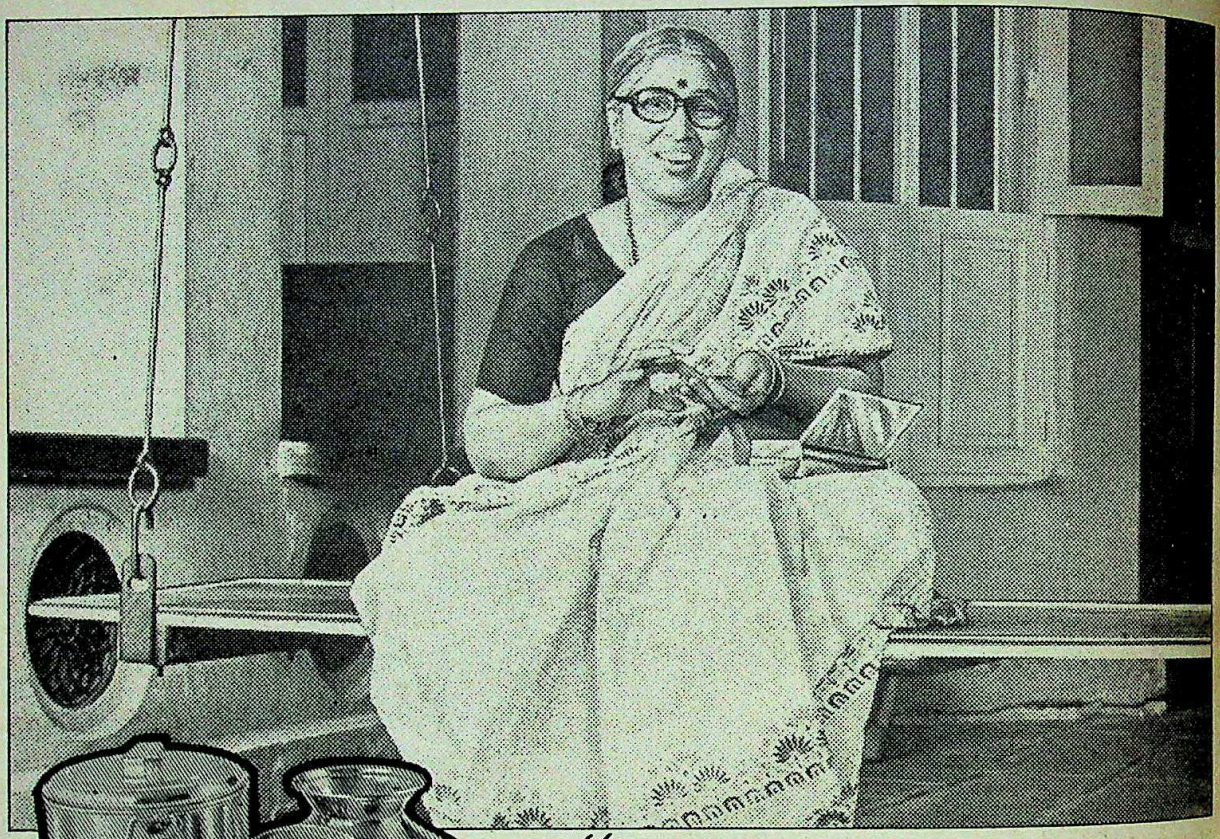

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Photographs by RAGHAVENDRA

Toxic affluents being discharged into the Tungabhadra river

KARNATAKA

The Waters of Woe

ON THE surface everything looks placid at the Ranganathittu bird sanctuary near Mysore, in Karnataka. The still waters of the Cauvery that engulf the nine tiny islets teeming with birds, however, not only run deep, but are also poisonous. Three industries including a public sector paper mill located 15 km upstream in Belagula discharge loads of toxic industrial wastes daily, contaminating the sanctuary and its environs. These effluents not only deplete the levels of oxygen in the river, thereby endangering all aquatic life, but also render it absolutely unfit for human consumption.

The effects have been disastrous. On many days dead fish can be seen floating on their bloated silver-scaled bellies. Foresters report that the 13 varieties of bird population that frequent the sanctuary have been rapidly diminishing. At least 12 families of spoonbills have disappeared and an estimated 300 of the slenderly built egrets that flock to the islets have died so far this season. Besides, there has been a consequent decline in the number of tourists visiting the sanctuary—from 1,000 a day a few years ago to a low average of 300 during the peak season—with many of them complaining of the foul smelling river and coming down with sore throats and coughs after drinking the water. Warns S. Devaraj, forester in-charge of the sanctuary: "If nothing is done it would no more be a sanctuary for birds."

And it is not just the birds that are endangered. Farmers in surrounding areas who use the river water to irrigate their fertile lands, complain that their crop yields have been depleting. In Palahalli, a tiny hamlet on the banks of the Cauvery, Umesh Veeraswamy Mudaliar, 22, found to his dismay that his patch of cucumber had become afflicted with a mysterious disease. The leaves appeared to have been corroded by an acidic substance and Mudaliar says: "Each acre used to give me a bullock-cart full of cucumbers. But now I get only half." Mudaliar's paddy crop has also been affected and now he gets 12 to 15 quintals an acre instead of the usual 20. Another farmer, Srikantiah Bore Gowda, who has six acres of paddy, complains that his cattle refuse to drink the river water and if they do, they fall sick. He too is frequently down with fever and cough after drinking the water.

Despite the flurry of complaints, the Karnataka Board for Prevention and Control of Water Pollution continued to maintain that the pollution of the river was "well under the permissible limits". But the board's bluff was called recently, ironically enough, by another state government agency—the Karnataka Engineering Research Station (KERS) at Krishnaraja Sagara. KERS has just completed a five-year study of five major rivers in southern Karnataka for the Central Board of Irrigation and Power and in its astounding findings have put the pollution control board to shame.

When KERS monitored the level of water pollution near the bird sanctuary in the last five years it found that the water was "unsuitable for drinking, bathing and fish culture". This was noticed especially during the period spanning February-July when the level of the river was low, resulting in higher concentration of effluents.

In more technical terms, KERS

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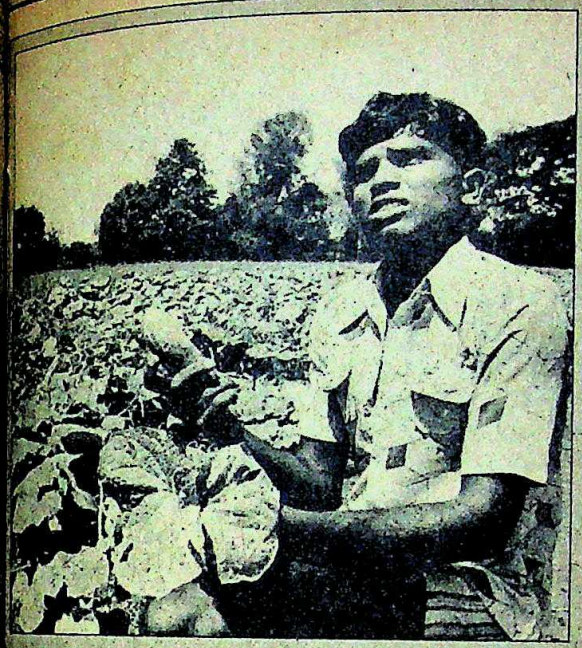


Umesh Mudaliar, a cucumber farmer from Palahalli says that one acre used to give him a bullock-cart full of cucumbers. Now he gets only half.

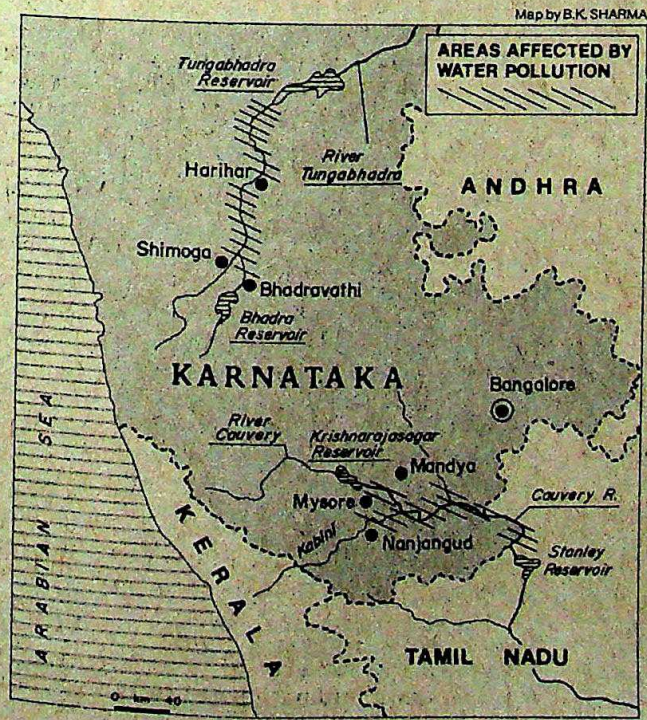
Gojappa Gangappa Basappa of Hirebidri says that 40 of his sheep have died after drinking the river water.

that the bio-chemical oxygen demand (BOD), or the amount of oxygen absorbed by the pollutants was rising steadily over the years. In 1979 for instance, BOD was 2.9 mgm a litre, just a fraction below the permissible limit of 3 mgm. But by 1983, it had risen sharply to 5.2 mgm a litre—a level in which no aquatic life can survive.

But the pollution control board's only reaction was an angry refutation of the KERS findings not only of the Cauvery but also of the other four rivers studied. Board Chairman S.Hanumanth Rao dismissed the KERS report contemptuously, saying: "The report is totally unscientific. I give no credence to it."

But Rao was forced to revise his stand when the Belagula farmers staged a dharna in front of the three industries said to be responsible for the pollution. The Mysore Mayor, D. Sathyanarayana, who pacified them, promised to shut down water supply to the factories if the pollution control board took no action. The board's response was prompt. It sent down its member secretary to inspect these factories the following day and found their effluent treatment plants working unsatisfactorily. It launched prosecution charges against the Mandya National Paper Mills, a public sector enterprise, after it found that the "industry is discharging the effluents without any treatment into the natural valley which joins the Cauvery river".

Map by B.K. SHARMA



Neither were two private industries—Kapchem Limited and Gammon Ferchems—spared. Kapchem, a distillery, was prohibited from discharging effluents till its treatment plants became functional. Gammon Ferchem, a fertiliser manufacturer, was asked to rectify the "small imbalances" before dumping effluents into the river. The "imbalance" was that Ferchems effluents were highly acidic, with a ph of 1.5 against a permissible limit of 6.5 to 9. Kapchem, on the other hand, was discharging effluents with a BOD level of 30,000 mgm per litre as against the permissible level of 30.

But by far the worst culprit is the Mandya paper mills. Started in 1962 as a private enterprise and then taken over by the Hindustan Paper Corporation in 1973 after it ran at a loss, the mill has so far not installed a viable pollution treatment plant. Only recently, after constant nagging from the pollution control board, have they decided to invest Rs 60 lakh to set up a

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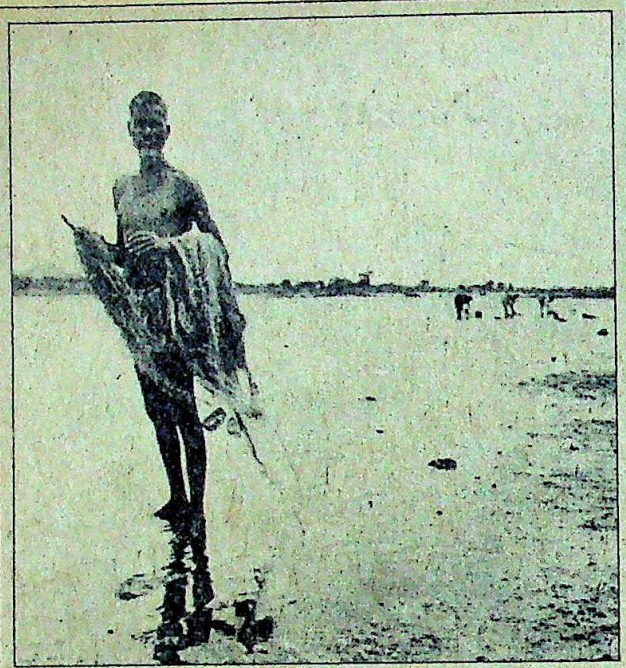
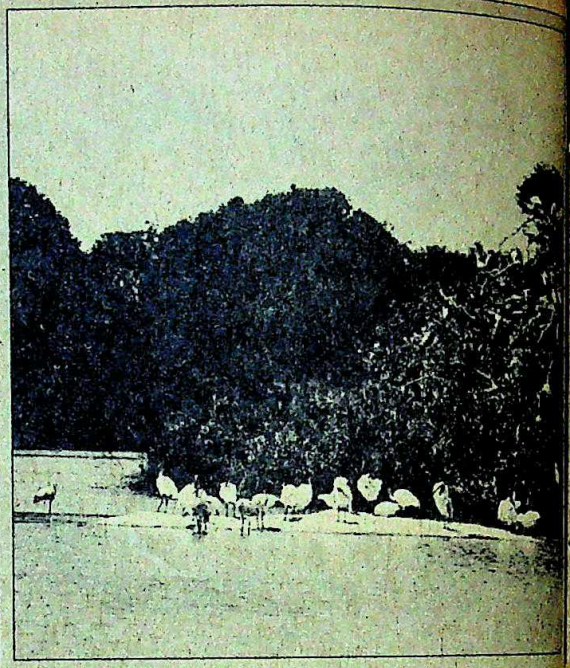


As a result of the pollution of the river over the last decade, the average loss to each fisherman annually was Rs 5,263.



Three industries discharge loads of toxic wastes daily, contaminating the sanctuary and its environs.

plant. Meanwhile, it continues to discharge 13,000 kilolitres of toxic effluents into the river daily. Works Manager R.S. Tripathi admits: "I do agree that the pollution levels are high. We are requesting the board for more time so that we can bring it down by next year."

WHILE the Belagula farmers will not allow these industries to drag their feet over pollution control anymore, about 60 km away, in the temple town of Nanjangud, on the banks of the Kabini, people are only now awakening to the hazards of water pollution. While the 1,000-odd pilgrims who come daily continue to take a "purification" dip in the Kabini before entering the Nanjundeshwara temple, KERS, which measured the BOD level, found that it went up to as high as 5 mgm per litre and concluded the water was "unsuitable for bathing and drinking". It identified the main culprits as the Sujatha Textile Mills in Nanjangud, and the town's sewage disposal system.

While the Sujatha Textile Mills denies that it is letting out any effluents into the river, D.Puttedeva, a 60-year-old shepherd who wakes up at 4 a.m to graze his sheep, accused the mill of discharging its effluents into the river at night. Other residents confirm his version and complain of irritation to the skin after they bathe in the river water.

Town Municipal President B.R. Shankar denies that there is a problem at all, but admits that his town has no underground drainage system and has plans to build one at a cost of Rs 1 crore. Meanwhile, sewage continues to be dumped untreated into the river. More forthright, the town's medical officer T.S. Jayanna says: "Pollution is a problem but how can we avoid it? People complain that the water is dirty. But when we send samples to the pollution control board they say it's okay. So what do we do about it?" He admits that there is a high incidence of skin complaints like eczema among his patients.

The pollution control board admits that untreated sewage from towns and cities is the major cause of water pollution. Of the 16 Class I cities in Karnataka, or those having a population of one lakh or more, only four have effective treatment plants. Even Bangalore is yet to get adequate treatment plants and continues to pump its toxic sewage into the nearby Vrishabhavathi river. The board estimates that 99 towns and municipalities have to set up sewage treatment plants. Only 32 can be expected to have these by the end of this decade.

About 20 km downstream from Shimoga town the river Tunga, wh meanders through lush paddy-fields, j up with the river Bhadra to form Tungabhadra. At the confluence lies sleepy hamlet of Kudli. But being sa wiched between two major rivers hardly brought any prosperity to the lagers. It has, instead, brought only m and illness. When the water dries up Tunga, the residents are forced to water from the Bhadra which, the study has shown, is highly polluted. villagers complain of developing ra fever or sore throats if they use the w Ironically, the main accused for the po tion is the government-owned Mys Paper Mills, and the Visveswaraya Iron Steel Limited, both located in the in strial town Bhadravathi.

From Kudli, the Tungabhadra w its way through Shimoga district crosses over to Dharwad where it bec at least half-a-kilometre wide near the dustrial town of Harihar where the owned Gwalior Rayons has its giant grade pulp and grasilene units. Ever it was set up in 1972, villagers stream have been waging a rel battle against the toxic effluents that factories have been discharging. In organised attempt to fight the th voluntary organisation—the Tra

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tional Centre—"for non-violent social change" sprung up in Ranebennur taluk, about 17km from Harihar in 1983. Comprising doctors, social workers and administrators, the centre has focussed on environmental problems as a result of pollution from the Harihar Polyfibres, as the units are known. Over the past year they held camps to educate villagers on the issues. The result has been a widespread awareness among the 21-odd villages located in the Tungabhadra area. In October last 300 activists gathered in front of Harihar Polyfibres in what they called a "vigil line" in silent protest. The centre has also filed a case against Harihar Polyfibres in the local magistrate's court asking for restraint on the mill from discharging effluents into the river.

VILLAGERS downstream from the industry also have much to complain about. In Hirebidri, 20 km from Harihar, fishermen complain that their catch has been dwindling with fish dying because of the pollution. In February last year, thousands of dead fish were found floating on the river. The pollution control board immediately clamped prohibitory orders on Harihar Polyfibres against discharging effluents into the river. A few days later the order was lifted.

The Fisheries Department, in a study, estimated that in Hirebidri alone, as a result of the pollution of the river over the last decade, the average loss to each fisherman annually was Rs 5,263, while in other villages it varied between Rs 172 to Rs 4,000. Says Kodajji Siddappa: "There are no more big fish in the river. We are only getting poorer." Gojappa Basappa, a shepherd, says he lost 40 sheep to diarrhoea after they drank the river water.

But Harihar Polyfibres denies that it is polluting the river. Executive president Sohilendra Jain argues that they have invested Rs 2.30 crore to set up what he claims to be the most modern treatment plant. "We are treating our effluents to the permissible limits. People must know that we are not expected to put back pure drinking water," he maintains. But Polyfibres has no explanation about how the massive fish kills occurred. Nor is the pollution control board forthcoming about the subject since they seem convinced that the Polyfibres treatment unit is working well. The KERS report, which again found the Tungabhadra downstream of Harihar Polyfibres unsuitable for aquatic life and humans, is the only spanner in the works. But as the Nanjangud shepherd, Puttegowda, says: "Who is to ask, and who will listen?"

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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Shiva Ka Insaaf: new dimensions of excitement

Bhutto: final reprieve

◆ By ignoring the hoary maxim that too many cooks spoil the broth, a leading Indian hotel chain has managed to achieve what was considered *tres impossible*. Last fortnight eight famous European chefs who would normally not be seen dead in each other's kitchens, sat down at the same table to acquaint themselves with Indian cuisine and also, in re-

The chefs: trading secrets

turn, display their culinary abilities for the benefit of carefully selected guests. After all, what's sauce for the goose, is also sauce for the gander.

◆ When the box-office refuses to budge trust the irrepressible Sippys to come up with something new. Their latest venture, *Shiva Ka Insaaf*, produced by Romu Sippy and directed by brother Raj, is India's answer to *Superman* which promises to go one better. It has been filmed in 3-dimension and audiences will be provided with special glasses to watch the film. The experience, promise the Sippys, will be wild; when Jackie Shroff—who plays Superman to Poonam Dhillon's Lois Lane—throws a punch, the entire audience will be ducking in their seats. "It's full of comic and gimmicky scenes," says Sippy, "the kids will have a whale of a time." Yes, but will the box-office?

◆ Success does have its price as the team responsible for the film *Nikaah* (Marriage) being a smash hit found out last fortnight. Producer-director B.R. Chopra, actors Deepak Parasher and Raj Babbar and heroine Salma Agha have been served summons to appear before a magistrate in connection with a defamation suit. The suit, filed by Imdad Saqui of Srinagar, alleges that *Nikaah* has defamed the Muslim way of life and culture and has deliberately misrepresented Islamic law pertaining to *talaq* (divorce). "This is a case of simple harassment," complained Chopra, "I feel that once a picture has been cleared by the censors no one should be entitled to file suits." Hardly the sort of stand that will stand up in court.

Agha, Babbar and Parasher in *Nikaah*: courting trouble

◆ Ruchika, the Delhi-based theatre group, is best known for the play they never staged—*Bhutto*. Two years after the Delhi police banned I.S. Johar's controversial political satire, the high court ruled in favour of the theatre group, allowing them to finally let the play—a three-act dialogue between the late Pakistan president and General Zia-ul-Haq—see the light of day. But the glad tidings have thrown up new problems for the play's director, Arun Kukreja who now has to reassemble his cast for re-rehearsals. "I wish it were a film," he says wryly, "we could have shown it immediately." Bhutto's ghost, it seems, will have to wait a while before eventually being laid.

Sharma: bargain book

■ Where there's a Wills, there's a way. Armed with that conviction, young sports journalist Lokesh Sharma approached ITC before the Los Angeles Olympics and made them an offer—a ticket to LA in exchange for a book on the Games. Last month, he finished his part of the bargain, the *Wills Book of Excellence*. "It was tough but great fun," Sharma says proudly. Obviously someone who believes in travel now, book later.

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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IN FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT

An Unequal Battle

As the campaign for next month's assembly elections hotted up, it was obvious that the dice was heavily loaded in the ruling party's favour. Reports from the states and an analysis of the electoral factors at play support that contention.

COVER STORY 74

Return of the Hero

Widespread speculation about Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran's health during his three-month absence was laid to rest when he returned home last fortnight. After his solitary swearing in he set about to put his fractious party in order.

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Life After Defeat

The aftermath of the December Lok Sabha elections proved a traumatic experience for opposition stalwarts. The most difficult has been the readjustment problems they now face in political terms as well as in their need for new accommodation.

SPECIAL FEATURE 26

"We expected too much of India"

Dr Henry Kissinger who pioneered the art of shuttle diplomacy visited India during his south Asian tour last month. In New Delhi, he spoke to INDIA TODAY on a wide range of issues that reflect the current priorities of the US Administration in the region.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT 92

Season of Discontent

India's dismal performance against a mediocre England eleven in the just-concluded cricket series was the result of a number of factors that does not auger well for the future. The only bright spot was the exciting young Hyderabad batsman, Azharuddin.

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Gold Rush

A new dimension is being added to Indian cinema that threatens to revolutionise the industry—three dimensional films. The man who pioneered them in India with remarkable success has sparked off a deluge, and now studios are busy getting into the act.

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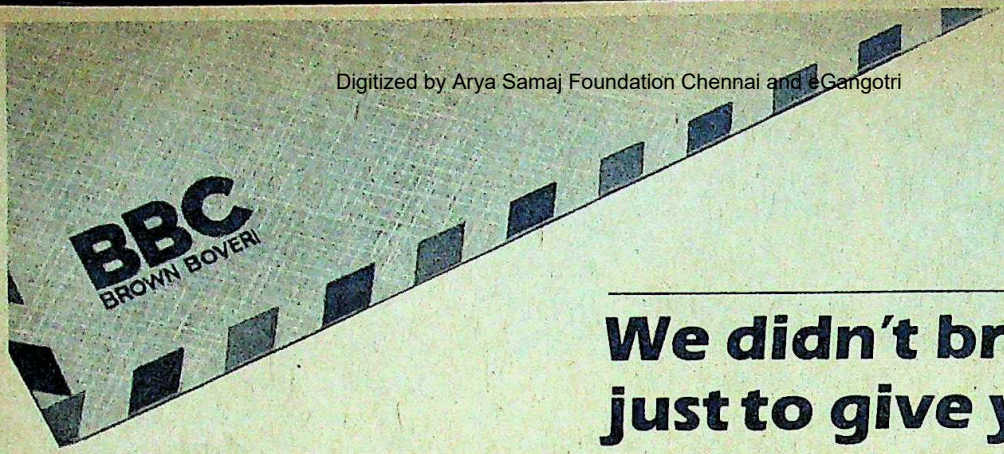

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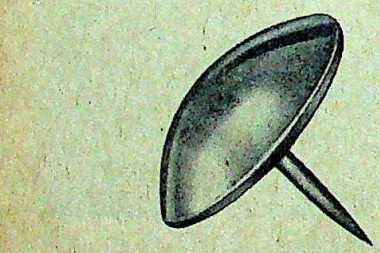

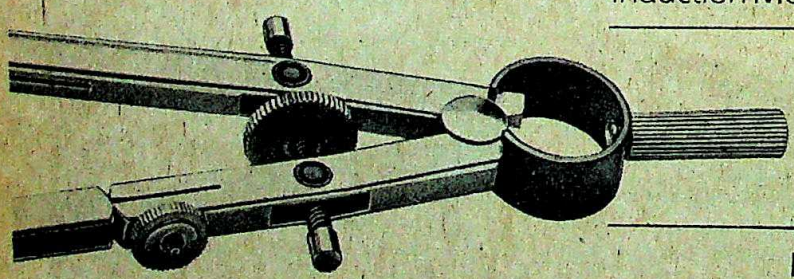

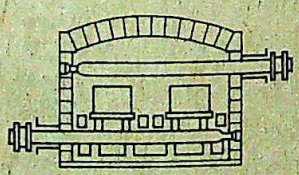

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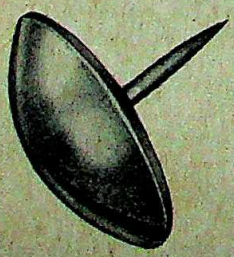

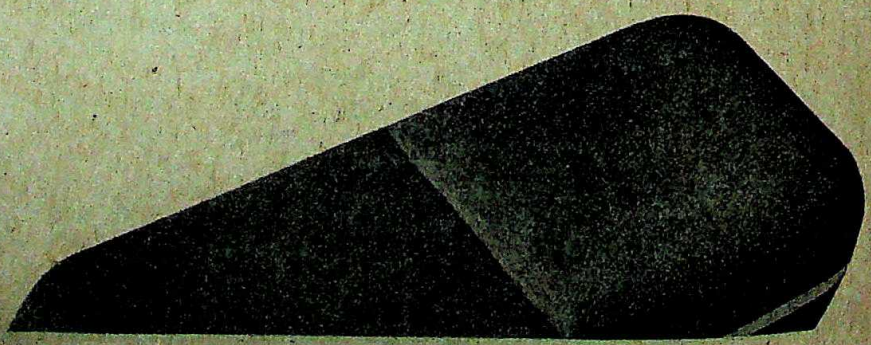

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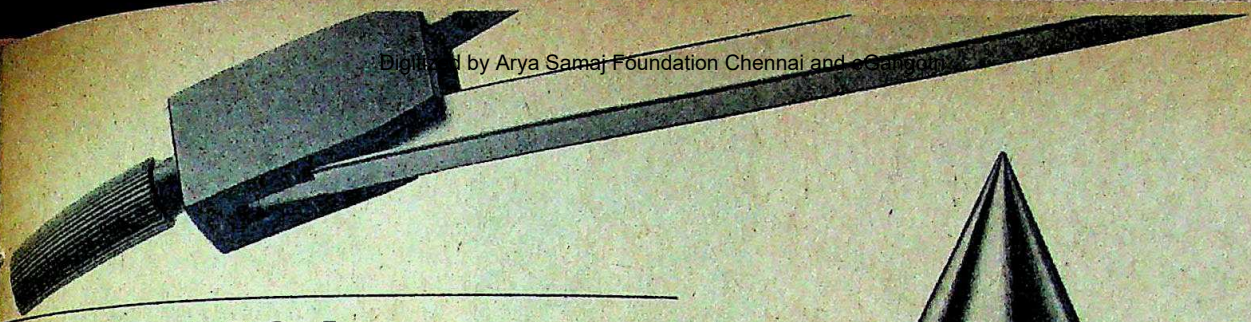

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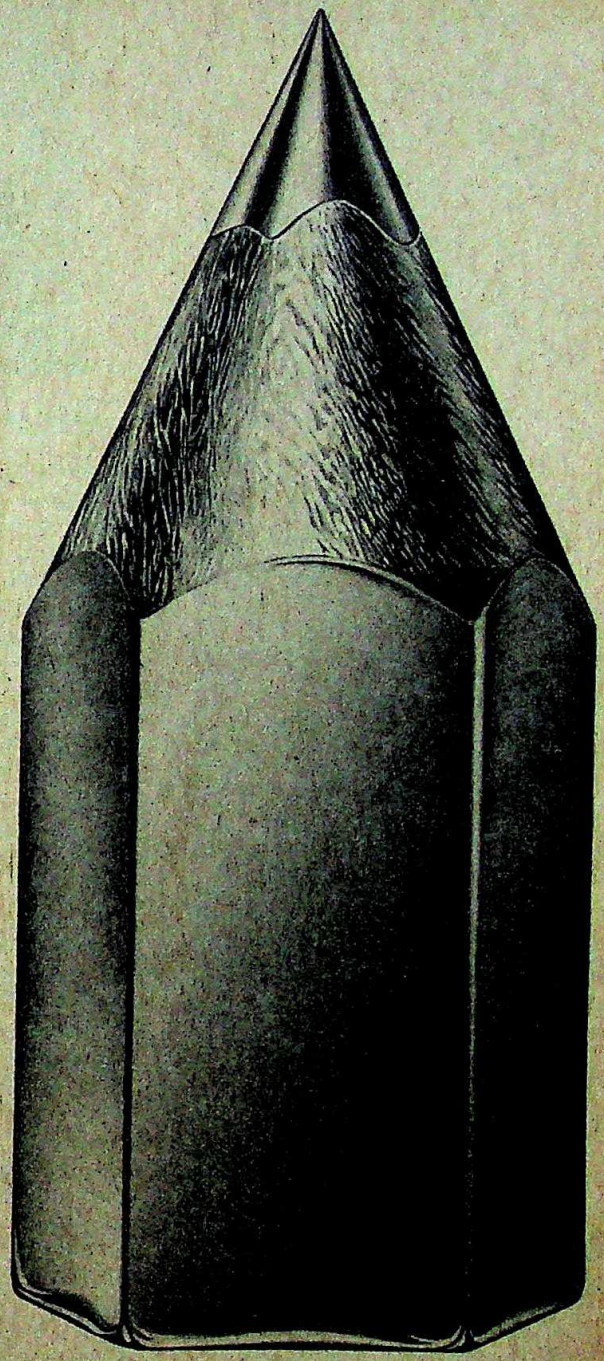

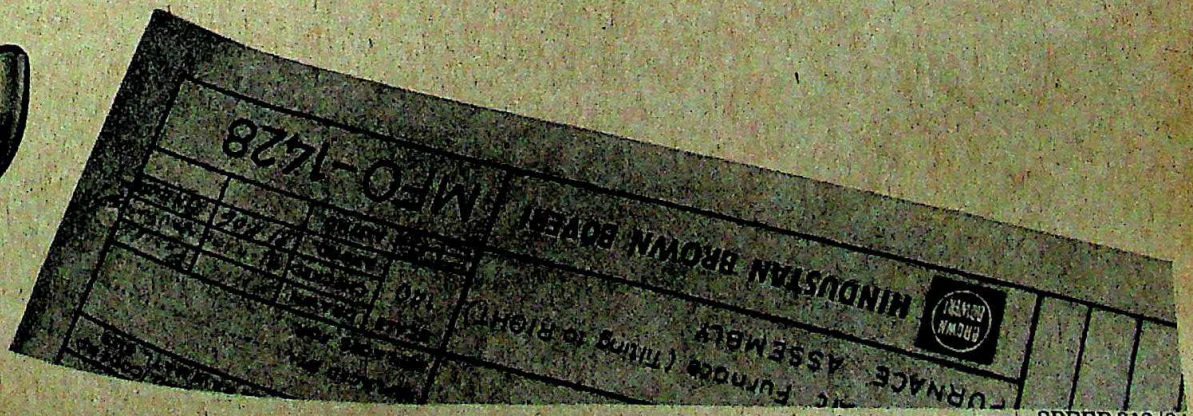

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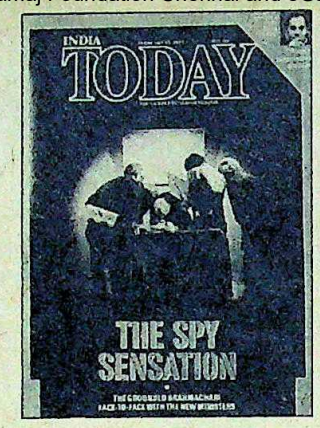

SENSATIONAL SCANDAL

Your cover story "The Spy Sensation" (February 15) was excellent. We can conclude from this that there is a big dent in our security system. The largest espionage, perhaps the most well-planned in recent times, had such a wide network that it surely could not have been built overnight and while it was spreading its roots our security system failed to spot them. The information given by the home minister is like a bikini which has concealed the essentials and revealed the superfluous; no information regarding who all were involved and how much damage it has done to the country has been made available. Rajiv Gandhi cannot really fulfil his promise to give the country a clean government unless he pinpoints the cause and source of this rot and takes stern steps to root out the evil. He has to take bitter decisions in order to live up to the expectations of the people who voted him to power.

Eluru C. SURYAM

■ "The Spy Sensation" was a lukewarm report on the biggest spy scandal since Independence. It did not unravel the root causes of the malaise. Notwithstanding the magnitude of this shameful episode, it is essentially a slur on the Government whose employees are selling the nation's secrets for meagre sums. The extent to which corruption has been encouraged and patronised is virtually eroding the system. We are making huge claims that we have unearthed a spy ring, but what big deal is it that considering it has been going on for such a long time and that too under the prime minister's nose. The results of past misrule are now coming to light.

New Delhi USHA SUMIT

■ The cover photograph was praiseworthy and highly symbolic: sinister black with the spotlight on a few influential persons having access to confidential files rightly conveying the inherent mood of intrigue, mystery and treachery behind the espionage operation.

Madras K. VAITHEESWARAN

MATTER FOR CONCERN

Rajiv Gandhi in his interview ("People's expectations are scary", February 15) has said that the judicial inquiry regarding the Delhi riots is not being instituted because it would be raising dead issues. Mrs Gandhi died before the riots occurred and as such her death is a "deader" issue, but an inquiry has still been instituted on her assassination and the entire election campaign was woven around this facet. Her murder rightly calls for an inquiry but so do the countless ghastly murders which occurred in the wake of her assassination. If Mr Gandhi is serious about his clean image, he should institute an inquiry on the matter immediately, and if not, let it be known that he is in any case no cleaner than any of his politician colleagues.

Jalandhar MEENAKSHI

SIGNIFICANT MOVE

Your analysis of the Anti-Defection Bill ("Taming the Turncoats", February 15) was illuminating. The passing of the act is no doubt a momentous decision and is imbued with the laudable purpose of cleansing the dirt from Indian politics. But the act puports to only cure the symptoms and not the disease itself. The malaise of Indian politics is its lack of principle and unless its ideological base is strengthened, it will continue to be a hide-out for undesirable characters. Thus, the only good thing about the new act is that it is in the right direction.

New Delhi ANSHUMAN TIWARI

DOWN TO EARTH

To discontinue the *Hum Log* serial, as stated in your story "The Sitcom Success" (February 15) could be the worst thing Doordarshan could do. The family serial may lack the wit and the filmi glamour of *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* but it is certainly in a class by itself. A visit to any rural area or for that matter to any lower middle class area will show how popular the serial is. The actors are anything but indifferent. True, some of its sequences are slow, but it is not right to condemn the entire programme on this count.

Madras SUNDAR SRINIVASAN

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QUIET BURIAL

The cover illustration was an excellent portrayal of the Opposition in the wilderness (January 31). The pale sepia pillars reminded one of an ancient gallery of living martyrs, buried in a political upheaval which might prove to be a historical relic some day.

Secunderabad — NAZNEEN EDULJEE

■ The cover story on the decimated opposition at the recent hustings was revealing. The drubbing did not seem to be visible to the national press who failed to see the mood of the common voter. What has emerged from this defeat is the indication that we are now sick of octogenarian leadership and that such leaders should step down voluntarily.

Panipat — YASH K. MANGAL

■ You should not have included N.T. Rama Rao in your cover illustration, bracketing him with Chandra Shekhar, Charan Singh, Vajpayee and others. He has proved his mettle better than any other leader of the so-called national opposition parties.

Madras — A. SESHAGIRI RAO

■ "In the Wilderness" is a poignant story of opposition dilemma. They have not been able to overcome the shock of a near total wipe-out. The fact is that the Congress(I) has identified itself with the masses and the people are ready to vote for Rajiv for being Indira Gandhi's son and for symbolising new hope, change and dynamism, without making promises. How would it matter if the opposition parties bring about a change in their attitudes, policies and programmes? At present, the greatest service the opposition stalwarts can render to the country is by renouncing politics and forgetting about their desire to serve the people. Let awareness of the need for change spontaneously dawn on the people, and there will be change.

New Delhi — GOPAL TRIPATHI

MOVING ON

Your special report "Rajiv Gets Going", (January 31) provided a very clear picture of the new prime minister's dynamic rise. At the same time you have not hesitated in expressing doubts as to whether he will finally be able to deliver the goods. There are bound to be others like you. Looking at the swift electronic action of his "broom", I am sure people will soon realise their mistakes. The way Rajiv has started tackling important issues immediately after taking over can be seen as a positive sign and one hopes that we will shortly have a clean administration that works.

Noida — J.R. LAROIYA

■ Your report speaks of new brooms sweeping clean. But sweeping the dust off one place and pushing it into the other would not help in producing the desired results. The reshuffles in the bureaucracy lead only to short-term hubbubs, but once the newcomer gets used to his surroundings he settles down impassively. New governments may come and go but as long as the national character does not develop and integrity and sincerity become a part of life, we cannot hope to achieve anything.

Jaipur — ASHIMA VARSHNEY

APPALLING RITUAL

It is appalling to note that despite the all round progress, there are pockets in the country where superstitions are still widely prevalent ("Scars of Suffering", January 31). The arrest of one person here or there is absolutely no solution as branding seems to have overwhelming social sanction. That even educated people should have faith in its efficacy goes to prove that possessing a college degree is no panacea to social problems—or any problem for that matter—unless our so-called system of education teaches one to question such beliefs. The solution lies in educative propaganda against the ill-effects of branding and developing medical facilities in the area; penal action may not help since quacks indulging in such activities do so not merely for personal material gains but in response to the social demands.

New Delhi — SURENDRA S. YADAV

■ Branding is the most common line of treatment especially for various ailments of children—to the extent that if a survey of the local rural population were to be conducted the scars of branding could serve as marks of identification for at least 70 per cent of them. In spite of the fact that branding is a criminal offence it still continues and has social sanction. This barbarous practice should be abandoned immediately, but till then it should be made a rule that the person accompanying the child for branding should also be branded so as to make him or her realise the agony of the heinous act.

Udaipur — DR A.M. JAIN

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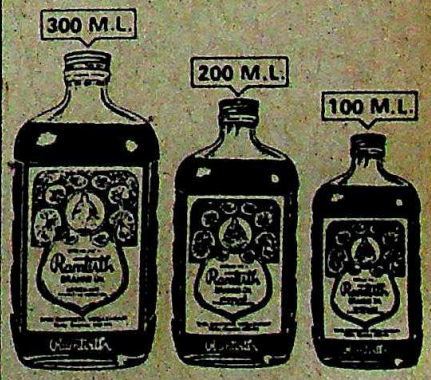

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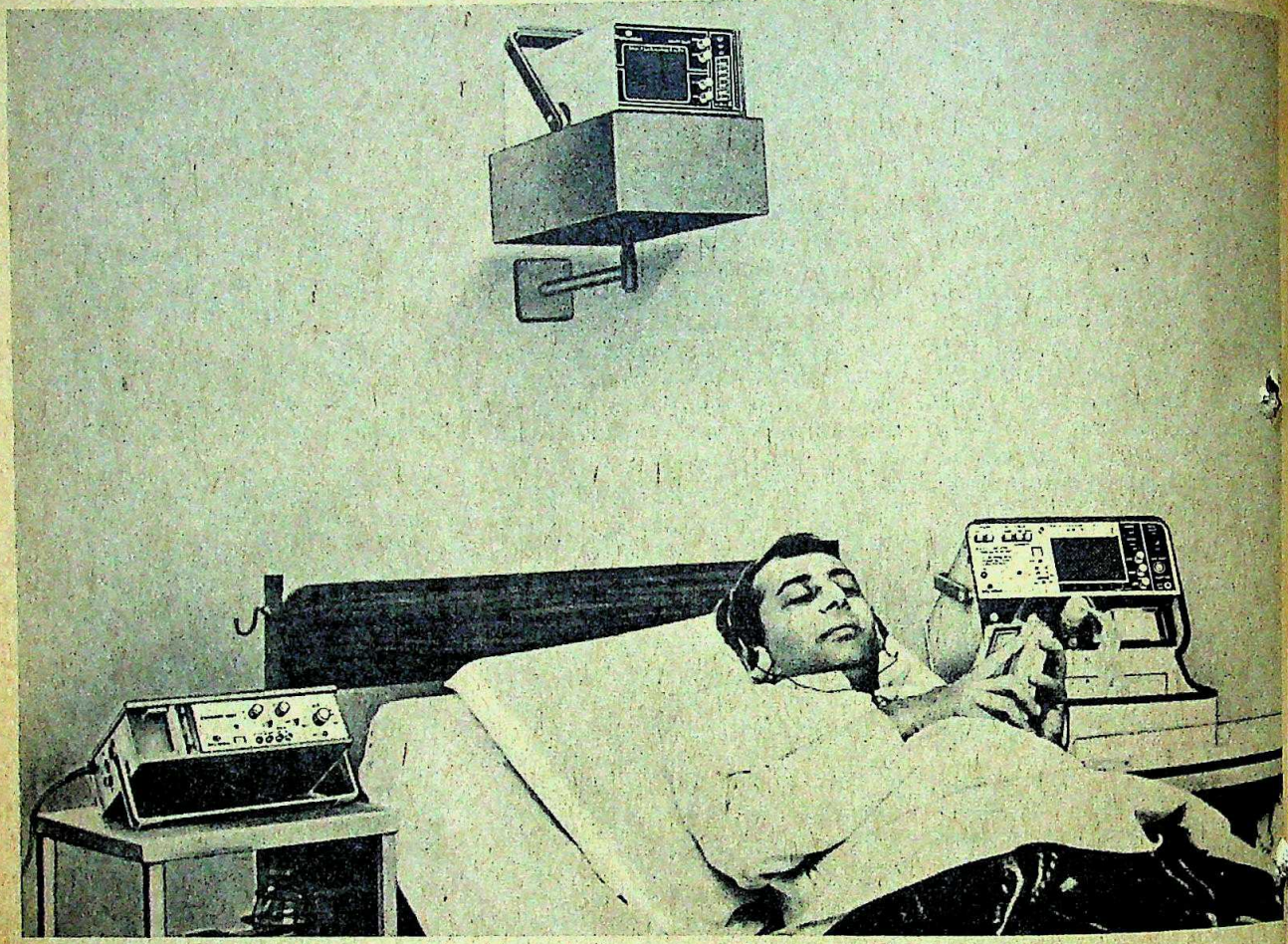

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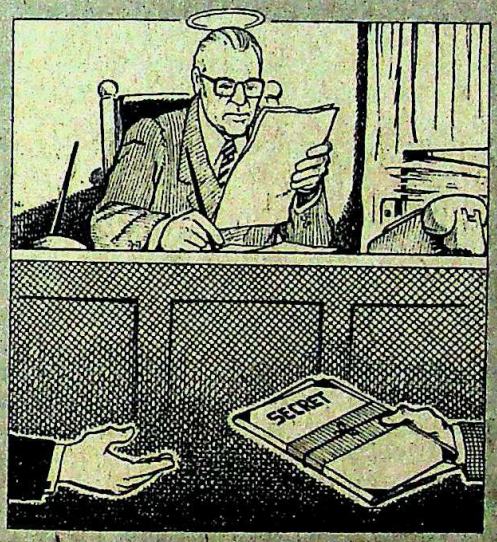
Defining Accountability

THERE'S a railway accident in Bombay, and the minister sends the two seniormost officials in the Railway Board in New Delhi packing. A prime minister is assassinated, and the intelligence chief resigns while a police official in charge of Mrs Gandhi's security is suspended. A spy ring is unearthed, and three officials whose personal staff were involved are made to suffer in various ways. And on a different plane, when an industrial disaster causes 2,500 deaths in Bhopal, the chairman and managing director of the company as well as the chairman of the parent American firm are arrested.

These and other events of the last few months have raised the question of public accountability with a new urgency and sharpness, and the conclusion is inescapable that accountability has not been interpreted properly. Why should the railway minister decide that he is less accountable for a railway accident than two of his officials in Delhi (in this case, fortunately, better sense prevailed and the officials were recalled)? Why should the intelligence chief be more accountable for Mrs Gandhi's assassination than the home minister? And why should senior officials be more accountable for the after-hours actions of their personal staff than the counter-intelligence outfit that is supposed to vet their bona fides? Finally, what was the point in arresting the chairman of Union Carbide Corporation of the US and then releasing him later the same day? There is an abundant arbitrariness here that needs to be examined closely, and the principle of accountability needs to be clearly defined so that responsibility rests where it should.



There are only three cases easily recallable of ministers taking the rap for events. The first was when V.K. Krishna Menon was transferred from defence minister to minister for defence production following the Chinese debacle. The second was when Lal Bahadur Shastri resigned as railway minister after a rail accident. And the third was more recently, when Vishwanath Pratap Singh resigned as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh following a dacoity carnage. Following from these precedents, should Narasimha Rao have resigned as home minister after Mrs Gandhi's assassination, and should Arjun Singh have resigned as chief minister of Madhya Pradesh because of what happened in Bhopal. Also, should some of those who have got the rap been declared free of blemish?

One conclusion can be reached quickly. The old (but largely ignored) tradition of ministers resigning automatically after a major railway accident or other tragedy needs to be re-examined. Governmental functioning today is far more complex than in the past, and a ministerial resignation following an event over which he had no control and which he did not cause through wrong decisions serves little purpose. A minister or official should be asked to leave or be punished in some other way only if some direct culpability or neglect is established. A case in point would be if a minister ordered a cutback on investments in replacing over-aged railway track, which then gave way causing a train accident. Another would be if officials warned that the location of a chemical plant was unsafe from the point of view of the local population, and the minister overruled him. And a third would be the case of an official who had ignored secrecy procedures, thereby enabling his underlings to leak out confidential information. The only exception that should be made to this doctrine of direct culpability would be in the event of a major catastrophe, where overall responsibility must be accepted by the person at the top. And a home minister's resignation would on this count be called for if the prime minister is assassinated.

Judged by this yardstick, many of the decisions on accountability in recent months fall short of making sense. For instance, why should an upright and intelligent officer like J.S. Baijal be reverted from the Finance Ministry to his parent service cadre in Orissa because of the actions of an underling whom he did not choose but inherited, and who had served other officers in the past and who therefore escape penal action only because of fortuitous timing? And should P.C. Alexander have been held more accountable for the spies in his office than the Intelligence Bureau which had the responsibility of clearing Alexander's staff from the security angle?

The plight of those who have taken the rap must also be considered in the context of the ripple effects it can cause in the civil service. If promising or distinguished careers can come to an ignoble end because of mischance, or because the secrecy procedures are so archaic and impracticable that they must necessarily be ignored, the reports of worry and concern among government officials are entirely understandable. No official can function with the Damocles sword of uncertainty hanging over his head. A government that professes concern for public accountability must be clear in its mind as to what it is trying to do, ensure that there is no miscarriage of justice, and be careful lest hasty steps taken rebound in unexpected ways. The country must be grateful for a government that is responsive to the need for accountability and cleanliness in public life, but good intentions are not ends in themselves. They must find expression in justifiable action that is grounded in a clearly defined framework of principles.

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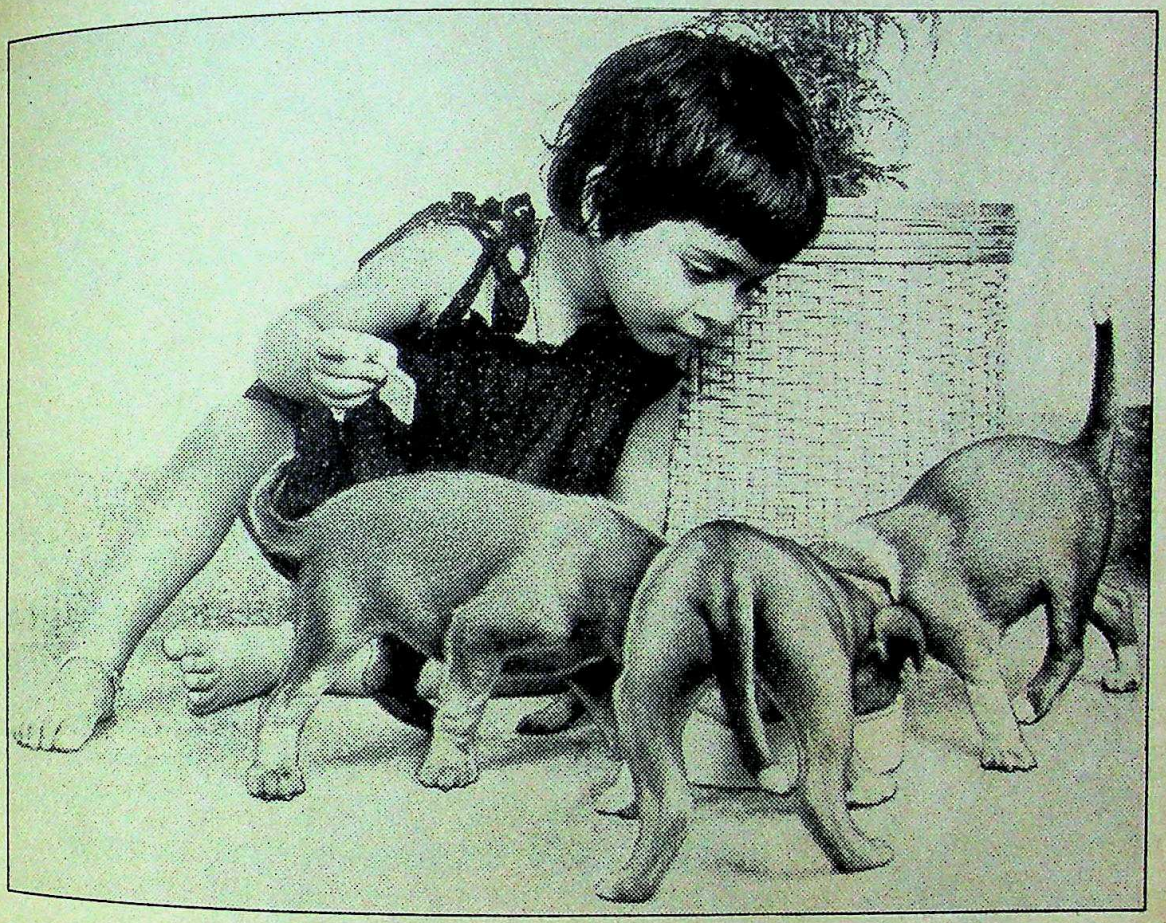

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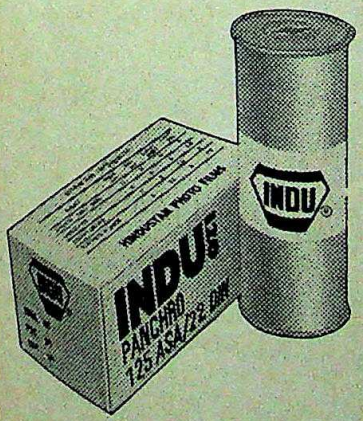

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- *After having been Humphrey for long years, it is nice to be told "Yes Minister".*
  ■ NATWAR SINGH in *The Times of India*

- *How can a man who is afraid of a lizard, work against the country?*
  ■ GEETA NARAIN wife of Coomar Narain

- *Anywhere else in the world a government caught leaking so damagingly would be worried about its survival; here the prime minister collects kudos simply because he is vigorous in his detection!*
  ■ VINOD MEHTA in the *Sunday Observer*

- *You can abuse me, slander me, call me defector, but you have no right to take Jammu & Kashmir out of the map of India. That will happen only over my dead body.*
  ■ G.M. SHAH in *Indian Express*

- *Millions of Indians clearly want to believe that Rajiv is a messiah divinely sent to lead the country to greatness.*
  ■ S.NIHAL SINGH in *Newsweek*

- *If at all Mrs Gandhi was our only programme', it was because she was the party, she was the government, she was the ideology, she was the nation. This left the opposition with no other target save her.*
  ■ RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

- *I would tell you that one reason Indo-US relations are strained is because the secret dream of most Americans is to conduct the sort of foreign policy that India conducted for a long period of time.*
  ■ HENRY KISSINGER at a meeting in Delhi

- *I won't hesitate in saying that India has been successful in cutting Pakistan down to size.*
  ■ PRESIDENT ZIA to Prem Bhatia in *The Tribune*

- *I'm not a fancy woman sitting pretty in a bourgeois drawing-room. I find myself equally at ease in the Dharavi slums eating dal-roti with a badli worker.*
  ■ DR NAJMA HEPTULLA in *Patriot*

- *Everything is not what it seems in politics. In politics there are wheels within wheels within wheels.*
  ■ JAYALALITHA in the *Sunday Observer*

- *For the first thirty eight years of my life (till the ascent of Everest) no one cared what nationality I was. I was a sherpa, a simple hillman. But now I was a doll to be hung from some kind of a string.*
  ■ TENZING NORGAY in *Society*

- *People in my constituency are expecting miracles from me. I have to find time for them. I can't give up films. They give me my bread.*
  ■ SUNIL DUTT in *Sunday*

- *I made the mistake of acting in a film called* Doosri Dulhan. *Neither Ray nor Lean can compare with Lekh Tandon who made this film.*
  ■ VICTOR BANERJEE in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

- *I had a bad habit even then. I tended to lift tunes. And the tunes I now played to Dada were all lifted tunes.*
  ■ R.D. BURMAN talking about his father in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

- *The press is only interested in knowing who's been sleeping in my bed or in whose bed I have been sleeping. Or in knowing who has raped me or whom I am raping.*
  ■ DIMPLE KAPADIA in *The Times of India Sunday Review*

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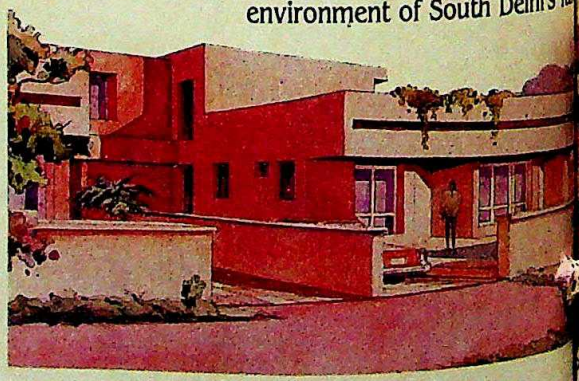

Types D, E, & F

	D	E	F
Plot Sizes: (sq.m)	420	336	264
Covered Area: (sq.m.)	203	168	158

Types G &
Plot Size: 167
Covered Area

DL UNIV LIM

DLF Qutab Enclave

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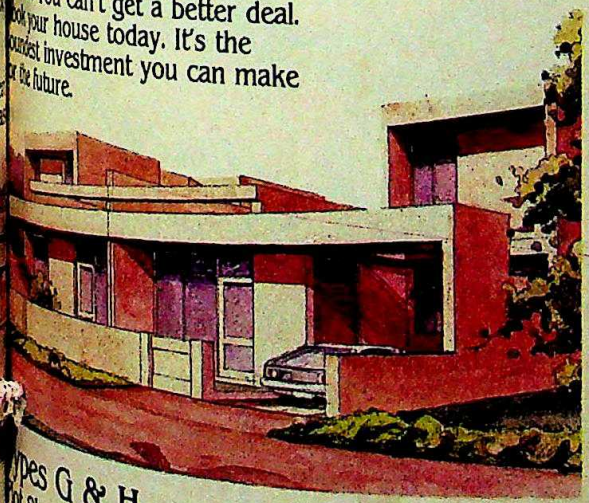

pes G & H
ot Size: 167 sq.m.
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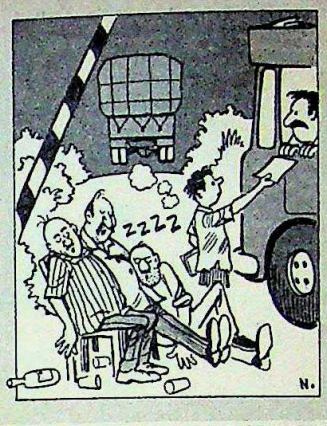
DUTY SLEEP



■ Sleep, according to one playwright known familiarly as Bill, "knits the ravelled sleeve of care" and generally tones up a system. People in Guna, Madhya Pradesh, may not have heard of the gentleman but it is obvious, from an incident last month, that they think similarly.

Two entry tax collectors were on duty at a crossing near the town late at night. For some reason they couldn't stop themselves from dropping off, but just before the tiny elves closed down their eyelids they caught hold of a passing driver, gave him the receipt book and asked him to do their job. The driver dared not say nay ,and for some time scrawled signatures until the elves attacked him with their potions. Before succumbing, he grabbed a *dhaba* boy and told him to do the job.

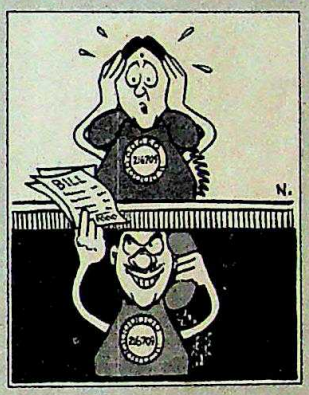
When the revenue inspector came checking at four in the morning—when, according to Bill, "dawn in russet mantle clad" comes creeping over the hill—he found two snoring officials and one snoring driver and a small boy handing out receipts. After that, of course, there was no more talk of ravelled sleeves of care.

PHONEY BILLS

■ Malicious people have been spreading canards that the Indian phone system does not work. Incontrovertible evidence that it does, telephones or no telephones, comes from Sucheta V. Nadkarni of south Bombay.

Ms Nadkarni's telephone, number 216709, was to have been installed on February 27, 1984, and she received a beautifully written letter from Bombay Telephones telling her so. She didn't receive the phone, though three months later she received a visit from repairmen who came to check her telephone because they had received complaints that it wasn't working. Further appeals brought no phone, but a bill of Rs 710 for 102 calls.

Upon which an agitated Ms Nadkarni showered everybody with letters and the phone was finally installed on October 11, 1984. A week later 216709 was cut off, because of "non-payment" of the bill. Two months later, Ms Nadkarni was to be seen with her head in her hands shedding tears over a second bill for Rs 200. Clearly, someone else was using 216709 and Ms Nadkarni was paying for this piece of highly misplaced altruism.



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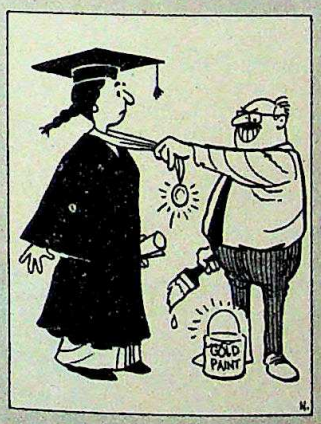

■ Swaroop Savita Bhave was one of hundreds who in 1984 was adjudged Bachelors of Arts. The lady was understandably pleased with her achievement. What made things better for Bhave was that, having secured the highest marks in her major, Philosophy, she was entitled to the Principal L.M. Datar Satkar Samiti Gold Medal.

Unfortunately, there is a silver lining to all this. The gold medal will not be a gold medal. As the university registrar explained to the graduate: "In view of the prevailing high cost of gold and labour charges it is not possible for the university to get the medal struck in gold within the stipulated value of the medal." Instead, Bhave will have to make do and rest content with a pure silver medal plated with gold.

The stipulated value of the medal is Rs 800, which at current rates, should buy about 4 gm of gold, not counting labour charges. There is more woe for Bhave: the registrar goes on to explain that because of the "cumbersome and lengthy procedure" of striking the medal, "the chancellor will present you a certificate in token of your having been awarded the medal". It's the old sorry story of the debasement of the gold standard.

FIGHTING MAD

■ Nothing could be more misleading than the cliche that women are the weaker sex. The Amazons of South America should be enough to dispel that illusion but if any doubts linger, the Aurangabad experience will sweep them away.

A drama troupe was in town with a play called *Ghashiram Driver*. As the title, plagiarised from another and much more famous play, suggests, the selling point of the piece was a series of 'hot' scenes between various pot-bellied Adams and fleshy Eves. About halfway into the programme, with the audience hushed into expectant silence, a group of about 30 women belonging to the Mahila Mukti Sanghatana and the Purogami Sanghatana got up and began to raise Cain. They shouted slogans asking Ghashiram Driver to go back, and shook their fists and rolling pins.

Ultimately the 30 women inside were joined by 60 of their sistren waiting outside and the roaring nineties frightened the actors so much that they hastily put on their clothes and fled. In fact, they had to leave the town with a posse of police protecting their retreat, because the women chased them all the way home.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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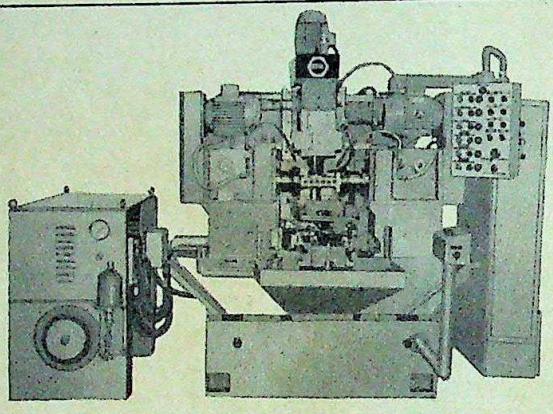
THE BFW 'SPECIALS'-3



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AT YEAR END 31ST DECEMBER 1984*	Rs (mn)	Change over 1983 (%)
– TOTAL ASSETS	6691	25
of which LOANS, ADVANCES & BILLS	4147	42
– OWNED FUNDS	1486	33
of which RESERVES	211	75
– BORROWED FUNDS	4868	21
– GUARANTEES OUTSTANDING	5102	13
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 1984*		
– TOTAL INCOME	515	52
– NET INCOME (after interest, depreciation, provisions)	120	36
– DIVIDEND (payable to Govt. of India)	30	33
FUNDED OPERATIONS		
– Sanctions	4296	50
– Disbursements	3530	72
GUARANTEES		
– Sanctions	572	(24)
– Issued	574	(19)

* General Fund

Note: This does not purport to be a full statement of accounts. Summary of audited annual accounts available on request.

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FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS 1984

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M.G. RAMACHANDRAN

RETURN OF THE

IT WAS a week of unbeatable excitement in Madras, politically, emotionally, and also histrionically, for without the flourish of drama the old movie magic might have seemed illusory, the miracle less convincing. The miracle, of course, was the triumphant return of Tamil Nadu's ailing Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran after a three-month absence. And the magic lay in the moment when the chief minister, alert of mind, agile in spirit and physically fit confronted a tumultuous public welcome minutes after landing in his state. Banishing all speculation that he was a patched up medical chimera, the chief minister drove up the 10-foot-high ramp in his sky-blue Ambassador, bounced out of the car, waved jubilantly to the hysterical crowds and summoned through gesture his ministers to join him on stage. Dispensing with a specially-designed van (with plastic bubble and pop-up seat) intended to display him, and rendering a temporarily-installed toilet upon the ramp useless, MGR seemed to have swept clean the medical traumas

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Crowds greet M
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HERO

of the last four months.

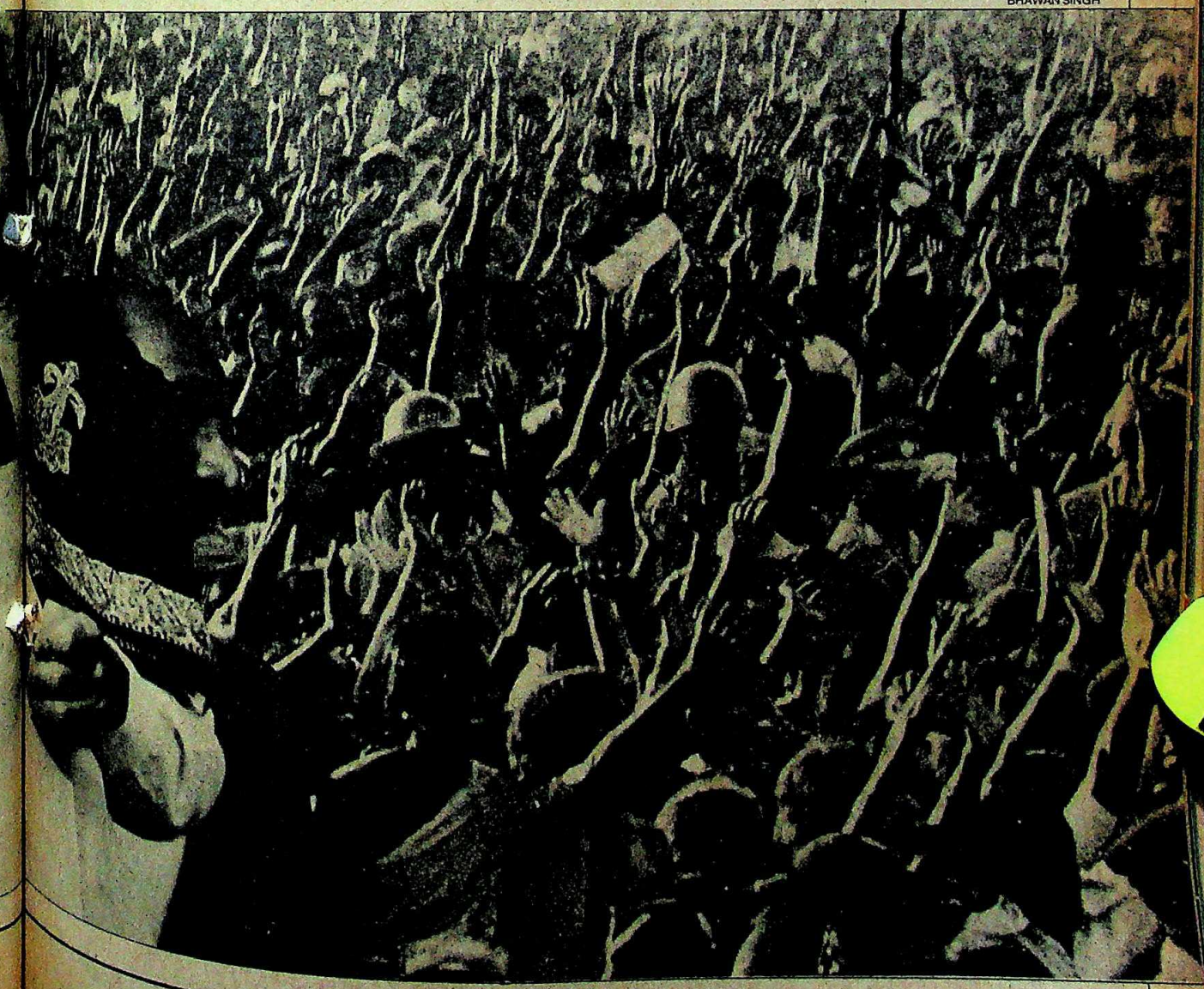
Except for one thing. He did not speak that first day. And when he began a series of meetings with state Governor S.L. Khurana, state ministers and party MLA's, the others quickly stopped speaking too. As suspense quickly built up over the matinee idol's true medical condition, his ability to speak and write, to take decisions, unconfirmed rumours swept the town: that he was prone to attacks of unbalanced hysteria, that he was a captive of a coterie around him, and much else.

Suggestively enough, the one person who had been at the centre of the state's political storm in MGR's three-month absence was suddenly nowhere on the scene. She had sought to be among the welcoming party at the Meenambakkam airport, but was denied access, just as she had been kept from meeting him from the moment he was hospitalised in early October. Politically mauled and emotionally beaten, she retreated temporarily to wait for a summons from the chief minister. At week's end the call had still not come, though it was said that Jayalalitha had sent a long, explanatory letter through a Congress(I) intermediary.

So was MGR still a captive of the coterie, a physically recovered but otherwise incapacitated chief minister who would be manipulated by the people who surrounded him? The answer, it first seemed, would be available on the Sunday morning swearing-in of the new government. Then came the first shock: only MGR would be sworn in on Sunday, February 10, the rest of the Cabinet would be announced two days later. Then the second shock: the swearing-in would be closed to the press, so no one would know how much the chief minister could speak or write. If that extended the suspense, the following Tuesday brought no relief, for there was still no indication of who would be appointed to which portfolio, who would be in and who out. At the time of writing, the key announcement that would tell the state's immediate political future was still under wraps, with the announcement of the new cabinet postponed yet again—to Thursday.

But the few straws in the wind told their story. For instance, on the day MGR

BHAWAN SINGH



Crowds greet MGR and his wife Janaki on their return: emotional welcome

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was sworn in for a third successive term as chief minister, he proceeded to his office to sign a single file. That signature confirmed that he was not only carefully making his own investigation into the fractious party dispute, but keeping his own counsel. For he reinstated one of his oldest, most trusted officials, K. Mohandas, as director-general of police in charge of crime and intelligence. Mohandas had in the past been one of MGR's closest confidants, his eyes and ears in the state. But in MGR's absence, he had been removed to an innocuous position. By reinstating Mohandas so promptly and so pointedly, MGR sent out a firm signal that he was in command, and that all the actions and decisions taken by the Government during his absence did not necessarily have his sanction.

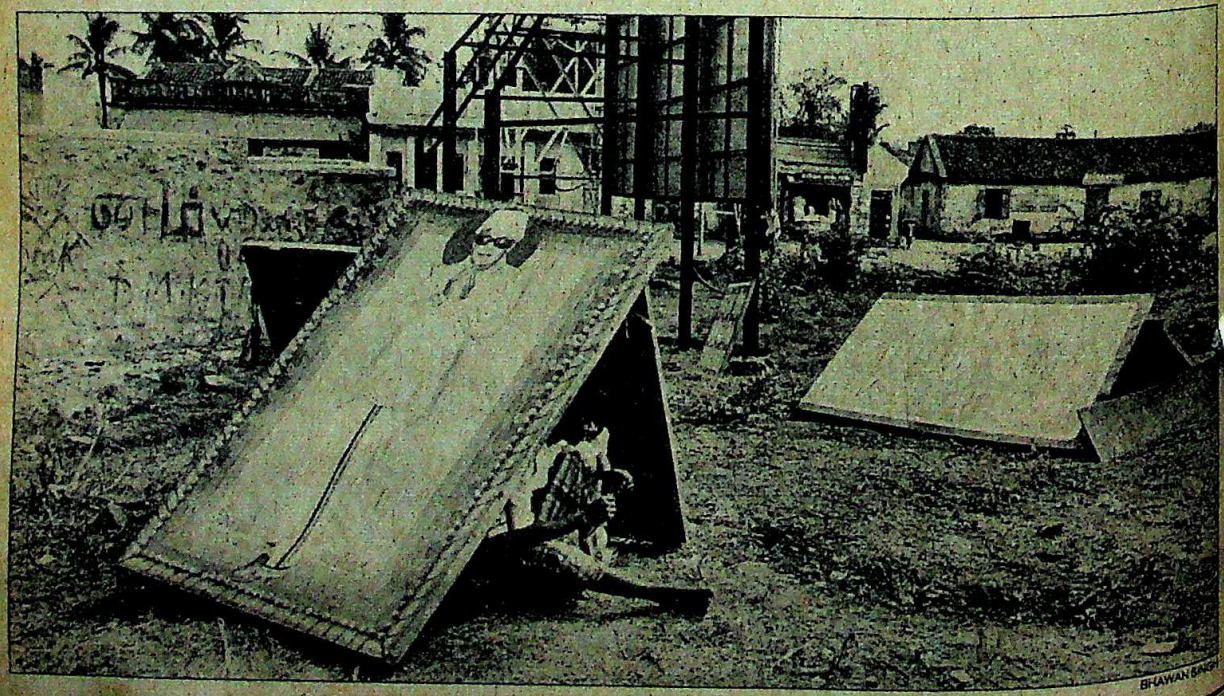
If that spelt a new dread in the "coterie" consisting of MGR's wife V.N. Janaki, Finance Minister and No 2 in the Cabinet V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, Information Minister R.M. Veerappan, party General Secretary P.U. Shanmugham, and the President of the All-World MGR Manram (fan clubs) Association, P. Musiriputhan, it seemed to spell some hope for Jayalalitha. Only days earlier, she had lost the support of even S. Thiruvanakarassu, the recalcitrant young minister for nutritious noon meals who had come out in protest after being divested in January of the portfolio of excise, commercial taxes and handlooms. Thiruvanakarassu protested that he wasn't sure the decision was the chief minister's, and planned a visit to New York to confirm this, but was ordered to stay put till MGR returned. When he did finally meet MGR, he emerged sounding like a man who had been cut to size and confessed: "The chief minister is fully in control of his mental powers and I am fully satisfied that he has been acting entirely on his own."

MGR's actions now showed that this was in fact the plain truth. In his meetings with Governor Khurana before his swearing-in, Khurana had deftly sized up the man, made him read out the first few words of the oath he would have to take, and then asked him to sign three times. In a manner as yet undisclosed, MGR had also communicated to Khurana that he would have his feuding party together again in two weeks. And now his actions showed that he was going about the task meticulously.

He had shown his displeasure over Jayalalitha's somewhat intemperate remarks in a series of newspaper and magazine interviews, in which she had even questioned the legality of MGR's marriage to Janaki, by allowing her to stew in her silent sweat. By reappointing Mohandas, he had shown that he did not fully approve of all the steps taken in his absence. And now the delay in forming his cabinet showed that he was going about the business of getting his party together with care. What exactly he would achieve remained unknown at the time of writing: but there was already little doubt about the fact that it was not the "coterie" that was in control, but MGR himself. The first task facing the home-coming hero had been achieved.

The next task, of getting the party together and running an efficient government, is more difficult. Clearly, the chief minister has not yet recovered fully after his kidney failure, lung collapse, paralytic stroke, diabetes problems and the kidney transplant itself. He remained constantly vulnerable to infections, to the possibility of his body rejecting his transplanted kidney, to a fresh setback to his health. And he still had to fully recover his power of speech. Dr T.K. Sreepada Rao, director of haemodialysis and associate director of the renal disease division of Brooklyn's Downstate Medical Centre who had attended on the chief minister throughout his illness and accompanied him back to Madras, confirmed that while MGR's recovery was remarkable his "speech function will take time to come back fully". Rao said it could be anywhere between two and three months before MGR could speak properly, and that he could at the moment only utter a few words and communicate his wishes through gesture, and with the aid of a Tamil-speaking speech therapist from Baltimore who is in constant attendance. And although MGR's visual and aural facilities were in

Billboards to be put up on MGR's arrival: mass following



BHAWAN SINGH

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perfect order, and his "ambulatory faculty" vastly improved after rigorous physiotherapy in the hospital gymnasium, it would also take time for him to write, "writing being a very fine function of the nervous system".

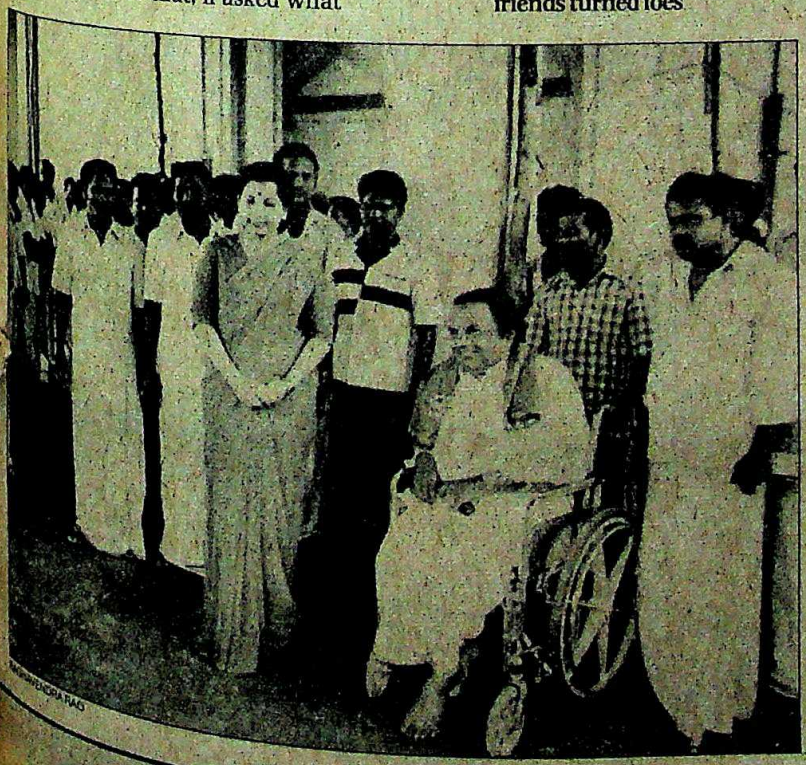
How debilitating would these be to a chief minister? And could a man so long in years hope to weld together a party whose leaders were clearly looking to the period after MGR? Certainly, the cracks in the party are real and cannot be papered over, except temporarily. Veerappan, MGR's foxy information minister who had once been a producer of MGR movies and whose rise in politics had been as spectacular as Jayalalitha's, was quite open about his antipathy. Some months ago he called her a "fourth rate lady" at a public meeting. Last week he told INDIA TODAY: "Seeing the way Jayalalitha was bossing over party affairs including choosing candidates for the elections, it became my moral duty to destroy her evil force." And he sniffed away any suggestion of a reconciliation between her and MGR: "If she claims to be so close to the chief minister, why did he not ask for her at Apollo Hospital? Why not now that he's alert?"

Musiriputhan echoes Veerappan's comments. A rotund grinning man given to wearing an enormous ring enamelled with MGR's face, his life has been dedicated to the twin passions of MGR and movies. He interprets almost every political development in metaphors drawn from MGR movies so that, if asked what MGR's health is like, he will refer to such and such scene in such and such MGR movie. He compares MGR's present resurrection to the climax of his 100th picture, a runaway hit called *Olivilakku* (1968), in which after suffering third degree burns in a fire MGR is taken as dead in hospital. Just then, an elderly widow whose life he had saved is seen bursting into song, a fervent prayer, and the cameras racing back to the hospital scene, show MGR revving to life with the eloquent whisper, "Ma".

BUT HE does not see Jayalalitha potentially in the role of "Ma". He speaks of her as a contemptible "powermonger—simply a luxury taxi". Like many party loyalists, he finds Jayalalitha's intemperate attacks on MGR's wife Janaki the most insulting. But asked to explain Jayalalitha's dramatic rise in the party after she joined it in 1982, Musiriputhan unlike the other party hardliners, however, is not at a loss for words. Unabashed, he colourfully describes it as a "democratic accident".

Personalities, and resounding personality clashes, being at the heart of the party crisis that squalidly broke out during MGR's absence, it is not surprising that Tamil Nadu's opposition leaders from the DMK gleefully make capital. Innuendoes generally abound when K. Manoharan, assistant general secretary of the DMK speaks, but on the subject of Jayalalitha versus the coterie, there is heavy trafficking in pejoratives. Evidently, when she was ruling the roost, Jayalalitha described Manoharan as a "passenger train". Manoharan today thinks she is nothing more or less than a "town bus", implying a tired, ramshackle creature badly in need of a new coat of paint. But he does not rule out the possibility of an eventual reconciliation between MGR and Jayalalitha. "The quarrel," he says, "is between them both. But he is a great cine actor. And she is a great cine actress. Both can act well, so it is difficult to predict the AIADMK's future."

Jayalalitha with Musiriputhan: old friends turned foes



Even some of the AIADMK leaders foresee a patch-up as inevitable. K. Rajaram, the party's speaker in the Legislative Assembly, says: "True, there is a quarrel, but after all it is about two factions claiming greater closeness to the chief minister. And now that the chief minister is in control, the dispute will end. He's a large-hearted man and he has rarely punished anyone severely."

Independent observers in Madras granted that MGR's first priority would be to let the hue and cry raised in his absence die down, before confronting Jayalalitha. But it was possible that he was under emotional pressure from his wife Janaki —little known in public life till her emergence by her husband's sickbed—to delay the meeting.

But all efforts at getting everyone together would have to go beyond an immediate unity exercise, and face up to the question of who will control and lead the party after MGR, who is after all past his three score and ten years. If politicians like Veerappan control the party machine, they do not have Jayalalitha's mass appeal. Veerappan is not even a member of the Assembly, being only a member of the state Legislative Council, and has never won at the hustings. In contrast, it was Jayalalitha who was the party's star campaigner during the December elections, touring a majority of the Assembly constituencies and drawing crowds that were bigger and more responsive than those at any other meeting.

She has another strength which spells incipient danger for the AIADMK hardliners: her proximity to the Congress(I) power centre in New Delhi has been interpreted as a sign of a possible alliance in a succession issue. It is a fact that the Congress(I) promoted her subtly—Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself met her and persuaded her to conduct the election campaign—but the ruling party shied away from any overt show of support

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once the elections were over. The reason was clear: the new government did not wish to soil its hands with an Andhra Pradesh-type situation that had produced disastrous results.

MGR saw her as a possible inheritor of his mantle although he never said so. But there is no other cogent explanation possible for the manner in which he ushered her into the party in the summer of 1982, quickly made her the AIADMK's propaganda secretary and then its deputy leader in Parliament after she was given a Rajya Sabha seat. Ministers at public meetings were instructed to stand up when she arrived, and it was suggested that when she occupied a platform no other party member should appear on stage. Matters reached a point that when an MLA from Madurai district last summer tried to help her on to a platform by giving her his hand, and was photographed doing so, he was summoned to MGR's Madras residence and was allegedly beatean up.

All this was in the second phase of her relationship with MGR. The first phase had started when in 1969 she starred with MGR in a blockbuster called *Adimai Pen* (Slave's Girl). For the next few years she was his constant companion. They acted in over two dozen films together before she was replaced by another heroine and the period of estrangement began.

Her years in the wilderness, with few acting roles and several abortive relationships, seemed to have taken a heavy emotional toll. And it was during one of her fits of acute depression and a crisis in 1979 that MGR reappeared by her side. Their relationship gradually revived and Jayalalitha's resurrection in MGR's life catapulted her into politics.

DIFFICULT though it is to explain the chemistry of public figures in private relationships, it is not hard to place MGR's special fascination for Jayalalitha among his varied and capricious liaisons and his leading ladies. As a star she was possessed of neither awesome beauty nor outstanding acting talent; but she had class: fair skinned and fluent in English, her worldly sophistication and articulate style finely counterpointed MGR's lack of background and education. Her intelligence penetrated his superstar isolation, her flashing eyes, large rolling hips and venomous barbs delivered in spitfire English evidently invigorated him out of his xenophobic cocoon. That being a Brahmin she was upcaste as well only heightened her appeal to a man who personified the anti-Brahmin struggle.

To her credit, she worked hard at streamlining the party during her days as propaganda secretary, bringing a new energy to the role but also allowing power to go to her head. Veerappan is probably right when he says that "she attempted a virtual takeover of the party", and she described herself in newspaper interviews as MGR's chosen successor. The backlash had to come, beginning with the protest resignation by S.D. Somasundaram last year and then the public squabble in MGR's absence.

So has a third stage in her relationship with MGR begun? Almost certainly yes, but how exactly this will now develop remains the big question. The initiative is entirely with MGR, and the thrice-born metaphor seemed particularly apt for him too. Not only was MGR sworn in by Khurana for his third successive term as chief minister, but the numeral three seemed to have special, almost mystical significance in his life. It indicated an escape from three major threats to his life. His admirers spoke of it as MGR's third birth. In 1967, he survived after screen villain M.R. Radha shot at him and the bullets were lodged in his throat. In 1976 he narrowly

Women and children await MGR: blind loyalty and admiration

BHAWAN SINGH

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BHAWAN SINGH

MLA's outside MGR's residence: paying homage to their hero

escaped disaster when he changed his mind to board a Madras-bound flight at the last minute and the plane crashed. And now he has pulled through a dragnet of serious illnesses.

But if the seemingly invincible chief minister now set about putting his party in order by carrying out a thorough inquiry into the goings on in the AIADMK, his success would become clear only with the announcement of his new cabinet. That alone would signify the path that he would choose to cut through the tangle of grasping power-seekers.

While judgement on this had to be suspended, his next task would be to refurbish his administration. MGR's record in office since 1978 has not been a distinguished one, the state has slid down the industrial ranking, government policy has lurched towards prohibition then back to open drinking and now to a hit-and-away house where everyone drinks but illegally. Other than his populist measures, like the midday meals scheme for schoolchildren (and a major plank on which the AIADMK swept the last elections), he has precious little to show for his years in office. Meanwhile, the administration has become secretive, insular and dictatorial, revolving in a largely unhealthy fashion around the remote persona of the chief minister.

In the circumstances, the slide in the state's administration since October is only relative to its performance earlier. MGR was taken ill at a stage when the mid-year assessment of finances and plan resources was due. With the chief minister ill in hospital, virtually all his ministers spent their waking hours first waiting upon him in Madras, and later monitoring his medical bulletins in Brooklyn. Had the cabinet busied itself from October with the job of issuing daily medical bulletins, and Health Minister H.V. Hande was more preoccupied with the chief minister's health than that of the public. The opening of new dispensaries and other decisions to improve public health facilities had to wait, like many other issues.

THE GOVERNMENT's finances went to pieces, and estimates are that revenue collection this year is likely to fall short by an unprecedented 30 per cent. Surprisingly, the maximum revenue loss is from the Department of Excise despite record bids given by the retail liquor vends. By January, the department had collected only 55 per cent of the Rs 150 crore due as excise duty, and an official in the department confessed that the total revenue might not exceed Rs 170 crore (against the initial estimate of Rs 203 crore).

The recovery of sales tax and transport tax is also seriously affected. Against an estimated sales tax revenue of Rs 816 crore, the actual recovery may not cross Rs 650 crore. By January-end, the kitty had received no more than Rs 400 crore.

All this, however, is rendered less than relevant in the present situation where such considerations are transcended by the spreading halo of the chief minister's political reincarnation. In the eyes of his people his status is that of a mythological hero towering among mere mortals; his recovery is perceived as belonging to the realm of the supernatural. This was substantially clear in the response to his public appearance after his return to Madras: every expectation fulfilled, the crowd, estimated anywhere between five lakh and 10 lakh, quickly turned exultant. Kalimuthu Aramugan, a former Air Force sargeant who is now commander of the state volunteer force of the AIADMK, supervising the crowds at the public reception said: "This is his third birth. Twice before he has hovered between life and death. But we believe MGR can never be vanquished." The young cheered uproariously, women with babies and poor peasants who had travelled in buses and trains from far-flung regions of the state like Coimbatore in the west and Madurai in the south wept unabashedly at the sight; and his team of ministers and MLA's were reduced to figures of blubbering emotion when greeting him.

Pattabhi, a farmer from South Arcot district who had travelled in a lorry to welcome MGR remarked: "He has completely recovered in every sense. This is like Lord Rama at his coronation." The only fact that counts in the present-day manifestation of the long and historic struggle of the Dravidian movement is MGR. He alone is the chosen leader, and the leader alone the ruling party. Beside that fact, all issues, initiatives and progress reports dwindle into insignificance.

But as Tamil Nadu's indomitable hero, MGR is embarking upon his third reign weighed down most by the perception of immortality which his people have bestowed upon him. Uncertain in health advancing in age and finally vulnerable to a human end, the glow of his present resurrection is dimmed only by the question: after MGR who? At present, the political scenario in the state may seem like an improbable ending from one of his countless films; he has emerged the indisputable victor, ready to vanquish the evil force and restore justice to his people. But in reality, his greatest task, given the constraint of time, is to choose and appoint a viable political successor in his mould.

—SUNIL SETHI in Madras

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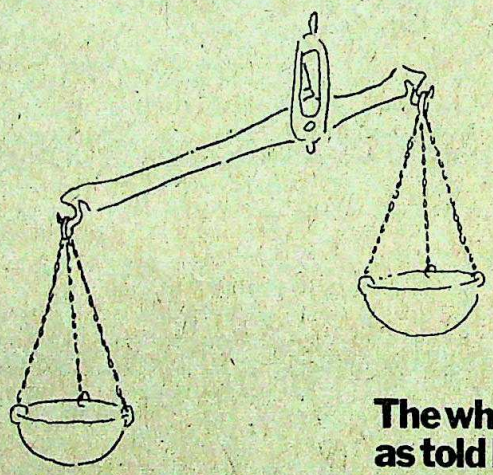

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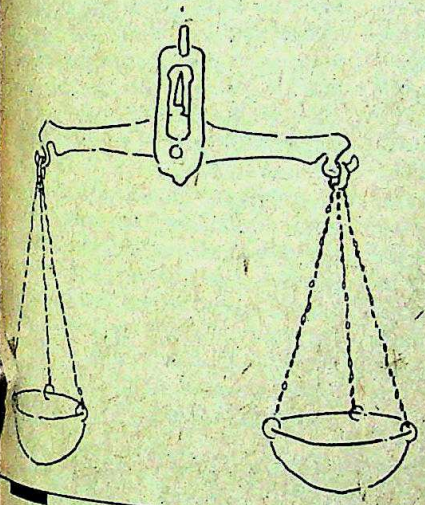

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OPPOSITION LEADERS

Life After Defeat

EVERY election produces its flotsam but the electoral storm that tossed most of the opposition leaders out of the Lok Sabha now threatens to leave many of them shelterless, jobless and rudderless. Deprived of parliamentary membership, many find themselves robbed of a roof over their heads and precious little to do with which to while away the hours or make a living.

Faced with the immediate prospect of eviction from their houses, some of them are resorting to desperate measures to find a place to stay. Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar is leaving behind the daily grind of Delhi politics and moving to the pastoral setting of Bhondsi village in the Haryana countryside. His BJP counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee and Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP) General Secretary Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna are looking for friends and party MP's to move in with. Others like Satish Agarwal (BJP) have left Delhi in disgust and many more may have to follow suit.

To make ends meet, men like the Janata Party's Syed Shahabuddin, and the BJP's Agarwal and Ram Jethmalani are picking up the threads of interrupted legal careers. Stormy petrel Subramaniam Swamy is off to Harvard University on a six-week assignment to teach mathematics for economists, as if to prove the truth of his friend Professor Roderick McFarquahar's observation that "there is life after politics".

Deprived of the forum of Parliament, almost every major opposition leader is planning to either write a book, or start a magazine or newspaper column. In such diverse and often desperate ways are the vanquished opposition stalwarts trying to regain their feet, to readjust to a dramatically changed situation. But one hope they all share is the conviction that when the political waters calm down they will bob back into the reckoning.

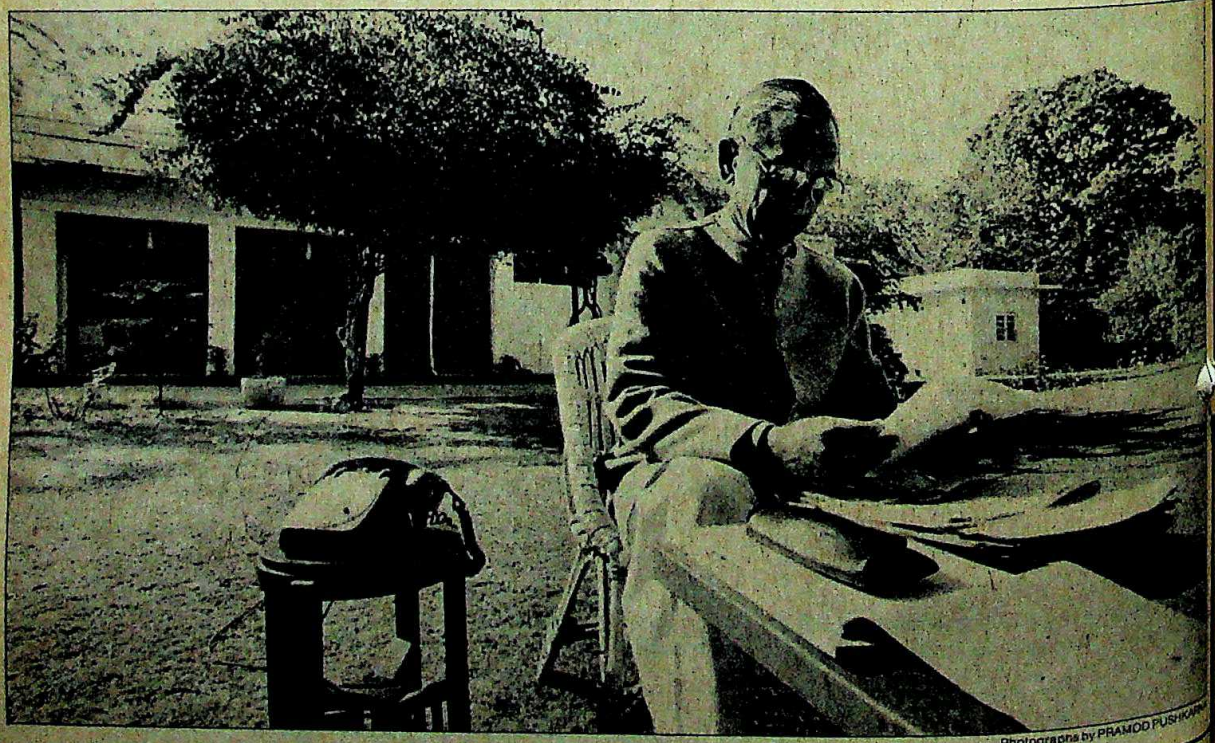
As if the Lok Sabha reversals weren't enough, when the Opposition's tired and defeated MP's trooped back to the capital in the last days of December, the Lok Sabha House Committee, which looks after MP's accommodation, put salt in their wounds by asking them to vacate their houses by January 31. That date is past and the ex-MP's now await with dread the arrival of the Estate Office's eviction squads. Alternative accommodation is hard to come by in the capital, where rents and property values have skyrocketed in the past few years. Jethmalani plans to buy a house in Delhi and asked his daughter to sell off her apartment in Bombay. But, he rues, "Now I realise that the money we got for the Bombay flat is not sufficient to buy a home in Delhi. A three-bedroom place on Ferozeshah Road is being quoted at Rs 17 lakh." Jethmalani will miss the vast expanse of lawn of his Janpath home. But, what he misses more is the lack of understanding of the House Committee which has rejected his plea for an extension.

"The heavens will not fall if the new MP is asked to wait for a few months," he says. "I waited for a year when I was elected in 1977." If the Estate Office trucks turn up he plans to move to the home of industrialist and former Janata Party MP Viren Shah. If he cannot do this, then he will move to Bombay where he still owns an apartment.

Bahuguna too plans to return to his home in Allahabad if he doesn't find suitable arrangements in Delhi. Fellow party member Tarakeshwari Sinha offered to let him use her house in Delhi's South Extension as she is moving back to Bihar, but Bahuguna says: "It is too sophisticated for a rough man like me."

Chandra Shekhar is quite firm about

Bahuguna: going back home



Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARN

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moving out of Delhi even if he is able to retain the house he has lived in for the last 17 years. "There is too much futile activity here," he complains. "I don't want people hanging around me 24 hours a day." He will commute daily between Bhondsi and Delhi, a driving time of about 40 minutes, even if it means making some adjustments in the working habits of his party secretariat.

Vajpayee has asked the Government to let the presidents of recognised parties retain government accommodation. Former Congress party president Kamaraj had a house," he says. "I am a single man; I can make do with one room." But the single room in the Vithalbhai Patel House legislators hostel where Vajpayee may be forced to shift provides a striking contrast to his present sprawling bungalow on Raisina Road near Parliament House. Another alternative is to share the house of BJP Rajya Sabha member Piare Lal Khandelwal, who is also a bachelor.

While Vajpayee himself may not be thinking of moving out immediately, he is unsettled by enquiries from prospective tenants of his bungalow. Some overzealous aide of Minister of State for Planning K. R. Narayanan, has been making enquiries about Vajpayee's plans. A day or so later Vajpayee ran into Narayanan at a state banquet and asked why he was keen to move into the house. An apologetic Narayanan averred that he was not aware of the enquiries being made by his staff. Vajpayee was touched that Narayanan still addressed him as 'Sir', a habit from when Vajpayee was foreign minister and Narayanan an ambassador.

VAJPAYEE says that unlike him, people with families can find housing quite a problem in Delhi. This is proving particularly true for Shahabuddin who has four of his six children staying with him, and his DMKP counterpart Ram Vilas Paswan. Shahabuddin occupies a South Avenue flat as a guest of another Janata Party General Secretary, Bapu Kaldate. "I am here at the sufferance of the Rajya Sabha Secretariat. The moment they want it, I will be out on the street," he says. But come what may he has decided to stay on in Delhi and remain active in politics, which is why he gave up a foreign office career. Besides, he says some important members of his community have asked him to stay in Delhi. "I look on myself as a *mohtasib* (accountant) on behalf of the community," he says. "I have no property, no bank balance," and living in Delhi can be expensive.

Paswan too says: "I will keep my family in Delhi till I am forced to leave or am otherwise helpless. I can take a house on rent but people like us are not used to staying in trans-Jamuna colonies. We have to be in the heart of the town."

It is, of course, understandable that most MP's who have been using the highly subsidised bungalows and flats provided to them want to stay on for as long as they can. Only about 50 of the over 200 MP's who have suddenly found themselves on the eviction list actually vacated their accommodation by the January 31 deadline. Some 127 others—including some from the Congress(I)—sought extensions on one pretext or other. Some cited "illness of cousin" or "illness of servant". Others wanted to retain just the servant's quarter or the garage.

Eduardo Faleiro, chairman of the House Committee, said the committee had decided to grant no extension except on the ground of personal illness and there were only four or five such cases. The committee will start legal proceedings in a few days against those who have not vacated. "We don't want to be harsh," he said, "but we want people to take notice that they cannot stay on indefinitely. The Chandra Shekhars and the Vajpayees will probably leave on their own, but others have asked for indefinite extensions."

There is a special rush for bungalows, some of which the opposition stalwarts are occupying, because a large number of former speakers, governors, chief ministers, judges and ministers have got elected. Some of them get priority and are entitled to bungalows rather than flats.

Chandra Shekhar: return to rusticity

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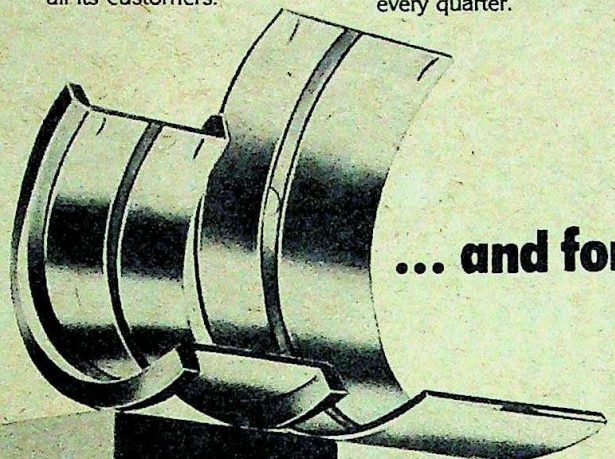

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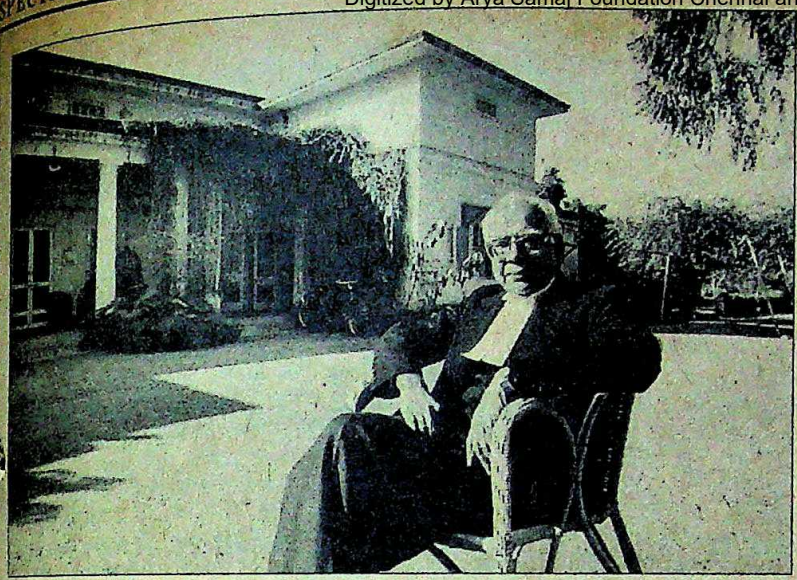

Jethmalani: house-hunting

But housing is just one of the hassles confronting the former MP's. Readjusting to the life of an ordinary mortal is another. Some, who have served for several years, find they have no life and career outside Parliament. Their only profession is politics and politics is much easier to practice when you have a government house in Delhi and all other major expenses like travelling, telephone, and secretarial services are taken care of. In any case, most MP's know of no other way of earning a living. Bahuguna says expenses are so high that an honest MP cannot live within his salary and perquisites. Bahuguna was supported by his son, a lawyer in Allahabad, who sent him Rs 4,000 per month. He laughs off his present predicament by reciting an Urdu couplet: *"Gardishey ayyam tera shukriya, humne har pehloo se duniya dekh lee."* (I am grateful to these difficult times for I have now seen life in all its aspects.)

"Profession?" Paswan asks incredulously, "what profession or business can people like me get into after having been bitten by the political bug?" He is trying to organise a dalit sena of backward youth from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They have offered to send him Rs 100 a month from each of the 15 Bihar districts where the sena has a strong organisation. He thinks this Rs 1,500 and his MP pension will be enough. Some former MP's like lawyers Shiv Shankar and Jethmalani, who are well reputed in their profession, should have no major problems. "I do enough practice to keep myself in reasonable comfort and I plan to continue like this," says Jethmalani. "Why the hell should I not take life a little easy. I am 61 and deserve some rest and relaxation."

After he returns from Harvard, Swamy plans to write a regular column for *Imprint* magazine. "Some of my colleagues will have to open paan shops," he quips. "I get a pension of Rs 750 , I have a free house to shift to (belonging to his wife), I don't drink or smoke or maintain hangers-on. What more do I need? This is a question you should ask Chandra Shekhar and Vajpayee." Even in defeat, Swamy cannot avoid a dig at his two bugbears, who had earlier forced him to leave the BJP and Janata Party in quick succession.

WHATEVER else they might be planning, paan shops were not part of their plans. Vajpayee plans to travel around to his party units. After 27 uninterrupted years in Parliament he now plans to read and write. "Politics never gave me full satisfaction even when I was a minister," he reminisces. "I got more satisfaction as a journalist, and when I wrote poetry, I felt I was creating something. Politics is just *hawai baaten* (airy talk)." But he will miss Parliament, a devalued forum but one that he used tellingly. "Parliament should act as a mirror to reflect people's aspirations, anger and frustration. But the rules are interpreted in such a way that the Opposition cannot have its say."

Craggy-faced, dishevelled Chandra Shekhar has no regrets about Parliament. He was never regular in attendance, and in any case, he feels, much of what the Opposition had to say went unreported by the media. Shekhar is bitter about the way the press, as he sees it, has become a captive of the Government. With Parliament no longer available as a forum and the press inattentive, he plans to disseminate his views by reviving the *Young Indian*, the bulletin he edited as a Young Turk, and which was closed down during the Emergency. "I hope it will start appearing in two or three months time," he says. "With our wide party base it should sell, if we can distribute it properly."

Others are also getting ready to dabble in journalism. Shahabuddin plans to write a column in the Urdu magazine *Nai Duniya*, apart from editing a small booklet he publishes called *Muslim India*. Bahuguna too has a book in mind describing his experiences over the past 40 years, including undisclosed details of his on-again, off-again relationship with Mrs Gandhi. "If I had not supported Mrs Gandhi in 1969 (when he was general secretary of the Congress party) she would not have remained prime minister and the Congress Party would never have split. *Main itna baawla ho gaya tha Indira Gandhi key liye*," he says. (I was mad about Mrs Gandhi.)

The resolve of so many opposition politicians to remain in Delhi at the centre of national politics, is born of the conviction that Rajiv's honeymoon with the euphoric electorate will soon be over and the Opposition will once again become relevant. "We may be beaten but not defeated," says Chandra Shekhar who is prepared to bide his time but won't quit politics. Vajpayee too will fight one more election—"I have to avenge my defeat." He will consider contesting a by-election but is in no hurry. What concerns Vajpayee is the trend of political events and the walls of suspicion raised between politicians of different persuasions. As if to illustrate precisely this point, the Government has built a wall in place of the hedge that separated his home from former finance minister Pranab Mukherjee's. "In Nehru's time our bona fides were never suspect, but now even the prime minister calls us unpatriotic."

It's hardly surprising, then, that with so many mundane preoccupations to worry them, the stalwarts of the Opposition are unable to think of political platforms and unity. If that doesn't change, then the banishment is likely to prove a much longer affair The opposition leaders however are convinced that the tide will change and sweep them back to the shore from the bleak open sea on which they are helplessly bobbing about now. —RAMINDAR SINGH

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If change is what our vote was about, the change should be for the better.

Do we know what needs to be changed, and into what?

A VOTE FOR CHANGE

Will the change bring us closer to the values we have always cherished? The values willed to us by Gandhiji, who staked his life to root the communal virus out of our people? Who left no material possessions behind.

By Jawaharlal Nehru, who after seventeen years as Prime Minister had only the royalties on his books to his name.

By Lal Bahadur Shastri whose assets after eighteen years of ministerial office were a few unpaid bills.

Change should mean a rediscovery of this lost heritage — a heritage of public ethic equal to any.

Where has this proud heritage gone? Whichever way you turn you see the face of corruption which is fast changing into criminality.

A criminality which showed its ugly face in the politically inspired mobs which held the capital of this country to ransom in the opening days of November.

A criminality which allows the killers of innocent men, and children to go unpunished. Which elevates the guilty to public office. Which sets two standards of justice in our secular state: one for the killers of one community, the other for those killed because they are of a different community.

This must change if we want to rediscover our lost heritage of propriety in public office. If we want to take our country forward.

The first step is to free ourselves from fear, fear to speak our mind.

To watch every action of those we have voted into power.

To protest every infringement of the law.

To demand punishment of the guilty, whatever their status.

To point to the misuse of public office at every step, whether in the cynical or vulgar use of power, or in the indifference to public accountability, or in the monopoly of the media.

We must learn to recognise the victimised, the threatened, the discriminated, and by our actions remind them that they are not alone. That all those concerned with the country's future are with them in their search for a just and human society.

That is the beginning of our movement — a movement which seeks to restore to the nation the rule of law and the secular tradition.

That is the meaning of change.

Organisation of Concerned Citizens

For the rule of law and the secular tradition.

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SPY SCANDAL

Spilling the Beans

INDIA'S latest espionage thriller could only have one title—The Case of the Cooperative Spy. Ever since his dramatic arrest and subsequent identification as the spider at the centre of the spy web, Coomar Narain, the meek-looking wheeler dealer has been singing like the proverbial canary. As a result, by last week, the number of arrests had risen to 16 and two more Delhi-based diplomats from the Polish and East German embassies were given their expulsion orders.

In fact, few fictional spy thrillers could have matched the rapid twists and turns in the plot. Apart from the intriguing involvement of the Eastern Bloc in the scandal, the new arrests included Yogesh Maneklal, Narain's employer, and two other businessmen dealing in exports to the Soviet Union. As a fitting finale, two senior bureaucrats including the secretary, defence production, took leave prior to premature retirement.

The dramatic developments followed confessions made in camera by seven of the key members of the ring including Coomar Narain. According to investigating authorities, the new facts that have emerged from the confessions are:

► Yogesh Maneklal was apparently aware of Coomar Narain's covert activities and may have even helped the French in their bid to obtain highly sensitive information.

Maneklal coming out of court: stout denials

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

► The two Indian exporters, V.K.Aggarwal and Ashok Jaidka, were actually working for the Soviets by passing on information obtained from H.N.Chaturvedi, an assistant in the Commerce Ministry.

► In the last two years, the French and the Soviets have had unrestricted access to practically all top secret documents that went through the prime minister's office.

► Polish and East German agents also had access to confidential information in an operation separate from the Soviet one.

The key piece in the puzzle is the confessional statement made by Coomar Narain in the court of the Metropolitan Magistrate on February 4. The confession took three solid hours to complete and covered 15 foolscap pages. Earlier, his wife had tried to get him to change his mind about confessing but Narain brushed aside her pleas saying; "I just want to get rid of it all." The most sensational revelation was his admission that he had been collecting information on behalf of his employers, Maneklal & Co, for the last 25 years. He, however, clarified that the espionage angle only started in 1972.

According to his statement, most of his network of contacts were assistants and private sec-

SLM MANEKLAL

On the Move

SLM MANEKLAL is, or was till its embarrassing involvement in the recent spy scandal, a company on the move. It was originally founded in 1948 as T.Maneklal by Trikamlal Maneklal Chamdawalla, who understandably dropped his last name. He was a self-made man and the firm started off in textiles. Later, it diversified into medium engineering, industrial rubber and also as agents for foreign companies.

In June, 1977, T. Maneklal amalgamated into SLM Maneklal, SLM being an acronym for Swiss Locomotive and Machine Works, a Swiss firm manufacturing diesel engines, blowers and water ring pumps. SLM's collaboration with Maneklal, however, dates back to 1960. It has been a successful marriage. In 1976-77, Maneklal's sales stood at Rs 4.69 crore. In 1977-78, the year of the amalgamation, sales jumped to Rs 10.90 crore. Its 1983-84 sales were Rs 23.94 crore of which exports accounted for a total of Rs 2.26 crore.

Maneklal's most recent successes have been in the Eastern Bloc countries. Last year, it received a number of orders for textile machinery from the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam. Ironically, on the day the present head of the company, Yogesh Maneklal, was arrested, the firm had just concluded preliminary negotiations for a Rs 14-crore export order to Czechoslovakia.

Significantly, another recent area the company has diversified into is defence. Currently, Maneklal supplies special capacity blowers and Rikki Board floats and has recently got orders from Bharat Heavy Plates and Vessels for refrigeration equipment as well as armoured plates for tanks. The firm is also the agent for the supply of sophisticated helium refrigeration equipment for the Atomic Energy Commission.

In addition, Maneklal has technical collaboration or agency agreements with companies in France, Austria, Switzerland, West Germany and Japan. It represents two big Polish companies dealing in marine equipment and in August 1984 became the agents for Weatherford International, an American company which manufactures oil drilling equipment and the Italian company, Unionoil Manuli. Maneklal has submitted tenders to the Oil and Natural Gas Commission worth Rs 7 crore on behalf of the two companies but is still to obtain any major contracts.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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retaries numbering around 30 who had worked at various periods in key ministries like defence and industry. Narain has claimed that he was collecting the information on behalf of his employers who were in turn passing it on to their clients. "I made my lakhs while they made their crores," he is reported to have told the court. He also says that he was passing on information to Colonel Alain Bolley, the French deputy defence attache expelled earlier. Narain has admitted that most of the information he managed to collect related to the Defence Ministry, foreign policy, the economy, planning, industrial policy and decisions and other "sensitive" subjects.

But his confession also indicated that he was selling the information to anybody else who wanted it. That was how investigating sleuths stumbled across the parallel operation taking place involving the Eastern Bloc countries. On January 26, in the course of his daily interrogation, Narain mentioned that he used to sell information to a man called H.N. Chaturvedi at the rate of Rs 1,000 per document. Investigations revealed that Chaturvedi was an assistant in the ministry of commerce. Once Chaturvedi realised the game was up, he implicated Aggarwal and Jaidka.

Chaturvedi, who said he has known Narain for the last 12 years, admitted that he was supplying the information to Aggarwal and Jaidka who were apparently passing it on to diplomats in the Polish and East German embassies. Aggarwal is based in Delhi while Jaidka operates from Ludhiana. Though the two have not yet made any confessional statements, they have admitted to being in touch with representatives of the East German and Polish embassies.

Aggarwal started his career in the army when he took a short service commission. He then worked as a corporate executive before starting his own outfit, Gangur Impex, exporting chemicals and consumer items to eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China. The main bulk of his business, however, was with the Soviet Union. Jaidka is a self-made businessman who started off with a small hosiery shop in Ludhiana's Nanumal Chowk. In 1977, he bagged export orders to the Soviet Union and is today a leading hosiery exporter with orders worth an estimated Rs 2.8 crore a year. Last December, he spent 10 days in the Soviet Union, ostensibly on a business trip. In fact Jaidka and Aggarwal are very close.

But the bigger surprise was clearly Coomar Narain's implication of his boss, Yogesh Maneklal, in the sordid spy saga. Immediately after Narain's arrest, Maneklal had been picked up for questioning but had been released. Another director in the company, D.P. Antia, was also questioned about certain telex messages he had sent to Maneklal asking for information about a tender and also relating to the transfer of government officials.

Investigating officials are closely examining not just Maneklal's French connection but his Soviet ones as well. The firm's dealings with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries have increased dramatically in recent years, specifically with Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia apart from the Soviet Union and Vietnam. On the day of his arrest, Maneklal had just signed a Rs 14 crore contract to supply machinery to Czechoslovakia.

In fact, investigating officials say that there was considerable Soviet pressure on the Indian Government to suppress the eastern European angle in the spy scandal. Unlike in the case of Bolley, the two diplomats were quietly expelled and it was only after they had left that the story was broken in the newspapers. Till last week, there was no official confirmation apart from the usual "no comment" offered by various external affairs spokesmen.

In an application on February 11 asking to be released on bail, Maneklal contended that he had been arrested "only on suspicion" and there was no independent evidence against him. But the counsel for the investigating authority countered that the confession of Coomar Narain showed "full complicity" of Maneklal in the case. He also contended "this is a serious nature of spying case (sic) of national importance having international ramifications. The accused Maneklal is involved in conspiracy with other accused persons including Coomar Narain, the kingpin in this espionage case."

Whether or not Maneklal is guilty seems to be in some doubt. But with each confession exposing yet another link in the espionage chain it is obvious that the full story of India's biggest spy scandal is a long way from being written. In fact, what has surfaced so far could be merely the prologue. Even Home Minister S.B. Chavan told INDIA TODAY last week that the Government was not deciding on taking corrective action "till everything crystallises".

—RAJU SANTHANAM

THE ASSASSINATION

Tardy Progress

THE HIGH-POWERED team investigating Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination seems to be in a tunnel with no prospects of a light at the end of it. Not that it hasn't made much headway, but the undeniable fact is that apart from nabbing the immediate conspirators, it has failed to come up with answers to key questions, or uncover any larger conspiracy behind the act.

After recording the statements of some 150 witnesses, the investigating team led by a veteran officer from the Andhra Pradesh police cadre, Anand Ram, submitted an interim charge-sheet in the court of Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate S.L. Khanna. The charge-sheet contains no surprises. It indicts surviving assailant Satwant Singh. Others figuring prominently are Balbir Singh, sub-inspector in the prime minister's security guard, and Kehar Singh, uncle of the slain assassin, Beant Singh. Significantly, Simranjeet Singh Mann, who was arrested last November as he tried to cross into Nepal from Bihar and was once regarded as a prime suspect, is not named as a conspirator. The reason is simple: officials have so far been unable to obtain any evidence that Mann visited Delhi before the assassination although Satwant and other witnesses have testified that he had, indeed, visited Beant Singh.

A. Ram

But in handing in an interim charge-sheet, the investigators have kept their options open. The precaution is a necessary one. The charge-sheet alleges that Beant and Satwant were part of the conspiracy, but it fails to come up with all the answers. Some of the unknowns:

- Were Beant and Satwant acting on their own?
- Was there any conspiracy to kill Beant Singh?
- Was Kehar Singh the only person to motivate Beant Singh as suggested in confessions recorded by the police?
- Why did the first conspiracy (INDIA TODAY, December 15, 1984) allegedly hatched by Beant and Balbir fail?
- What prompted Beant to pick on Satwant as an accomplice?

One problem is that the Ram team didn't come into the picture right away.

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Makin' a living
And I'm feelin' down
I've been on the move
'Coz I got money to make
But after it's all over
A man needs a break
So here's to the good times
It's gotta be said
I'm ready for a Royal
I'm lookin' for the Red

Yeah, I'm lookin' for the Red

WHEN YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR A LIFT

Royal Reserve

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and Satwant, for example, was interrogated by several agencies giving him ample time to think out his answers and get a feel of the line being adopted by his interlocutors. Satwant was first questioned by the Delhi Criminal Investigation Department (CID), followed by a stream of sleuths from the Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing and the Central Bureau of Investigation, not to mention the Ram team. As one official confessed: "We are now at a stage where we don't know whether Satwant is leading us up the garden path or giving us positive leads."

The confusion that arose from the multiplicity of investigating authorities was evident in the manner in which Mrs Gandhi's special assistant was implicated in the case. R.K. Dhawan's statement was recorded in the course of the investigations but the Ram team was taken aback when Satwant's lawyer said in court that Satwant had been forced to sign blank sheets of paper and implicate both Mann and Dhawan.

Not that the Ram team itself has been free from controversy. That all has not been well was suggested by the sacking of the chief investigating officer, R.P. Kapoor in January and the reported decision of K.D. Nayar a deputy inspector general of police from the Central Industrial Security Force to quit the team. It is also alleged that some persons picked up for questioning in connection with the first conspiracy were let off without charges being pressed though a Reserve Bank employee, a contractor for the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, and a businessman were allegedly implicated in it. As it is, the fate of the investigation seems to hang on a most unlikely thread: the credibility of Satwant Singh.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

P.K. KAUL

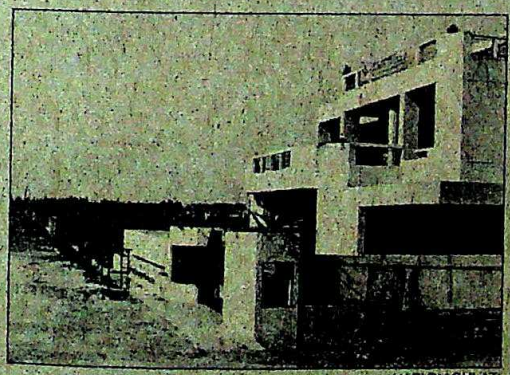
Loan Mela

FOR WEEKS an anonymous cyclostyled sheet had been doing the rounds—with copies addressed to the prime minister, finance minister, the governor of the Reserve Bank and others. No one took notice of the allegations concerning a housing loan given by the Central Bank to finance secretary P.K. Kaul, until the subject hit the front page of a Delhi newspaper. Suddenly, the man who is the Government's new cabinet secretary was embroiled in a messy controversy. Inevitably, the question arose as to whether the newspaper report had been a deliberate leak from Kaul's rivals for the top slot in the civil service. But this quickly became of only academic interest with Kaul's appointment as cabinet secretary.

The deal between Kaul and the Central Bank nevertheless raises embarrassing questions. Some three years ago, Kaul (who was then defence secretary), signed up a Rs 7.5 lakh loan with the bank to build his house in the New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA), just across the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border. Late last year, with the house nearly complete, the bank signed a lease agreement with Kaul. The bank was to shift its NOIDA branch from a busy main road to Kaul's house in a more remote locality—at a rent of Rs 14,500 compared with the earlier rent of Rs 3,500. Kaul's monthly repayment obligation on his loan was Rs 12,500, and the bank lease would run out in seven years. At that point of time, Kaul would get possession of his house at a cost that would be no more than the tax he would pay on his rental income, less the permissible deductions.

The obvious question suggested itself. Why did the bank take Kaul's house on rent for such a short period, at a price that seemed too high for NOIDA? Kaul told INDIA TODAY: "I had taken permission from the Government. And the timing of the newspaper report appears strange. I can assure you there is absolutely nothing unusual in these transactions. And all the transactions were effected before I became finance secretary."

Kaul's NOIDA house (top) and the earlier branch office



HARI OM GULATI

HARI OM GULATI

Nevertheless, a visit to the area showed that barely 400 feet from Kaul's house the ground floor of another building was being let out for Rs 1,200 And a local real estate agent offered to let the top floor for no more than Rs 1,100. Also, carpenters were still putting the finishing touches to Kaul's building, three months after the property was rented to the bank.

It was also discovered that the local residents' association had pleaded against shifting the branch, that the previous branch manager had advised against the shift, and that the police had said the new location was unsafe.

A Central Bank official explained the high rent by saying "The bank has to pay since the owner has to make modifications to the house to accommodate the bank." Central Bank Chairman B.V. Sonalkar merely said: "Unlike other banks, we are absolutely scrupulous about renting premises. We have given loans for houses to hundreds of our clients."

The Government too has clearly seen nothing objectionable. But a senior civil servant put his finger on the central issue when he said: "Let me put it this way. I would not get into a deal like this."

—RAJU SANTHANAM

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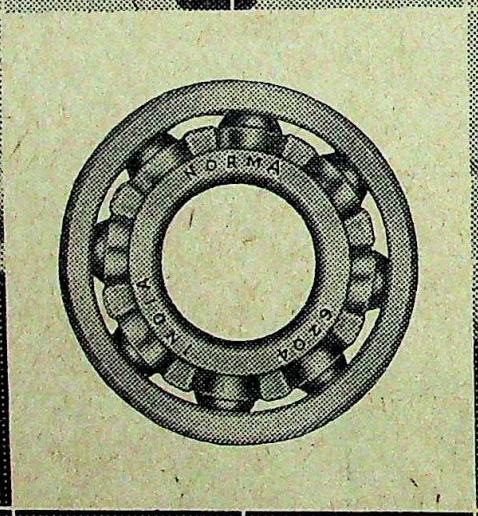

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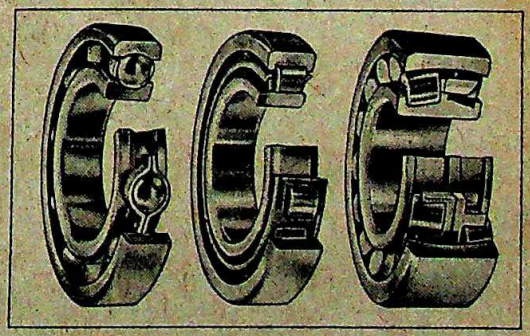

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INDO-SRI LANKA RELATIONS

Positive Signals

THEY arrived within hours of each other and left in much the same fashion. One epitomised hope, the other despair. One's arrival was scheduled, the other, a victim of bizarre circumstance. Together, however, they could not have more symbolised the often tragi-comic paradoxes and pulls of Sri Lanka's festering Tamil crisis.

On the night of February 9, a scheduled Air Lanka flight from Colombo landed at Bombay carrying the stocky figure of Sri Lanka's Minister for National Security, Lalith Athulathmudali.He was en route to New Delhi for a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, a meeting that symbolised a resumption of the interrupted dialogue between the neighbours over the Tamil issue.In the early afternoon of January 10, a Zaire Cargo aircraft bound for Colombo made a distress landing at Trivandrum at the opposite end of India's western coast carrying a sinister payload—arms and ammunition covertly supplied by Jordan meant to help Sri Lanka's trigger-happy security forces combat the Tamil extremists in the northern part of the island.

The two events had an even more common significance.Both were, in a sense, the result of miscalculations. The British pilot of the Zaire Cargo aircraft misjudged the amount of fuel he would require to reach Colombo. He had taken off from Amman and refuelled at Muscat before taking a flight path that would skirt the southern tip of India.Off the Trivandrum coast, the fuel gauge was registering an alarming low and the pilot radioed an SOS to Trivandrum airport tower to say he was making an emergency landing.It was an ironical—and embarrassing twist of fate that led to the cargo of the aircraft and its destination being known just when Athulathmudali and Rajiv Gandhi were exchanging hearty handshakes in New Delhi.

Athulathmudali, on his part, was really standing in for his president, J.R. Jayewardene to whom the original invitation had been extended by the Indian side.Jayewardene, the man who holds the only key to the eventual solution of the Tamil problem, declined the invitation.In that sense, Athulathmudali, despite his high-profile image, was merely a conduit, thus aborting any hope of dramatic breakthroughs in the impasse.

Notwithstanding that, the meeting did represent a major step forward.Despite the war drums being loudly beaten in Sri Lanka, there is now a growing realisation on the part of the country's leadership that Rajiv Gandhi's ascension has turned the Tamil issue into a different ball game altogether.The signals were made more evident last fortnight.

Before his departure for the conducive climes of Male in the Maldive Islands for a meeting of South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC), India's new Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari had been instructed to stress the urgent need for a high-level meeting between the two countries with his counterpart, R. Jaisinghe. Jaisinghe, in turn, passed on the message to Colombo and the response came as a welcome departure from the combative stance of the past few months.

That Rajiv was determined to push home the opportunity was made even more evident. At his personal intervention, the Zaire Cargo aircraft with its deadly cargo intact was allowed to leave Trivandrum for Colombo, thus defusing another potential explosive in the minefield of Indo-Sri Lankan relations.The message had clearly gone home.After his hour-long meeting with Rajiv without the benefit or hindrance of aides, even Athulathmudali admitted that the aircraft's release "would not have been possible in different circumstances", meaning the late Indira Gandhi.

In Colombo, before his departure, Athulathmudali's visit had been seen as just another opportunity for Colombo to air its well-known grievances over India's role in the Tamil crisis.The *Daily Times*, the government mouthpiece, stated that Athulathmudali would "have the opportunity of presenting Prime Minister Gandhi with Colombo's point of view about the difficulties created by terrorists functioning from bases in Tamil Nadu".

That was undoubtedly Colombo's intention. Athulathmudali arrived bearing a detailed list of camps in Tamil Nadu where extremists were ostensibly being given arms training. But by the end of the meeting, Rajiv had clearly disarmed Athulathmudali enough to give the latter's remark that the talks had been "most constructive and helpful" a ring of authenticity.

According to informed sources, Rajiv once again reiterated his desire for a meeting with Jayewardene in the near future and also extracted the promise that till then the dialogue between India and Sri Lanka would be maintained and made more frequent.Regarding Colombo's complaint that the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) should not be allowed such open and instant access to and support from the Indian leadership, the Indian prime minister is understood to have convinced Athulathmudali that the TULF represented the only conduit

Athulathmudali and Rajiv (left), the Zaire aircraft and (top right) Jayewardene

C. RATHEESH KUMAR

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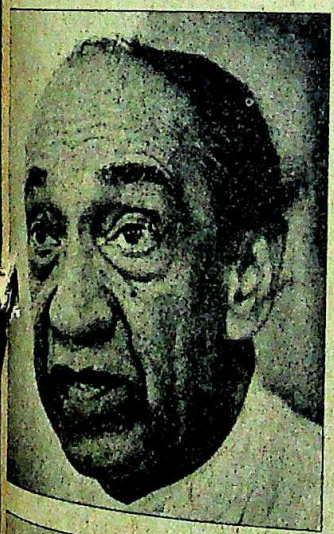
for convincing the Tamil militants to curtail their extremist activities till a political solution to the problem could be finally thrashed out.

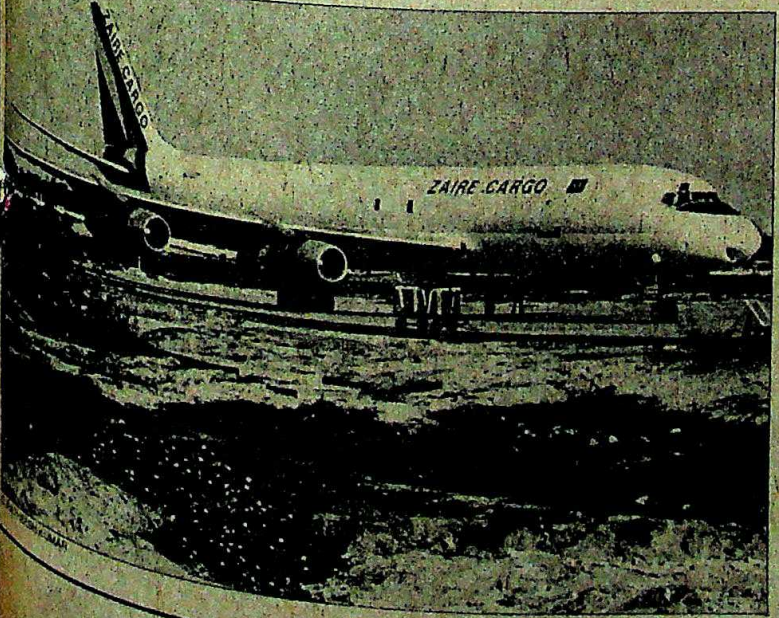
But that, obviously, will be a long and bruising process. Jayewardene at the moment does not seem to be in the mood for finding a political solution which would necessarily entail his having to make concessions to the Tamils which, in Sri Lanka's current antagonistic atmosphere, could be construed as a sign of weakness rather than strength. There are other political compulsions in operation as well and he will require a lot of convincing before any real and solid foundations can be laid. On the same day that Rajiv and Athulathmudali were meeting in Delhi, Jayewardene announced at a meeting that India could "no longer be considered a friendly country" if it continued supporting the Tamil extremists.



On the actual battlefield, the war between the Sri Lankan security forces and the Tamil guerrillas showed no signs of letting up. Last week, the reputed London newspaper, *The Times*' south Asia correspondent reported the cold-blooded massacre of 32 innocent men in the Tamil-dominated Mannar area, a report stoutly denied by Colombo. Almost simultaneously, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), one of the extremist guerrilla groups, claimed that it had "smashed" the Karainagar naval base located 30 km from Jaffna and killed 150 Sri Lankan navy personnel. EPRLF spokesmen said that they had "captured" the base after a four-hour battle and destroyed a number of naval gunboats.

In Colombo, however, such claims are no longer given the prominence they once were and the hyper-active political grapevine was instead buzzing with the possible fallout from the talks between Athulathmudali and Rajiv Gandhi. In a dramatic departure from his usually aggressive posture, Athulathmudali's first remarks on returning to the island laid special emphasis on the fact that Rajiv had personally intervened at his request to allow the Zaire Cargo aircraft to leave for Colombo. That in itself indicated that he had left Delhi somewhat impressed by the prime minister's genuine desire to bridge the growing divide between the two countries. But whether that would be reciprocated can only depend on the moods and motivation of one man—Junius Richard Jayewardene—in whose court the ball is now squarely placed.

—DILIP BOBB in Colombo



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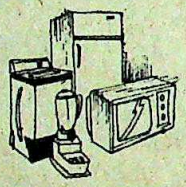

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ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

Dirty Linen

IN THE thick of the night, last fortnight, there was a burglary at St Stephen's College, the holiest of Delhi University's holy cows. A brigade of morally misguided young men moved quickly and stealthily in the dark, crept into the out-of-bounds ladies common room (LCR), broke open the lockers of their female fellow students and escaped with all the female clothing they could find, leaving behind the cryptic message: "Jack the LCR robber robs again."

The morning after, all hell broke loose. Fluttering from the red brick balcony of the prestigious college were women's clothes—shorts, skirts and shirts. Splashed on the walls of the defiled common room was a "chick chart" with the names of the top 10 Stephen's beauties and headlined 'The Terrific Ten'. On another wall ran the obscene slogan: "The bra precedes the breast, without the bra women's lib is best." Operation Undercover had been a success. Within an hour came the journalists, swarming like bees, outraged at the outrage of female modesty. Armed with cameras, flash bulbs and zoom lenses they arrived to seek out the hearts of darkness hidden in the haloed precincts of the college.

For St Stephen's—reputed to draw always the cream of students into its portals every year—it was an internal crisis, no less. The college has always maintained a private dignity and distance from the noises that the rest of the university periodically makes. This was a shameful public expose and more so because some of the college's own women teachers had invited the press in to see the appalling scene. "If any girl's modesty is outraged, mine is too," one is reported to have said. "The boys are potential rapists."

Principal John H. Hala insisted, however, that it was "a domestic issue... uncultured but not immoral". A virtual emergency was declared to enable the college to solve its problems at "home". A round the clock vigil was imposed, student squads posted at all entry points to bar the invasion of outsiders and Section 144 was imposed banning large public gatherings. The college magazines *Kooler Talk* (lovingly called Katy) and *Spice* were also banned and an inquiry ordered into the despicable affair. The next day, as the law and order situation deteriorated further with loyal Stephanians pouncing on the invading press, the CRPF was called in. For the first time in 104 years, the stone corridors echoed to the heavy footsteps of marching police guards.

Strangely enough, while almost all the boys and girls of St Stephen's stuck together maintaining that it was "a domestic crisis" and "a family matter" the rest of the town went to town over it. The university rose in arms. The Students Federation of India and the Janawadi Mahila Samiti took out marches to protest against the "acts of vandalism and harassment of girls". *"Hum chicks nahin chingari hain"* they shouted outside the locked gates of the college. More than a hundred teachers from various university colleges sent a memorandum to Dr Hala claiming that sexual humiliation of girl students could not be considered an internal matter of St Stephen's. The All India Women's Association is said to have demanded that the Government punish the guilty. In another memorandum, teachers asked for greater security measures for women students and an end to "the reign of terror unleashed by college authorities".

A protest march by university students: public exposé

The crisis continued to make front page national news in the dailies: "St Stephen's siege continues", "Culprits at large", "Sex war takes an ugly turn". The public humiliation was new and unpleasant. In a DTC bus when a young man pinched a girl, one passenger turned and sniggered, "Must be a Stephanian." The college was given a new name: UGC, the under garment college. As it happened, the undergarments were totally a media creation. "I don't know who picked up the word," said an M.A. final year woman whose locker had been forced open, "but no one ever left it. Fact is there were no undergarments at all, only sports gear." Similarly with the notorious chick charts. For several years, St Stephen's has had chick, stud and even teacher charts that make periodic appearances on the college notice board. They list, on the basis of physical attributes, the top 10 boys and girls of the college. Although some students don't like it, others find the whole thing fun. "It doesn't bother you in any way," said a third year B.A. girl student, "in fact it's a compliment to be on them."

The recent LCR raid, although it may have been in bad taste, was still a joke, most Stephanians agree. The college has had its share of sexual horseplay before, and usually much worse. In 1979, some students danced nude in front of Miranda House and got away with a few days' suspension. During Holi, another year, some men barged into St Stephen's, molested a number of girls and marched out of the college, scot-free. The agitation this time seems to be a build-up of what has come to be regarded as the lax attitude of the college authorities in dealing with sexual harassment of girls.

However, the crime has been given a punishment this time. Three boys who have confessed to masterminding the operation have been expelled from the hostel and may not be allowed re-admission. But a week later, as passions softened in the mellow February sun, sympathy by and large veered towards the misguided "goondas" thrown out of college for a silly prank. "Just because people thought it was underclothes there was such a hue and cry," said a St Stephen's student. "If they'd known it was only skirts and T-shirts no one would've bothered." Well, crises come and crises go, but this one has at least proved one thing. "It's established our loyalty towards our college," said an M.A. girl student, "it's established that there is something like a true Stephanian."

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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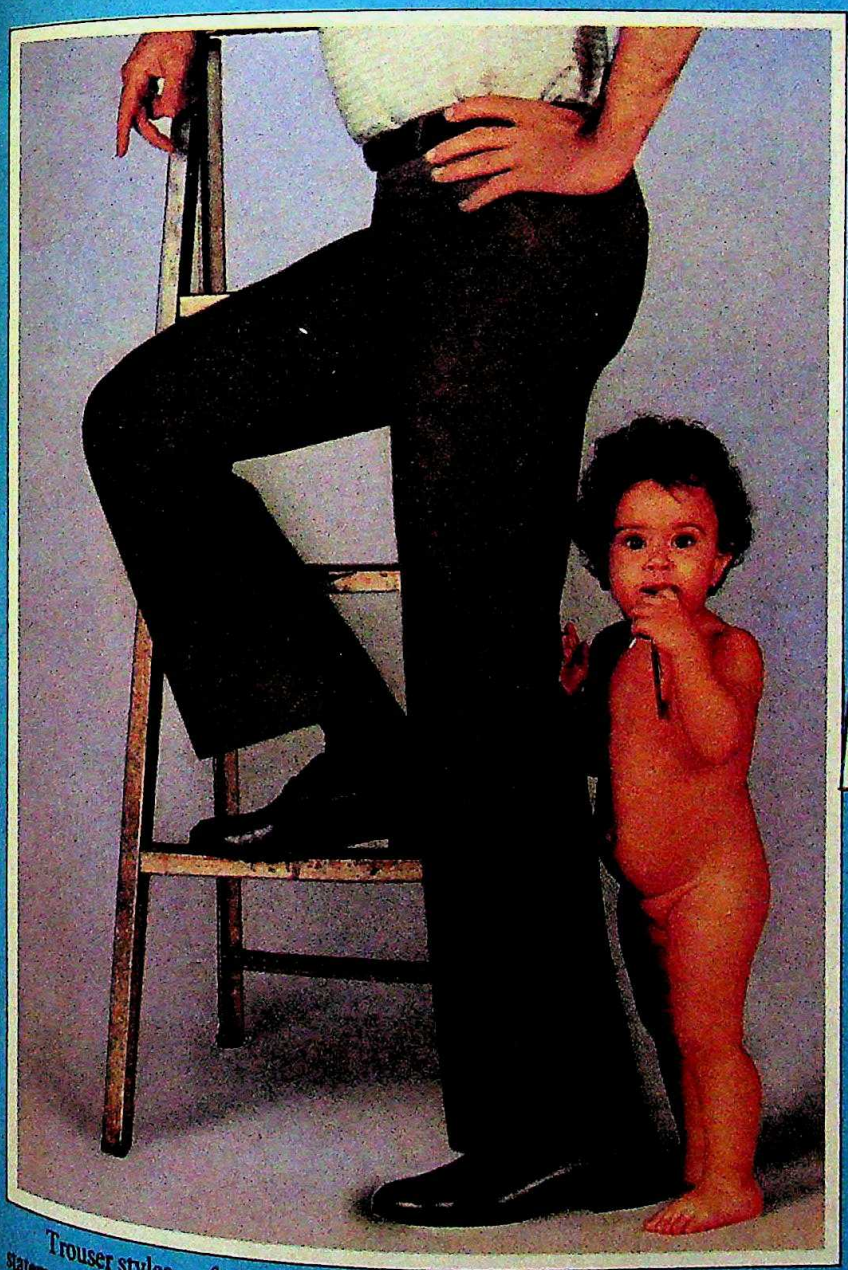

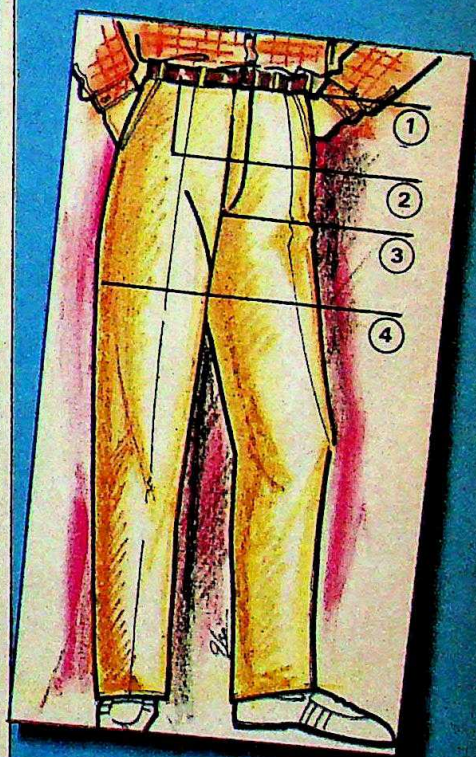

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Political Thaw?

AS THE wintery freeze in Kashmir thawed, there were signs that the cold relationship between the Congress(I) and ousted chief minister Farooq Abdullah was also showing signs of a brief spring. For the first time since the May 1983 election, Farooq and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi talked in New Delhi for 40 minutes in what was described as a cordial meeting. A week later, Ghulam Mohammed Shah, the state's shaky chief minister, publicly announced that he was prepared to quit office, but on his own terms. Said he: "I am prepared to reunite with Farooq's National Conference if he accepts total and permanent friendship with the Congress(I) and does not claim the chief ministership of the state." He also made it clear that he would resign only if his entire cabinet was accommodated.

The offer came soon after the conciliatory approach adopted by estranged brother-in-law Farooq towards the Centre, the defeat of Shah's candidates in the Lok Sabha election, and growing infiltration into the valley from across the border. Since July last year, when Shah was catapulted into the driver's seat by the Congress(I), he has been pressing for a strong line against Farooq. Last fortnight, however, he was forced to beat a hasty retreat when it became clear that the Centre was viewing seriously both the recent electoral reverses in the state and the Shah Government's inability to cut into Farooq territory. Admitted a Congress(I) leader from Jammu: "We chose Shah to strengthen those forces friendly with the Congress(I) and the Centre and weaken Farooq's base. But he has not succeeded so far. At this juncture we can't write off Farooq who is willing to cooperate."

In fact, the Congress(I) decided to open a dialogue with Farooq only after he made friendly overtures despite his party's impressive showing in the Lok Sabha poll when it won three out of the five seats it contested. To begin with, Farooq was the first opposition leader to appeal to the people to rally behind Rajiv after the assassination of Mrs Gandhi. He repeated this theme after the Lok Sabha polls, with Begum Abdullah, known for her strong views against the Congress(I), also chipping in. She declared: "We, of India, are totally opposed to any violent action in the valley." While there was no reciprocal response from the Congress(I), Farooq held to his line. In an interview last month he said: "I cannot be ridiculed for my desire to raise additional bridges between Srinagar and Delhi. I do not believe in double standards. I am for friendship with Delhi. And I cannot shut my eyes to the victory of the Congress(I) elsewhere in the country." Again he emphasised that Rajiv "has to be assisted by everyone in his attempts at providing better socio-economic conditions."

Farooq has many milestones to cross before he manages to build bridges with Rajiv. The major stumbling block would appear to be Shah.

The strategy worked. Rajiv's willingness to spare time for Farooq during a parliamentary session and the visit of Argentinian President Raul Alfonsin, indicated the importance he attached to the Kashmir problem. While the two remain tightlipped about details of the meeting, it was clear that an attempt had been made to narrow down the differences between two people who had had no animosity towards each other before entering the political arena. According to sources, however, the discussions went on predictable lines: while Rajiv insisted that Farooq shun what he called his relationship with anti-national elements in the valley, Farooq sought the dismissal of what he described as the 'usurper' Shah Government and the calling of fresh assembly elections. Although they reached no final agreement, they concurred on the need for more meetings.

The road ahead is long and Farooq has many milestones to cross before he finally manages to build bridges with Rajiv. The major stumbling block would appear to be brother-in-law Shah himself. Reacting to the Rajiv-Farooq meeting, Shah's son Muzaffar, who was trounced in the Lok Sabha election by a Farooq nominee, met over a dozen central leaders pleading against any rapprochement with his uncle, and playing on his so-called anti-national activities.

A week after his son's visit, Shah and Deputy Chief Minister Devi Dass Thakur also descended on New Delhi ostensibly to discuss the Seventh Plan with the Planning Commission. But their visit was aimed mainly at undoing the damage caused earlier by Farooq. During their stay both Shah and Thakur called on Rajiv and other central leaders, and emphasised the dangers involved in the rehabilitation of Farooq in the valley. While Shah pleaded for a political strategy, Thakur was interested in administrative actions against Farooq and his former colleagues. Thakur sent the copies of the 'White Paper on Farooq Abdullah' to the Union home minister and the attorney general of India for their opinion on whether a case of sedition and treason could be registered on the basis of evidence compiled by the cabinet committee headed by Thakur. Claiming he was not accusing Farooq of any anti-nationalist act, Thakur alleged: "There is plenty of evidence of the positive encouragement Dr Abdullah and his followers gave to anti-national and secessionist forces."

The White Paper lists instances of extremists being released from custody without due process. But the major problem remains Farooq's reluctance to dissociate himself publicly from men such as Maulvi Farooq and Abdul Ghani Lone. On February 9, when over 100 activists of allegedly secessionist organisations were arrested for celebrating the first death anniversary of the executed killer Maqbool Butt, Lone, who is chief of the Peoples' Conference, called for a hartal in the valley as a mark of respect to Butt, who, Lone charged, "was denied justice by the Central Government." The police, besides arresting extremist elements, also seized handwritten posters containing highly inflammatory slogans and speeches against the Central Government. And there are those who believe that he was soft on Sikh extremists. As long as these doubts remain, the chill between Farooq and the Congress(I) is unlikely to thaw.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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PUNJAB

Courting Confusion

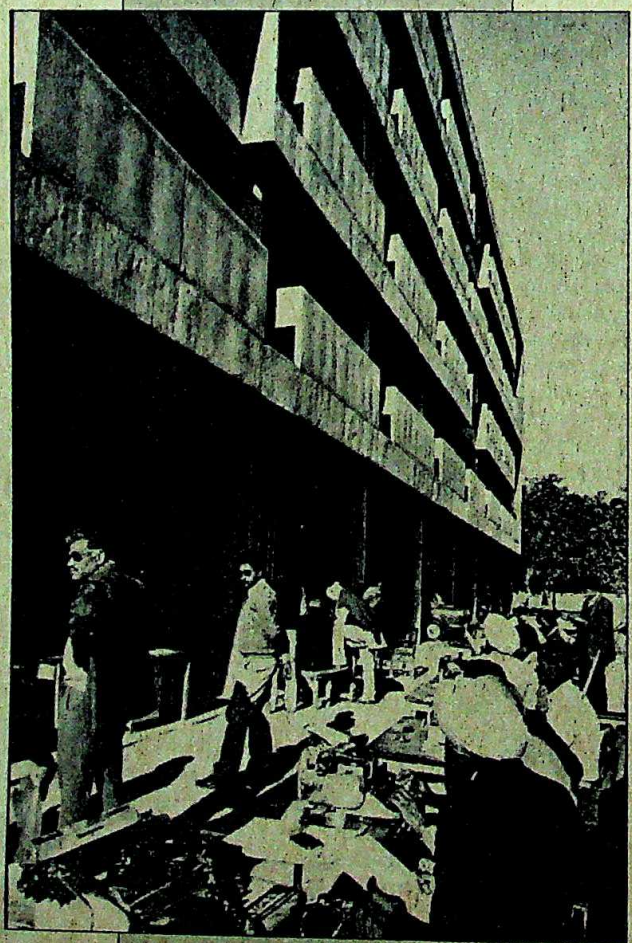
EXTREME situations often justify extreme measures. But this can hardly justify the complicated legal devices that are now being applied in Punjab on the plea that they will combat terrorism. In fact, they are turning out to be counter-productive. The special courts were set up under the Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts) Act in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar last year to try the several hundred alleged terrorists and secessionists captured from the Golden Temple and in combing operations in Punjab.

But instead of speedily dispensing justice, they are now saddled with hundreds of cases which have clogged the legal process. What makes it worse is that the procedure laid down for the courts under the new act has no respect for the universally accepted principles of natural justice, condemning the accused, in many instances, to prove his innocence without even the assistance of a lawyer. In the words of former Supreme Court judge and the erudite civil liberties champion V.R. Krishna Iyer: "A scared government has tried to meet extremist terror with legal terror which has few parallels in history. This act is worse than the Rowlatt Act of 1919."

The basic fault lay in the way the act was worded, for it did not confine the courts' domain just to cases of terrorism. The act added to their scope through an omnibus clause that included practically every offence under the Indian Penal Code and many other acts, not all of them relating to civil strife. The reach of the special courts extends from murder to dacoity, hijacking to offences under the Telegraph Act. The list does not end here. The special courts are also empowered to take the initiative against suspected offenders even where they have not yet been committed to trial by the police, as well as try suspects for alleged offences unrelated to those which brought them to the special courts.

What these sweeping changes have amounted to is to bring to the special courts practically all the work of the state's 36 sessions courts. Not surprisingly, they're perpetually hard-pressed, unable to focus on their main objective of swift trials for terrorists. Already, just six months after they came into being, the special courts have lists of pending cases that run into years. The bulk of this work has been put under the purview of just three special courts, at Jalandhar, Patiala and Ferozepur.

The Special Courts are perpetually hard-pressed and unable to focus on their main objective of swift trials for terrorists.



By the end of last month, the courts had their files spilling with over 3,700 cases. "We are somehow trying to cope with the work as far as humanly possible," said S.S. Sandhu, the public prosecutor at Patiala. In charge of the special courts is Justice Amrit Lal Bahri, who in spite of having appointed three additional sessions judges at Patiala, Bhatinda and Ludhiana to share his burden, was spending up to 10 hours a day in the court, sometimes disposing of as many as 25 bail applications in a day.

By the end of January, the court in Patiala alone had a backlog of over 1,200 cases, half of which were transferred to the additional sessions judge at Ludhiana, R.L. Anand. Even though he ends up working simultaneously on at least two dozen cases a day, in five months Anand has been able to dispose of a mere 125. His counterpart at Jalandhar, K.S. Bhalla, has done slightly more, taking care of 80 to 90 cases a month out of the 2,000 that have been brought before him.

This increasing burden defeats the very *raison d'etre* of the new law. Says Ludhiana lawyer Mohinder Singh Grewal: "The accused are brought from far-off places and their advocates cannot keep track of the proceedings. In the courtroom, only the judge, prosecutor and defendant are left to battle it out. No wonder there are frequent confessions." Grewal, who also happens to be the secretary of the north zone unit of the All India Lawyers Union, estimates that the accused in at least half of these trials go undefended.

From every angle the dice is loaded heavily in favour of the prosecution. For example, most experts say that the new act makes it almost impossible for the defendant to get bail. For the law states: "If the court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that he (the bail

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applicant) is not likely to commit any offence while on bail, the judge could grant bail. "Since the accused are suspected terrorists, this is a tough condition.

The list of unconventional measures under the act is endless. Among them:

- The trials are to be held in camera.
- The courts need not record names and addresses of the witnesses in their orders or judgements or in any record of the case accessible to the public.
- The court can also direct that the identity of witnesses remain secret.
- A lawyer or litigant disclosing the identity of any witness is liable to one year jail and a fine of up to Rs 1,000.
- The accused has no right to appeal to the High Court. An appeal to the Supreme Court is permitted, but has to be made within 30 days, a period considered too short to complete formalities like getting certified copies of judgements and arranging lawyers.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, most litigants are unable to exercise their right to appeal. Out of the 750 cases decided by all the special courts put together by the end of last month, not even one-third ended up in the Supreme Court. In fact, confession has become the order of the day. A large majority of the accused reach the trial stage only after spending around six months in jail and if the punishment for their offence is jail for around that length, their lawyers advise them to make a confession and go home after spending the few remaining days of the sentence in the jail.

This absurdity is compounded by the fact that none of these courts has as yet taken up the case of any known terrorist. In fact, over 80 per cent of the cases in their bulging bags relate to the Arms Act, 12 per cent to such acts of felony not normally ascribed to terrorists, and the remaining relating to offences under the excise laws, the staple fare in Punjab courts in normal times.

There is widespread cynicism as to the effectiveness of the Act and dozens of tales are rounds. For example, there is the case of a potter in Amritsar whom police arrested on the charge of possessing a spear. Produced in the court five months and 25 days after his arrest, he nodded in the affirmative when the judge asked him if he confessed to his crime. His sentence: six months in jail. Sure enough, the potter was able to return home after five more days in jail.

In cases where a quick confession is not forthcoming, most trials get postponed on account of the absence of witnesses or the defence lawyer. Surprisingly, in spite of all this, there has been little public protest. Even the Akalis have failed to make an outcry. Most people do not seem to have understood the implications of the new law. Except for the Punjab and Haryana High Court Bar Association, which sent an angry 10-page memorandum to the President, prime minister, law minister and the Supreme Court, no other bar association in the country has shown any interest in the plight of the accused in Punjab. But even the concern expressed by the bar in Chandigarh could be viewed as being more selfish than philanthropic. After all, with the right of appeal removed, it is obvious that many lawyers have lost the chance to grab hefty briefs.

The only people fighting the battle against the Act with some determination are veteran trade union leaders Bimla and Satya Pal Dang who, till the other day, were countering the Bhindranwale menace politically in their own small way. They have already achieved modest success with the release of nine petty shopkeepers of Ghanpur in Amritsar district from the clutches of what Dang calls "a vicious anti-democratic law". Says he: "The police had booked the shopkeepers, all Sikhs, on the charge that all of them had raised Khalistan slogans after the murder of Mrs Gandhi. We organised both Hindus and Sikhs and got the police to withdraw the charge." He, however, cautions that trumped up cases like these could only provide "grist to the extremists' rumour mill".

The crowning irony, however, is that most of the 450-odd cases of charges including those against the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) General Secretary Harminder Singh Sandhu and Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) President Gurcharan Singh Tohra are to be put on trial in special courts outside Punjab, in Jodhpur and Ajmer in Rajasthan, leaving the Government open to the charge of showing excessive zeal in committing ordinary criminal cases to special courts in Punjab while all the key suspects are in any case being taken care of in the jails in Rajasthan.

It is obvious that the Government has been in an unseemly hurry in Punjab and equally obvious is the fact that its haste may finally prove to be counter-productive. And that is hardly an enviable fate for a state which has ralready suffered so much in the past three years at the hands of the extremists.

—GOBINID THUKRAL in Jalandhar

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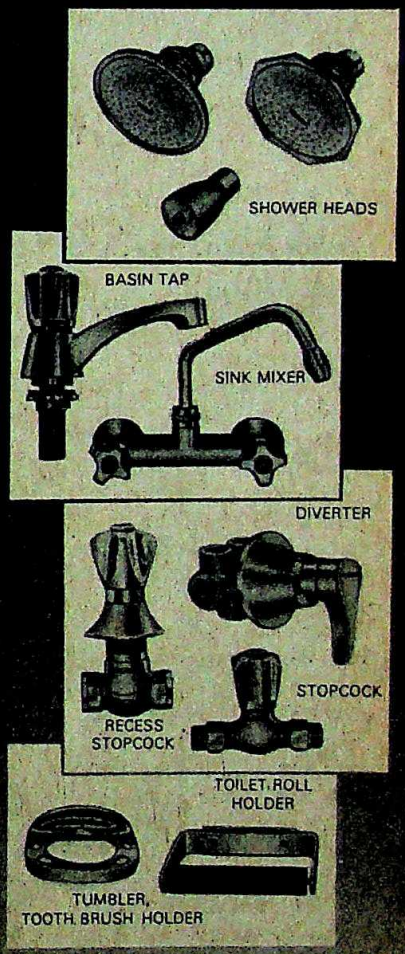

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Imagine a minuscule source of highly pure water. Should you ever need to purify it still further, Thermax can do it for you.

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Thermax. Concept to Completion

Thermax involvement starts with a feasibility study. A meticulous exercise, from raw water analysis to scanning of various possible treatment schemes, through the different stages of aeration, coagulation, clarification, filtration, softening and demineralisation. During this crucial stage, our engineers work closely with the scientists from our R&D Department.

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Our manufacturing and design collaborators for water treatment plants are Permutit Inc. of U.S.A., a company in the Zurn group.

We market TULSION exchange resins which are manufactured to international standards in collaboration with IONAC Chemical Division, a unit of the Sybron Corporation, U.S.A.

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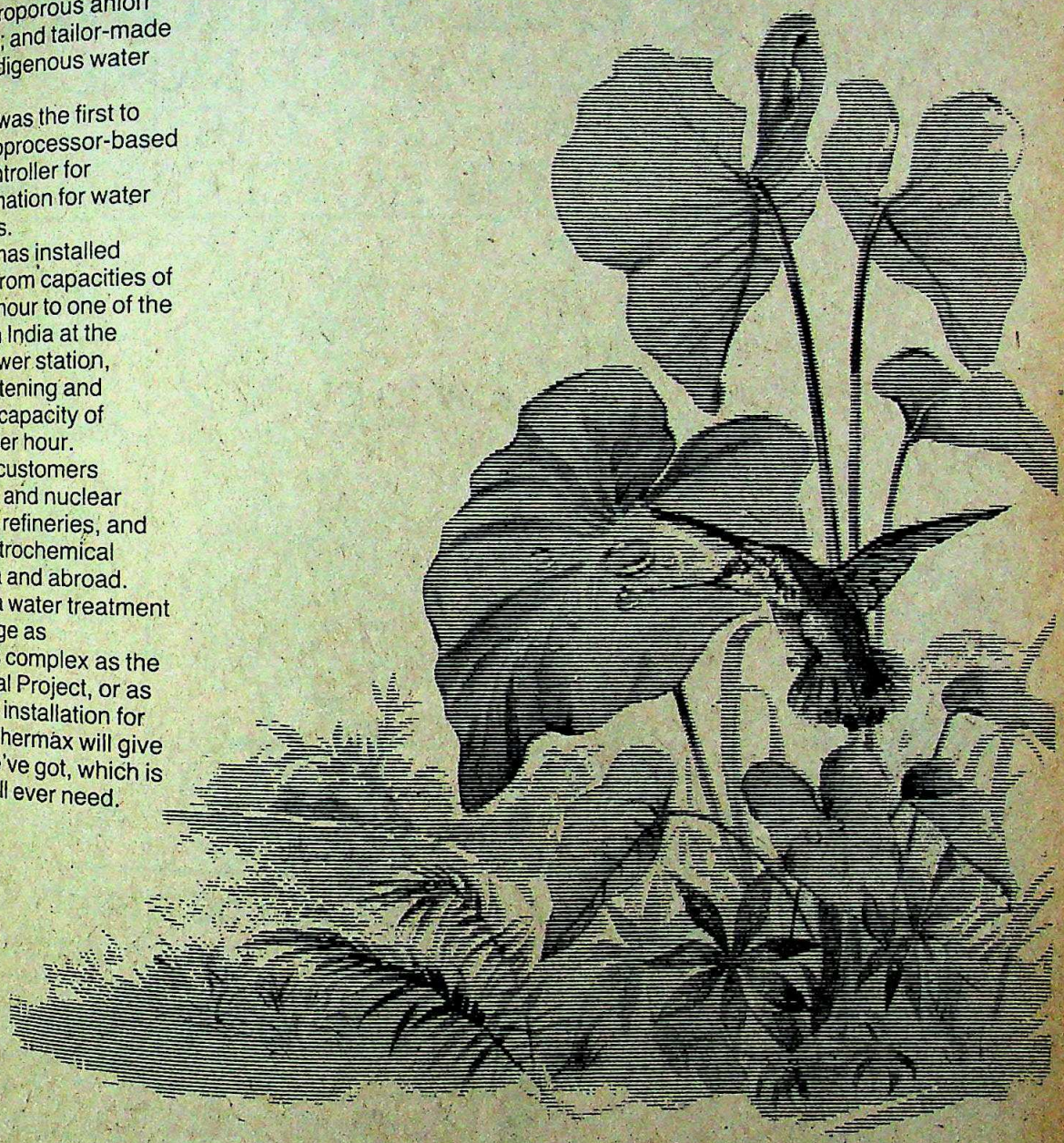

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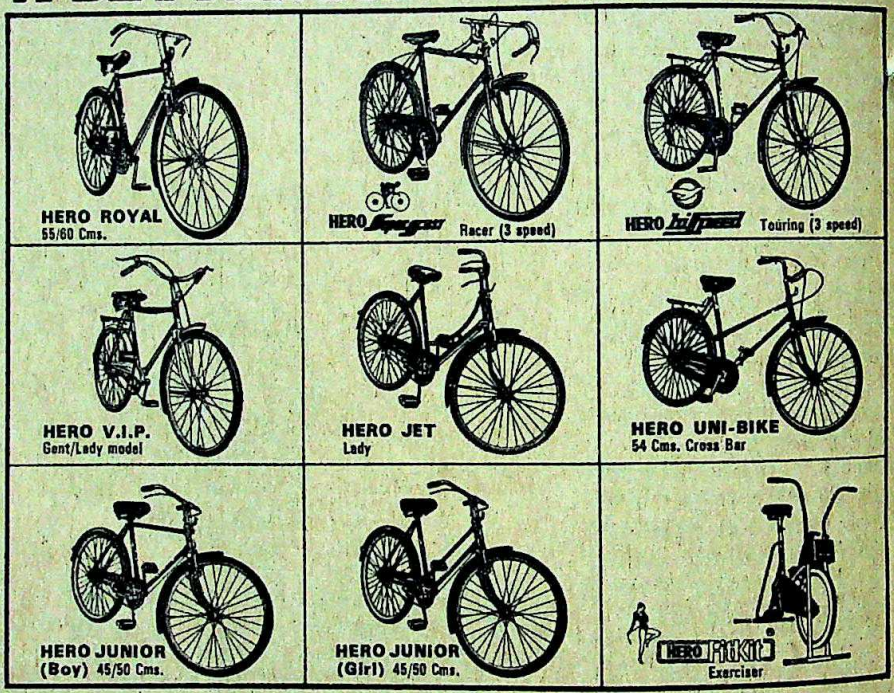

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MAHARASHTRA

Mindless Mayhem

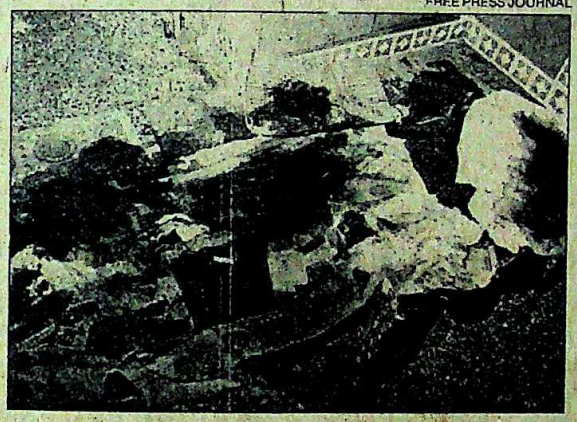
TRADE UNION rivalries can be bitter. But when they deteriorate into mindless violence, as they did in a tiny Thane flat on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections, it is time to stop and take stock of workers' rights and employers' privileges. In a palpably grotesque expression of crime and punishment, four small daughters of a sweeper were killed in cold blood while their father was away and their terrified mother, Walibai Makwana, was locked in the bathroom. When she emerged from hiding, she identified one of the six persons who ravaged her home as Sebastian D'Souza, President of the Everest Building Products' Employees' Union.

Raghav Makwana, a sweeper now suspended from the Everest company, claims that his children have been slaughtered because of his loyalty to the recognised union led by R.J. Mehta, the Asbestos Cement Engineering and General Industries Employees' Union and, in fact, on the evening of the murder, had got into a scuffle with a member of D'Souza's faction. Fearing for his life, he had stayed away from home—and paid with the lives of his four children. D'Souza and a companion of the night have been arrested by police, but it is doubtful whether the case will so much as come to court or a conviction be obtained.

In this case, inter-union frictions began when the Everest management started flirting with a union floated by that 'king' of trade unionism, Datta Samant, although it had already signed a contract, in November 1980, with Mehta's group. In fact, the management refused to deposit the Rs 1.37 lakh due as house rent to the union trust. However, the Samant affair lasted only so long as it suited the management and the moment it became difficult to 'manage', a new union was floated, with D'Souza switching loyalties again to head this third union.

The Everest case is, in fact, symptomatic of the growing malaise crippling unions and employer-employee relations in Bombay. Over the last 10 years, musclemen and hardened criminals have become regular participating factors in labour disputes with the sole intention of spreading terror by the grace of the union or the management. Mehta notes with regret the unfortunate trend for "liquor addicts, gamblers and absentee workers to get into unions so as to gain legitimacy and protection". The Thane DCP (crime) Arvind Patwardhan points out that at times the unions are merely labels for other activities. The labour commentator for the *Maharashtra Times* lays his finger on the danger of ulterior union activity when he states that "once these hired hitmen are allowed to infiltrate, the situation goes out of the hand of the union leaders."

FREE PRESS JOURNAL



Blood-spattered bedding of the four victims: heinous crime

In the 1981-82 Bombay textile strike for instance, almost a dozen persons were stabbed to death in attempts to let loose a wave of fear. In the Godrej factory riot case a few years ago, a sub-inspector was stoned to death, but those arrested were soon released for lack of evidence. Following union acrimony in the Crompton Greaves factory, one person was murdered. Seven persons belonging to Datta Samant's union were taken into custody for allegedly being responsible, but they were not convicted. It was little wonder that workers affiliated to the old union quickly changed loyalties.

The police themselves are sceptical about taking active interest in FIR's lodged in union assault cases because once a settlement is arrived at with the management, the charges are invariably dropped. This is what happened, for example, during strikes in the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank and the Mukund Iron and Steel Company. Although a dozen serious cases of assault and stabbing had been registered, the charges were quickly dropped once an accord was reached.

However, there is no denying the rampant upsurge of violence and instances of uncontrollable aggression are becoming a legion. Even a powerful management like *The Times of India* group found itself unable to prevent the physical intimidation of its employees by members of Gulab Joshi's Kamgar Utkarsha Sabha trying to swamp the Mumbai Mazdoor Sabha (MMS). No one dared to call the police when the chief reporter of *Maharashtra Times* Dinoo Ranadive and fellow journalists were slapped and abused in the office of the Bombay Union of Journalists last October. Hassan Khan, member of the recognised MMS, fractured his legs in an attack in broad daylight by rival unionists while he was standing opposite the secretariat building.

In the latest instance of large-scale intimidation, this time featuring striking workers of the National Rayon Corporation (NRC), a security guard was killed outside the factory in Kalyan last November, leading to the arrest of six workers belonging to Samant's General Kamgar Union (GKU). Matters came to a head on January 26 when police fired on workers outside the factory, killing three persons and injuring others. Alleging that the police was acting in collusion with the NRC management, Samant organised a procession in Bombay to protest against "the cold-blooded firing on the working class".

It is not known exactly what prompted the firing: while Samant claims that the police had refused permission for a peaceful flag-hoisting by workers outside the factory premises and that Shiv Sena elements had been instigated into attacking his men with soda bottles from inside the compound, the police version holds that firing was resorted to only after the workers had surrounded the police station about 100 meters from the NRC factory, after tear gas had failed to disperse them. The truth may be known only after a judicial inquiry is held, but the incident highlights once more the fact that in the very predictability of this sequence of events lies the terror. —COOMI KAPOOR

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MIZORAM

Persisting Problems

IF SILENCE were half consent, Laldenga, the 58-year-old leader of Mizo insurgency, would by now be well on his way to a coronation of sorts, to take over as the interim chief minister of the new state of Mizoram. But last fortnight, political observers were inclined to read a lot more than that in Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's continuing stoic silence on the Mizoram issue as Laldenga awaited a call from the prime minister's office and a final decision on the fate of the negotiations resumed in October last. By all accounts, it seems, some new complications and doubts had arisen and G. Parthasarathy, chairman of the policy planning committee in the External Affairs Ministry, nominated by the Government to negotiate with Laldenga was trying to work out a final package for settlement. Meanwhile, reports from the Mizo underground headquarters in Bangladesh were encouraging. The Mizo National Front's (MNF) 12-member executive council had okayed the points of agreement reached in the course of negotiations between Laldenga and Parthasarathy so far.

After renewed rounds of talks last fortnight Laldenga was guarded in his hopes of a quick settlement. Said he: "Mr Parthasarathy and I have decided to be optimistic. This is all I will say for now. Whatever we have finalised we must keep under our hats, what is the use of making it public property?" But he admitted that the decisions arrived at during the negotiations so far would have no meaning till the prime minister okayed them and also decided finally on his outstanding demands. "I am waiting for summons from Mr Gandhi. He is very, very busy," Laldenga said, hard put to conceal a new sense of uncertainty.

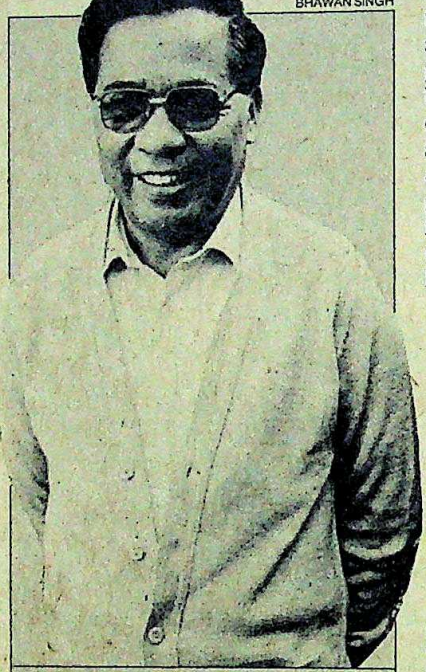
At least twice last fortnight he rang up Parthasarathy to find out the exact cause of delay. Parthasarathy was non-committal, saying that the prime minister was very busy, what with the follow-up of the six-nation summit and then the visit of the Bhutanese monarch. And now with assembly elections round the corner it was indicated that the silence could in all probability last longer.

But details of a tentative agreement and areas of persisting discord were trickling in. According to sources both in the Government and MNF, with the agreement on the grant of statehood for Mizoram, dissolution of the present Union territory assembly and the installation of Laldenga as the interim chief minister a la the late Sheikh Abdullah, the only major problem that still remained to be sorted out was the exact outlines of special safeguards for the state under Article 371(A) of the Constitution. Drafted for Nagaland in the wake of the Shillong peace accord of 1975, the section states that:

► No Act of Parliament will apply to Nagaland without the approval of the state assembly if it pertains to social and religious practices, customary law, ownership and transfer of land and resources in Nagaland.

► The Governor of Nagaland will have special powers regarding the maintenance of law and order in the state as long as conditions of insurgency and civil disturbances continue.

BHAWAN SINGH



Contrary to his bravado of the past, Laldenga has now begun to talk of the urgent need for peace and a farewell to arms.

The MNF strongly objects to the second part of the section, while finding the first adequate for their needs. "Why should the governor have these special powers? Are these provided in the case of Uttar Pradesh?" asked Laldenga indignantly. He also made hints that besides this the safeguards were more or less acceptable to him, adding, "The safeguards in our case have to be basically as in Article 371(A) but these will have to undergo additions and amendments in keeping with Mizoram's special needs."

But to Laldenga's mind a promise of power along with the accord seems as important as the constitutional safeguards. While fighting shy of accepting that he made the chief minister's chair a prerequisite for settlement he stated that the Congress(I) Government in Mizoram was in any case committed to step down as soon as there was an accord. They said as much in their election manifesto, he says, asserting that this was a major stumbling-block earlier as Brigadier Sailo opposed it all along. In recent weeks he has had a number of meetings with Mizoram Chief Minister Lalthanhawla who was once an underground MNF activist. Last fortnight the assurance was repeated once again by Mizoram Finance Minister Sainghaka whom Laldenga has known as his one-time home minister in the MNF's provisional, underground government.

Contrary to his bravado of the past, Laldenga has now begun to talk of the urgent need for peace and a farewell to arms. "Believe me, every person, every weapon will come out once the agreement is finalised. I don't want to be running a private army," he said, adding that arms, surrender and amnesty were relatively fringe issues as long as the basic political and constitutional demands put forward by him were accepted.

But even if the basic political question was sorted out, more complications will arise in the nitty-gritty of implementation. There is, for example, a wide variance in the Government's estimates and Laldenga's claims of his armed strength. The Government is absolutely disinclined to believe the Laldenga claim that his group has no more than 400-500 trained fighting men sharing less than a total of 200 firearms.

The Government swears by the estimates prepared by its intelligence agencies which have sources in the jungle

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fastness of Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sajek Ranges and the Burmese Arakans. According to them the Mizo National Army has at least 600 troops with no less than 450 serviceable firearms. Another factor worrying the Government is the involvement of the Bangladesh Government and the army with the Mizo rebels whose main headquarters is situated at Chhimtalang near Ruma Bazar Cantonment. Similarly, their tactical headquarters, which is used for hit-and-run operations in India is situated at Chhipui in Sajek Ranges, close to the border.

Intelligence men also talk of the existence of an MNF liaison unit led by self-styled Lieutenant-Colonel Lalrinmawia at Ruma Bazar. All this points to a growing link between the Mizo rebels and the Bangladesh Government. Officials in the Union Home Ministry fear that the Bangladesh authorities may help the rebels retain some strength secretly, to be used later as a sort of perpetual blackmail against the Centre. This is what was done by the Phizo group of the Naga rebels after the Shillong peace accord. Government sources point out that such a possibility exists with the Bangladesh authorities regularly using the MNF rebels as a counter to the Shanti Bahini, the ill-clad and ill-trained force of the Buddhist Chakma rebels who have been fighting against the settlement of plainsmen in the hills and frequently inflicting casualties on both the new settlers and the Bangladesh armed forces.

The Bangladesh Government has often accused India of aiding the rebels, —allegations India has denied vehemently—and has sought to use the MNF in a kind of retaliation. It was in the same quest that Bangladesh actively connived to bring about an understanding between the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) and the Mizo rebels. India now wants to settle the whole problem in one stroke. Said an official: "The Tripuris are not such a threat without the Mizo support. Any agreement with the Mizos now will have to ensure that not only do all of them come overground but also that they do not leave a small group of die-hard advisors behind or sell off their arms to the Tripuris. The fact is, the two insurgencies are linked and therefore cannot be viewed in isolation of each other."

BUT IF the Government is bothered about the possibility of Bangladesh still perpetuating the Mizo insurgency to counter Chakmas, Laldenga and his men intend to do the same in their own way, though they insist that their differences are confined to the Chakma settlers in Mizoram. Last fortnight, Laldenga and his aides belatedly brought the Chakma issue to the forefront of the negotiations demanding the abolition of the Chakma Autonomous District Council as a pre-requisite to the accord. Without this, Laldenga told INDIA TODAY, there can be no peace in Mizoram. He asserts that the Chakmas were never residents of Mizoram and were allowed to come in on valid permits. "First you allowed them to settle down and now you give them autonomy, something they do not even have in their own country. So obviously more of them would like to come into India now." Giving yet another serious twist to his armed bands' chronic rivalry with the Chakmas, Laldenga said menacingly: "If the Chakmas keep coming in the Mizos will have no choice but to resist them."

Laldenga now asserts that an accord will not be possible in the absence of a firm commitment on the Chakmas. In fact the latest charter of demands submitted by the MNF to Parthasarathy has a tell-tale section that reads: "Notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution the legislative assembly in Mizoram shall have the power to create and abolish autonomous district councils." The objective, obviously is to do away with the autonomous Chakma district council. This is one demand the Government is unlikely to grant and Laldenga almost threatens that this could mean a break in negotiations.

Some officials, however, feel that Laldenga is now trying to use the Chakma issue as a last-minute bargaining counter. Said an official: "He genuinely wants an agreement now. He just does not want to fight any more. But he also realises that he cannot get from the Government the kind of constitutional concessions he is seeking. So, in the form of a clear verdict against the Chakmas he is, in fact, seeking a sop for his people, for whom the so-called Chakma influx is an emotional issue." On the other hand, officials point out that Laldenga has also shown a bit of realism by dropping some of his other impossible demands, like the addition of large tracts of reserve forests in adjoining Assam, Manipur and Tripura states to the new state of Mizoram. "We have to be realistic", said Laldenga, adding, "any such territorial adjustments require amendment to Article 3 of the Constitution and concurrence of chief ministers of all the involved states. We could do without all those complications at this stage."

With Laldenga himself repeatedly talking in terms of "this stage", it is obvious that, tired of two decades of insurgency he too is keen to end his agony. In a rare expression of realism Laldenga told INDIA TODAY: "There is no question of surrendering or accepting defeat. We always realised it was not possible to defeat the Indian Army. But we always wanted to make the point that the Mizos were not associated with the framing of the Indian Constitution and as such could not accept it right away. Now that the changes sought by us are being carried out, our job is done." An agreement now will indeed be his only chance of grabbing power in Mizoram. And that should be a lot for the maverick who went to war with the Union for as little as political dominance in what was, in 1965, a small, landlocked tribal district in Assam.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

MNF soldiers: negotiating surrender

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WIPRO CORPORATION

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY
Results 1983-84

About the Corporation

The Corporation has its corporate office at Bombay. It is currently organised into four businesses. Wipro Consumer Products Division, with its business office at Bombay and manufacturing at Amalner (Maharashtra) and near Madras, manufactures, markets and exports consumer products. Wipro Fluid Power Division, with its business office, manufacturing and R & D centre at Bangalore, develops, manufactures, and markets hydraulic cylinders and systems. Wipro Information Technology Limited, (subsidiary of Wipro Limited), develops, manufactures and markets a range of sophisticated minicomputer systems incorporating the latest technology and state-of-the-art features and exports microprocessor based sub-assemblies. Its business office and R & D centre are at Bangalore and manufacturing is in Mysore. Wipro Systems Limited (subsidiary of Wipro Limited), with its business office, manufacturing and R & D centre at Bangalore, develops product software for export.

Each of the four divisions/subsidiary companies are headed by senior business heads with corporate direction and support in the areas of personnel and administration, finance, planning and corporate affairs.

Consolidated financial highlights

Corporation financial highlights for the year ended June 30, 1984 are :

(Rs. millions)

	1983-84	1982-83	1973-74
Sales	**691.2**	622.5	187.7
Profit after tax	**27.7**	26.7	2.9
Profit after tax plus depreciation	**35.8**	30.3	3.6
Retained earnings	**26.8**	25.8	3.6
Shareholders' funds	**116.0**	89.3	11.7
Return on average shareholders' funds	**27.0%**	34.1%	28.4%

Wipro Consumer Products Division

Voluntary price regulation on vanaspati (cooking medium) continued during the year. We implemented first phase of modernisation of our Amalner factory resulting in reduced energy consumption, lower operating costs and an improved quality of 'Sunflower' and 'Camel' vanaspati. Currently, we are implementing the second phase of modernisation.

Market for our laundry soap '787' was expanded.

'Bubbles', a special soap for children, was launched in selected states in October 1984. The distribution network has been strengthened to meet the requirements of this important consumer product.

We have received government registrations for manufacture of fatty acid (a raw material for soap) and are implementing this project.

Our export based shoe upper factory with modern machinery and skilled leather technicians, commenced commercial production in October 1984. We are planning for rapid growth in this area.

Business headquarters of the division moved into new office premises at Bombay in November 1984.

Wipro Fluid Power Division

Our performance during the year was satisfactory. Position of leadership in industrial hydraulic cylinders has been consolidated. Shipments and order bookings of mobile hydraulic cylinders have increased. We are developing hydraulic cylinders and systems for specialised market segments, and are establishing separate facilities at Bangalore for the manufacture of very large specialised cylinders. R & D facilities have also been expanded.

It is proposed to establish manufacturing facilities at Tumkur (65 kilometres from Bangalore) for hydraulic tipping systems. A memorandum of understanding was signed with M/s. Nencki AG, Switzerland for technical knowhow.

Today Wipro's fluid power products are known for their reliability, high performance and quality.

Wipro Information Technology Ltd.

Industry growth rate in 1983-84 was significantly below expectation. There has been a recovery during the last six months and we have a healthy order book.

In 1983-84, with almost twice the sales in minicomputers of our nearest competitor, Wipro captured 30% of the market in minicomputers, an achievement confirmed in a survey by Data Quest magazine in July 1984 where Wipro emerged as the undisputed leader.

We offer customer service countrywide through a network of offices, backed by a qualified and experienced team of hardware and software specialists and service engineers. A close working relationship with users helps us develop customised solutions. Today we have a wide range of minicomputers— Wipro Series 86E, Wipro B-250, Wipro Z-650, Wipro Banker and Wipro Wise — with features such as upgradability to

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meet a user's growing needs. The software developed by Wipro is compatible across the entire range of its systems. Complementing the excellent facilities in our R & D centre is a team of experienced, qualified and dedicated personnel.

Our modern factory at Mysore was substantially expanded during the year.

Our first major export order from the USA for Rs. 3 million worth of populated printed circuit boards designed and manufactured by us, is currently being executed.

Our plan to manufacture and market MICR encoders in technical collaboration with Maverick Microsystems International Inc., USA, is under consideration by the government.

Wipro Systems Ltd.

Incorporated during the year to develop and export sophisticated computer software, the company received necessary government clearances. Products developed so far include office products like Word Processor, Information Manager, Spelling Checker etc. and integrated packages like the Project Management System and Integrated Financial Management System.

Research and Development

Continued leadership in business is possible in the long run only through R & D efforts in all areas of operation. Our R & D expenditure during the year was Rs. 9.1 million (including Rs.3.9 million on capital account) and will significantly increase in the current year. Our R & D centres are recognised by Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. Highly qualified engineers work in these well equipped centres to develop effective customer solutions.

Wipro team

Success of Wipro is in a large measure due to the quality of performance of our human resources. We have a team of 1400 people enabling us to successfully grow in diverse businesses. The management team of 400 employees is young and consists of about 40% postgraduates and 70% engineers. During the year action was taken to integrate employees with diverse backgrounds into Wipro culture. Induction, training and employee development activities have been considerably strengthened during the year.

Finance

Corporation has grown through a well planned deployment of retained earnings and has achieved a compound annual growth in net worth of 25% over the last ten years. The growth in net worth is entirely on account of ploughing back of profits. Diversification over last five years has broadened our business portfolio, and by June 30, 1985, less than 30% of our capital employment will be in traditional business of vanaspati.

Additional infrastructure development cost being incurred in current year to achieve sales growth over next two years is raising breakeven levels substantially.

Directors of Wipro Limited have recommended issue of bonus shares to shareholders in the ratio of one bonus share for every one equity share. Wipro continued to be a non MRTP, non FERA company with shares listed on Bombay Stock Exchange.

Future Policy

For future growth, we would invest in R & D and technology, broaden product portfolio, increase market share and retain maximum profit after tax.

We would improve effectiveness of resource utilisation, aim to maximise annual turnover of capital employment, increase manpower productivity, make operations more cost effective, and achieve higher return on R & D investment.

Wipro beliefs

The most important factors that have contributed to our corporate success is faithful adherence to certain articulated and communicated beliefs. These beliefs represent fundamental socio economic purpose, hold the organisation together and give it direction, and form the foundation and framework for determining company objectives and plans. If an organisation is to meet the challenges of the changing world it must be prepared to change everything about itself except its beliefs.

* Respect for the individual. People are our greatest asset.
* Achieve and maintain a position of acknowledged leadership in the businesses we are in.
* We should pursue all tasks with the objective of accomplishing them in a superior manner.
* Our individual and company relationships should be governed by the highest standard of conduct and integrity.
* Be close to our customer in action, example and spirit, and give superior quality products and services.
* The effectiveness with which management performs its job is measured basically by the long term profits which it achieves for its enterprise.

In summary

It is important for us not to become complacent with success and to be aware that much needs to be done to improve in striving for excellence.

Azim H. Premji

Azim Hasham Premji

Note:
This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings at the Annual General Meeting.

CLOSE TO THE CUSTOMER

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WEST BENGAL

Time for Reckoning

WITH the electorate turning out an even-handed verdict in West Bengal two months ago, politics in the state has been thrown into an unusual kind of flux. Despite being catapulted back into the political reckoning, the Congress(I) shows no signs of breaking out of the seven-year period of sloth. And the ruling Left Front finds itself torn by internal criticism, pulls and tussles among the constitutent parties and by dissatisfaction among the party cadres.

The Congress(I) finds itself in a state of glassy-eyed inactivity after the elimination of its two former power centres: A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Pranab Mukherjee. Asoke Sen, union law minister, says this has succeeded in "destroying entrenched groupism", but that may be a premature judgement at a time when a new party boss for the state is yet to emerge.

The Congress(I) by its inactivity has willy-nilly been drawn into a temporary truce with the ruling Left Front, a truce that the latter desperately wants. In its attempt to secure time for setting its own house in order, the Left Front has adopted an uncharacteristic conciliatory attitude to the Congress(I). Even the well-known Congress-baiter State Finance Minister Ashok Mitra declared that the Centre's attitude towards West Bengal was "positive". All Front ministers have also been instructed to refrain from holding the Centre responsible for every conceivable problem. The accent clearly is on the performance and not criticism.

Unfortunately, although the Front leadership has succeeded in stemming criticism of the Centre, it has not been able to do the same with internal criticism. If anything, the smaller Front constituents are loudly voicing their discontentment with the dominant CPI(M). The Forward Bloc Minister for Higher Education Sambhu Ghosh's public disagreement with the Front's policy of excluding compulsory English teaching at the primary levels became a major controversy last fortnight. CPI(M) leaders in particular condemned the Forward Bloc's open criticism of the Front, arguing that such matters should be raised in the privacy of internal meetings.

Clearly the dominant Front partner, the CPI(M), needs time to neutralise this minor revolt especially since what the Forward Bloc did openly, other Front parties, CPI, and the West Bengal Socialist Party, are doing somewhat more circumspectly. None of the smaller Front partners has any desire to sink with the CPI(M) giant and seem to have decided to work for bolstering their individual party images. As West Bengal Socialist Party leader Biman Mitra says: "A lot of political parties are destined to disappear or become defunct in the near future and what is required is a new non-communist force in the country, something like the socialist parties of Europe."

Asoke Sen

Ashok Mitra

The Congress(I) has been drawn into a temporary truce with the Left Front. But both are confronted by dissensions, throwing West Bengal politics into a strange state of flux.

Having sensed these sub-surface conflicts, the CPI(M) leadership at last fortnight's Left Front meeting quietly bowed down to the analysis and demands of its smaller partners. Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee declared that the Government's "non-performance" was at the root of the electorate's disenchantment with the Front. Far from taking the smaller partners, especially the Forward Bloc to task, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu only opined that it would perhaps be unwise to presume that any particular government department was to blame for the Government's poor image, implying that instead of blaming each other all Front parties should equally share responsibility for the erosion in their support.

The CPI(M) leadership not only faces the task of convincing its partners that their alliance is credible and viable but also that of containing the rising dissidence within its own ranks. A few district committees of the CPI(M), notably that of the 24 Parganas have reacted sharply against their party's official contention that organisational lapses were mainly responsible for their poll reverses. "It is unfortunate but a small coterie in the leadership of our party is refusing to admit its failures and its past actions that have destroyed all the work the communists have done in Bengal for decades," says a prominent CPI(M) district committee leader in disgust.

In an effort to draw its cadres closer, the CPI(M) leadership sent out questionnaires asking for views on their poll reverses and whether it would be prudent for the Left Front to resign from the Government like Karnataka Chief Minister Hegde did. Significantly, most district committees and branch committees were against the Left Front resigning, chiefly because they feared that the Congress(I) would launch an attack on them, as they did in 1971-72. The lower ranks of the party were however extremely critical of a number of party leaders and ministers whose acts and irresponsible statements alienated large sections of the populace.

Naturally the Left Front has so far been unable to take any major step to alter its record of non-performance, despite the near-frenzied internal demands to make immediate changes in its governmental functioning. "We have to make policy changes and drop inefficient ministers if necessary," feels a Forward Bloc leader lamenting the CPI(M) inaction in such matters. So far the only concrete step taken by the state Government is a "special three-month drive" to clean up Calcutta. Orchestrated amidst much fanfare by the CPI(M) Urban Affairs Minister Prasanta Sur, this drive aims to provide the basic minimum civic services that the Calcutta Municipal Corporation is normally supposed to do.

As for the Congress(I), its state leaders admit that for the time being the

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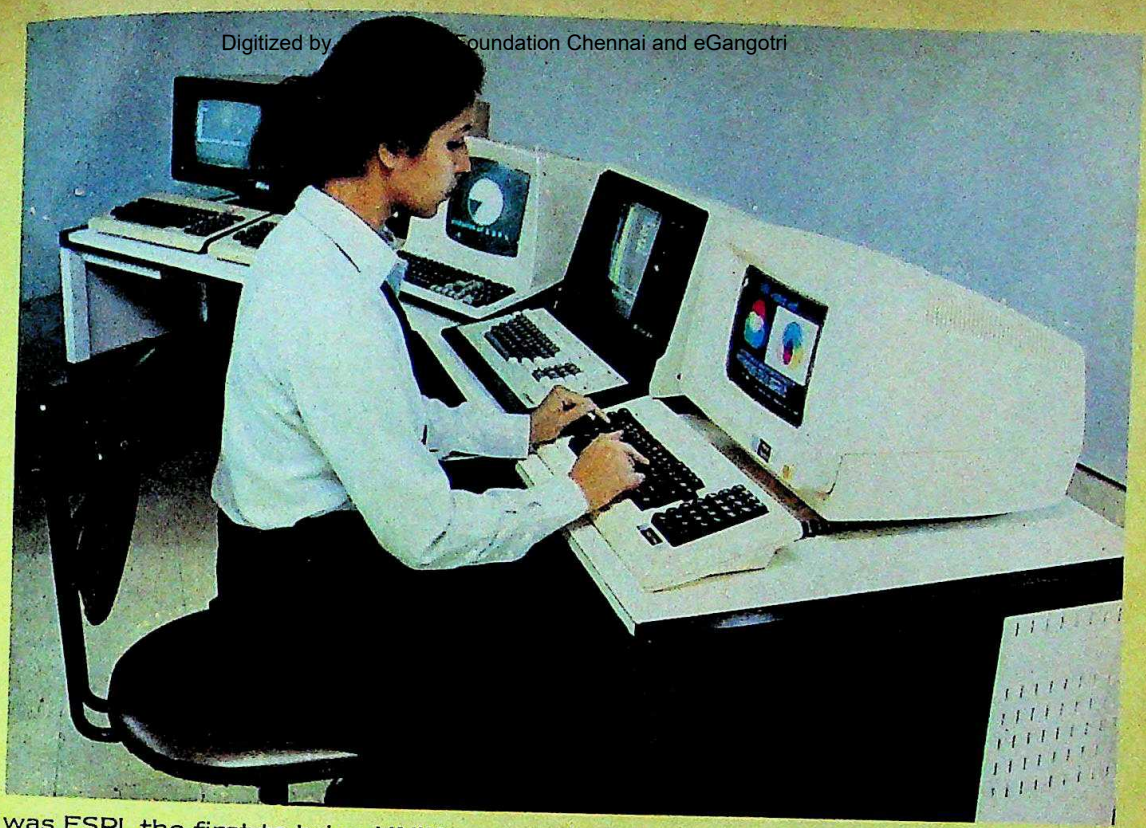

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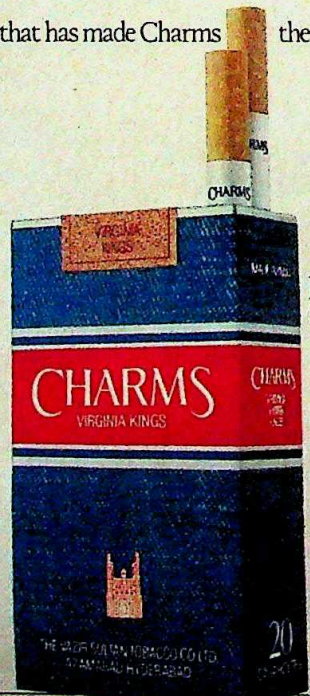

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Centre's man in West Bengal is Asoke Sen, whose piloting of the anti-defection bill is read as a sign of his importance. All the same, they are convinced that Sen is a "passing phase" and an unlikely candidate for commanding the volatile state unit of the party.

Sen, on the other hand, has made his desire to come back as undisputed Congress(I) leader in West Bengal quite clear. Returning from New Delhi after the Parliament session, Sen summoned a WBPCC(I) meeting for the express purpose of passing a resolution urging for the "immediate" reconstitution of the committee. The PCC(I) has been practically defunct for the past couple of years and its reconstitution is going to be significant. Sadhan Pande, a Congress(I) candidate for the Bustolla assembly by-elections says: "The high command now wants to form a pradesh committee that will be projected as an alternative to the Jyoti Basu ministry." The new PCC(I) president, in other words, will be the Congress(I)'s prospective chief minister.

At present, there are three likely contenders for the coveted post: Sen, Ajit Panja and to a lesser extent, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi. However, most Congressmen, including Sen, do not think that Das Munshi can or should be inducted at that level. "Das Munshi will have to accept whatever position the high command gives him," Asoke Sen told INDIA TODAY.

Ajit Panja also is reportedly not keen to become WBPCC(I) chief, especially considering that his past record in that post had not been inspiring. Even Sen is not quite sure where he stands. His complaints against Congress(I) leaders who had allegedly worked against party candidates in the recent parliamentary elections has not elicited any response from the party high command.

Not only will the state Congress(I) have to refurbish its internal organisation but, as Asoke Sen says, it will ultimately have to project "a clean and efficient alternative to the Left Front". For the Left Front too the task is twofold: internal dissensions have to be submerged and then it will have to prove to the electorate capable of providing a government that works.

Obviously, the equations that dominated West Bengal politics for the past seven years are rapidly crumbling and the situation is now so different that the party that can shrug off its inertia and adjust fastest has the best future.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

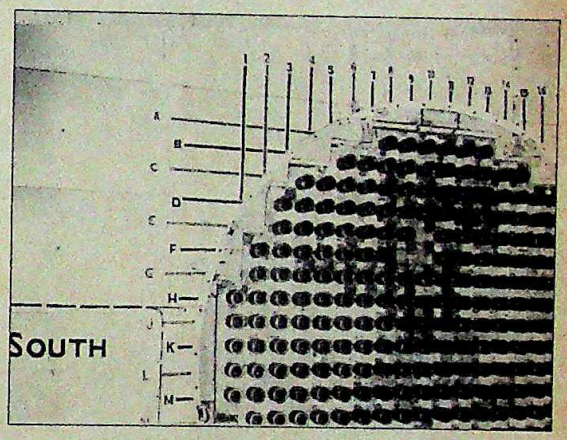
RAJASTHAN

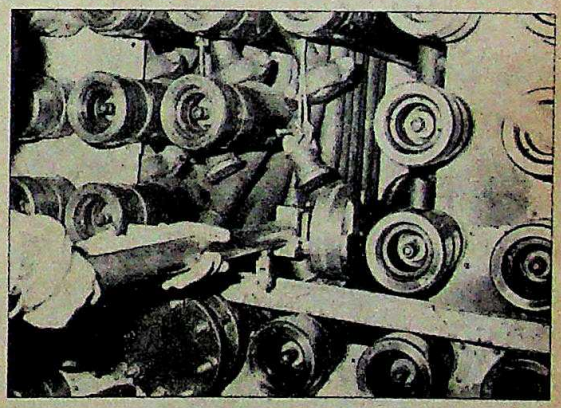
Plugging the Leak

PATIENCE and perseverance sometimes do pay. On February 1, the 220 MW unit-1 of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Project (RAPP) at Rawatbhata, 62 km from Kota, went back into operation after 1,060 days or nearly three years. The reason for the unprecedented shutdown had been the leakage of water from two tiny cracks in the south end shield enclosing the calandria, the heart of the pressurised heavy water reactor (PHWR). The restarting of the plant laid to rest all fears that the plant was going to be scrapped because the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) was unable to plug the leak (INDIA TODAY, April 15, 1984). Clearly pleased by the success of nearly 3 years' endless attempts to plug the leaks, G.V. Nadkarni, chief superintendent of the project said: "The long period required to get the problem right made people wonder about the unit's future. But ultimately we have been able to get it going."

The leak was first spotted on September 20, 1981 and immediately pinpointed as from F-10, one of the 306 coolant tubes in the calandria— a cylinder 20 ft long and 17 ft in diameter. According to the PHWR process, each coolant channel holds 12 bundles of natural uranium, which undergoes fission to generate heat which in turn heats the heavy water coursing over the coolant tubes. This in turn heats ordinary water that evaporates into steam which moves the turbines, thus generating power. Enclosing the calandria are 4 ft wide "end shields" which support the weight of the coolant tube assemblies and act as shields to keep radioactivity in. Ordinary water is circulated through the end shields to keep them cool. It was this water contaminated by radioactivity which was leaking from the south end shield.

The first attempt to plug the leak was a chemical process advocated by BARC scientists, and involved sealing the crack with zinc polysilicate. The unit resumed functioning on January 28, 1982 but was shut down a month later on March 4 because the leak reappeared.





The leaking end shield (top) and repairs in progress: commendable work

For the next 19 months scientists worked on the assumption that the snag lay in tube F-10 alone. The problem was complicated greatly by the fact that the men working on the repairs could face intense radioactivity: in 15 minutes a worker would absorb as much radiation as he could normally take safely over three months. "Therefore," says Nadkarni," we had to work out the procedure to the last detail so that nobody had to stay a minute longer than necessary."

Every step taken also had to be ap-

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proved by the RAPP Safety Committee, the DAE Safety Review Committee and the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB). This was essential because it was not clearly known to what extent the continuous neutron radiation, for over eight years since the unit went commercial in end 1973, had affected the end shield. Presumably, the material had lost some ductility and become somewhat brittle, so that still greater care had to be exercised before working on it.

In September 1982, the F-10 coolant channel was cut but the next major step came only a year later. The coolant tube is held in the end shield in another tube called the lattice tube and its cutting took place only in September 1983 by an improvised process which is called the spark erosion method.

A detailed inspection showed that there were two cracks—both 1.5 mm wide—on the inside face of the end shield facing the calandria, running from lattice tube F-10 to lattice tubes F-9 and E-10. The first was 38.5 mm long and the other 58 mm.

In the course of 1984, the coolant channels and lattice tubes of F-9 and E-10 were cut. A decision was made to plug the three channels, even though it would reduce the power generation capacity of the reactor by about 2 per cent. Special plugs—made of 3.5 per cent nickle steel—were designed by the Reactor Component Group of the Bombay Nuclear Power Board's Engineering Design Division. The plugs were installed in mid-December last year and the effectiveness of the plugging was tested for a month with cold and hot water circulation and found to be safe. Last fortnight RAPP-1 finally began operations at a generation capacity of 60 MW.

Though the leak has been successfully dealt with, the cracks have not been eliminated. Nadkarni admits that they have only been sealed within a metal gasket. And three years later no one has any reasons for why the cracks appeared and whether this problem could occur elsewhere in the end shields. For the moment however, restarting the plant in spite of having dealt with a problem never dealt with before is achievement enough.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Rawatbhata

DHOLPUR

Crying Shame

THESE were the ones that didn't get away. Nearly three years after blinding 13 innocent villagers (INDIA TODAY, July 31, 1982) at a fake eye camp in Rajakhera, 35 km from the district headquarters of Dholpur, Ramesh Chandra, Mahesh Chandra and Munnalal were given a stiff 18 years' imprisonment each by Chief Judicial Magistrate Mathura Prasad Paliwal late December. Charged by the district police with causing grievous hurt by a dangerous weapon, extorting money, cheating and entering into a criminal conspiracy, the break-up was six years on each of the three counts, the sentences to run consecutively. Two others, Babu Lal and Radhey Lal, accused of publicising the camp, were acquitted for want of evidence.

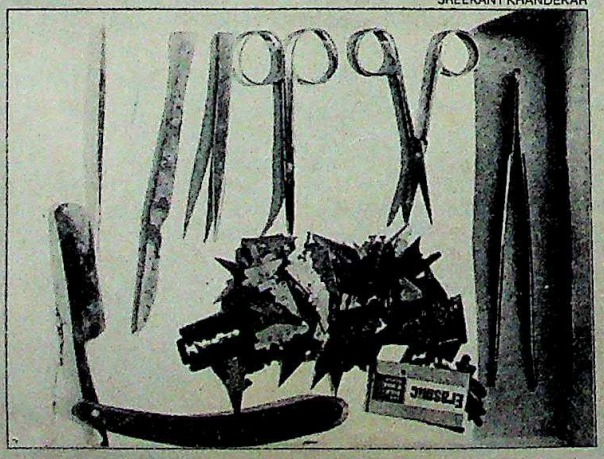
Much in the manner of undetected quacks operating in various parts of the country, the young men armed with an old dissection box comprising forceps, rusted knife, bits of shaving blade and barber's razor, needle and thread, syringes and some medicines, set up their camp at Rajakhera on March 20, 1982. According to evidence in court, they made the patients, mostly elderly, pay Rs 21 each for admission into the camp. Using chloroform in quite a few instances, they then pierced their patients' eyes with a sharp instrument, and bandaged them up, refusing to continue 'treatment' until the unsuspecting soul paid up a further sum.

M.P. Paliwal

The extent of the damage caused to the villagers can be gauged by a report made by the then surgeon of the Dholpur district hospital, Chandra Shekhar Arora, on the victims which states: "Ram Devi, 62, left eye—gaping wound in upper part of the cornea and iris... blood presenting in section... upper half of cornea hazy... no useful vision; Hanuman Das, 50, right eye—irregular section of cornea in upper part... lens matter visible through pupil... only perception of light... no useful vision; Shyama, 80, right eye—anterior chamber is formed and vaseline particle floating in it. Some lens matter present in pupilary area... no useful vision."

The instruments used at the camps

SREEKANT KHANDEKAR



The irony was that although the police was aware of the camp, they got into the act late because nobody had lodged a complaint. In court their lawyer argued that his clients had been falsely implicated, that the identification by the witnesses was inadequate, that they be treated leniently considering their youth, that they had had no police record and had already spent nearly three years in jail. But Paliwal was unimpressed. "In such a matter, only a stiff punishment would be appropriate," he said.

Still, the damage is done, and is further highlighted by the fact that this unscrupulous trio had held about three dozen camps in which more than a thousand persons were 'treated'. They also face similar charges in the Alwar district court. But, considering the nature of their wanton misdeeds, no punishment would be harsh enough.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Dholpur

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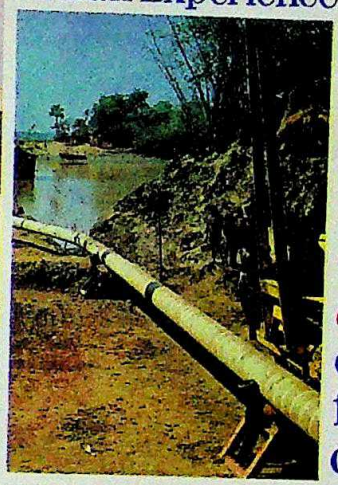

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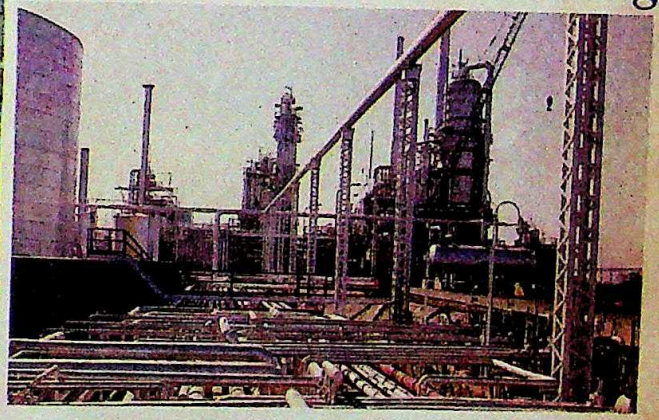

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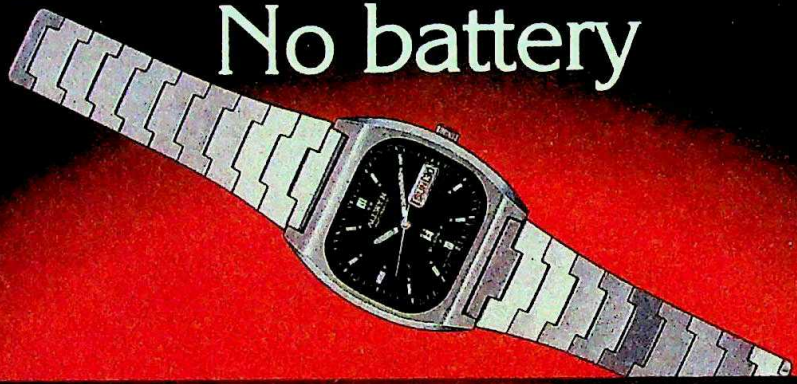

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Repression of Rights

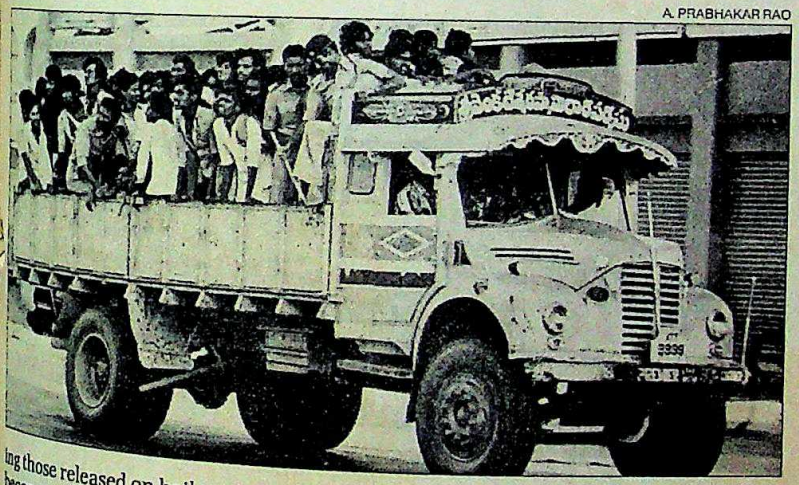
BEING released on bail is no guarantee of even temporary freedom in Andhra Pradesh these days. This was brought home rather forcefully to Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) Secretary K. Balagopal last fortnight. No sooner did he step beyond the massive gates of the Central Jail in Warangal than he was rearrested by waiting policemen and deposited in a police lock-up while further charges of attempted murder and arson against him were investigated. In what has developed into a running battle between the police and supporters of radicals and Naxalites, rearresting those released on bail seems to have become a favourite ploy of the police.

But for Balagopal, the waiting policemen were no surprise. During his detention he had told INDIA TODAY of this police habit of subverting the law in order to harass and intimidate individuals for their political beliefs. But never in the past have civil liberties activists themselves been targets of the police as during the present crackdown.

The police have their own reasons for being angry with the APCLC. In the past decade its activists have frequently exposed police atrocities. Last year alone they brought to light 24 deaths and six cases of rape in police custody. But the police offensive against them gained in intensity after APCLC activists accused the police of killing K. Sudarshan, 19, and K. Sarangapani, 23, in separate incidents in Warangal. Both were members of the radical youth league which supports the Kondapalli Seetharamaiah faction of the Naxalites.

Whether the police campaign against the APCLC activists has the approval of the Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao is unknown. But he is certainly peeved with the Naxalites, some are believed to be backing M.V. Ramana Reddy, who has launched the Rayalaseema Vimochana Samiti to contest the Assembly elections from the parched Rayalaseema region. The APCLC is more inclined to view the police offensive against it as an extension of the police drive against Naxalite sympathisers and a bid to scuttle investigations into police atrocities.

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



Rao (top left), Balagopal and (below) arrested supporters: running battle

But Warangal District Police Superintendent K. Arvind Rao counters these allegations, saying: "The APCLC preaches violence and Balagopal has done it even in my presence. We have to check violent acts by any group." He is unconvinced that they are fighting for the rights of the poor, and says that if cases of minimum wages not being paid to labourers are brought to his notice, he is prepared to take remedial action "But", he argues, "we have to take stern action when the law is violated."

APCLC President G. Kannabiran, however, discounts the police chief's words and accuses him of being politically biased. "He has scant respect for the Constitution and is responsible for all the extra-legal activities of the Warangal police." Indeed, the police in Warangal do have an inglorious record, including parading Naxalite sympathisers in the nude. Admitting that several colleagues indulged in barbaric acts, one police officer says: "A political force like the Naxalites is being countered by the police force. This is not right. As long as we are asked to fight them as a law and order problem they will grow stronger and the police will lose credibility."

Meanwhile, social scientist Rajni Kothari has appealed to Rama Rao to intervene and order the release of the unlawfully detained civil liberties activists. The case against Balagopal and other APCLC activists including Telugu poet Varavara Rao, paediatrician and APCLC vice-president Ramanathan and college lecturer P. Seetharam Rao is that they had planned the January 18 attack on the house of circle inspector Ramachandra Rao by the radicals, ostensibly to herald the start of a bandh that day to protest against Sudarshan's killing.

Sarangapani, who was killed later, had taken part in the attack. Forensic experts gave out few details after their post-mortem on Sarangapani's body, and Arvind Rao maintains that he died of exhaustion when chased by the police. But his mother Radha who lives in the local Azam Jahi Mills quarters laments: "The police did not allow me even to bathe the body but did the cremation themselves and stayed there till the body was reduced to ashes."

As for Sudarshan, the district police say he is still absconding but the APCLC alleges a local police officer was responsible for his killing and cremation. District Collector R.P. Singh has ordered an inquiry into the incident. The police are also worried by the growing sympathy for the Naxalites among the farm workers and students. Police camps have been set up in some villages and in the local Kakatiya University. A petition for their removal is now before the Supreme Court. Whatever the verdict, the strife between the civil libertarians and radicals on one side and the police on the other may take an uglier turn before the March 5 assembly elections.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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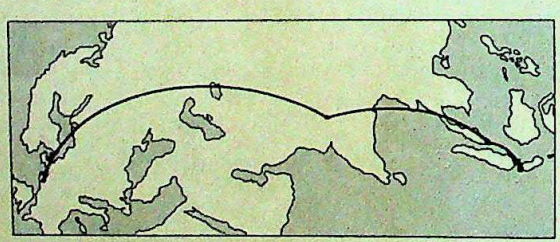

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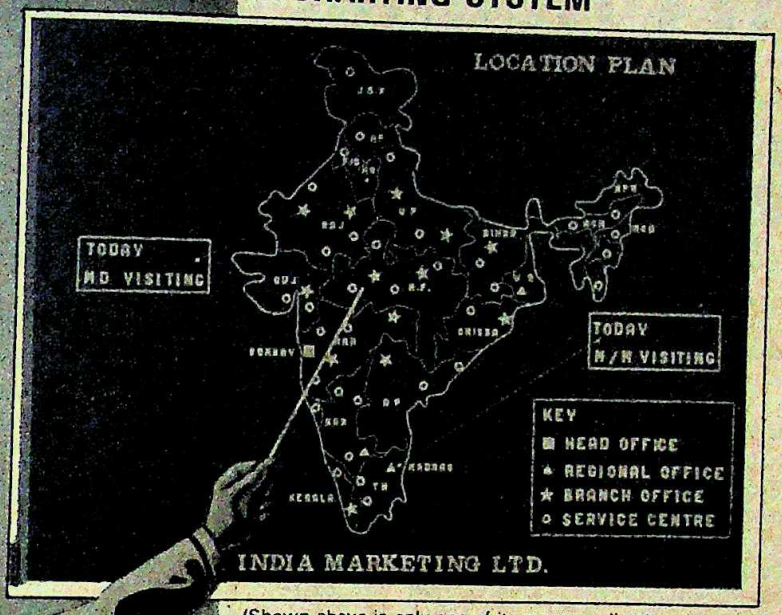

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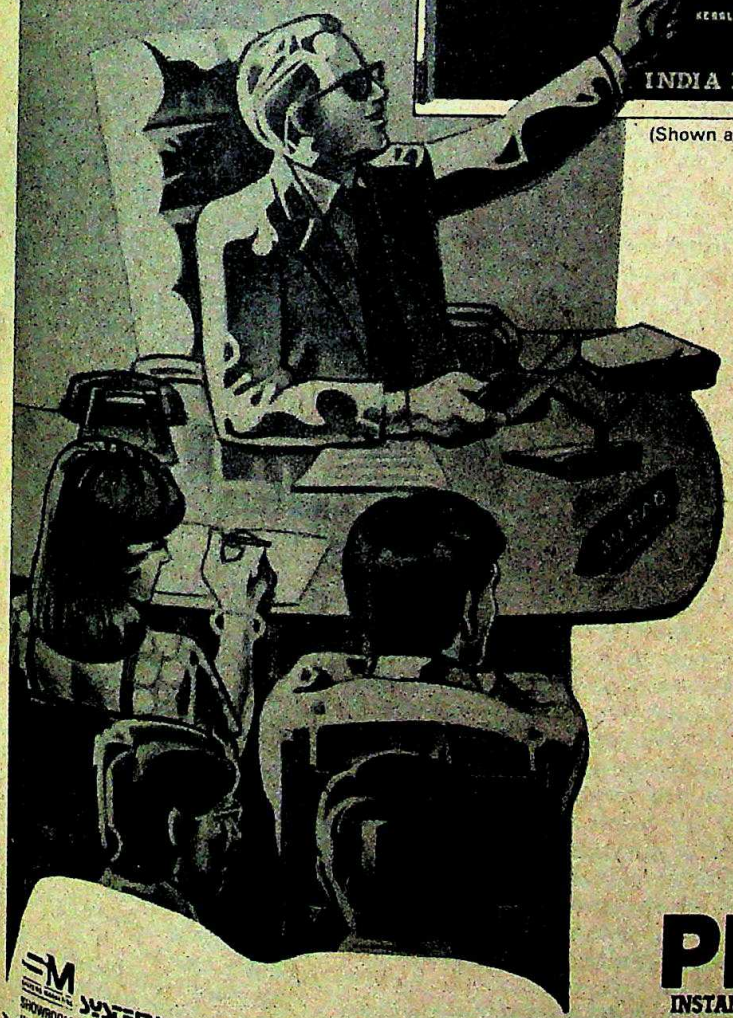

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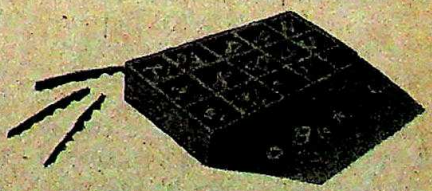

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ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

An Unequal Battle

IT WAS the night of the long knives, a political massacre more thorough than heralded by the Lok Sabha poll, a cleansing of the ranks that had been hinted at often enough but which few believed would ever come about. And, in the process not only was the ruling party poised on the edge of a transformation, it was truly at the start of a Rajiv Gandhi era. As the prime minister's Parliamentary Secretary, Arun Singh, said: "We've taken the first step. It's the right step, whether it is politically sagacious or not. Let's see what happens. We've done what we promised."

The promise that Singh was referring to was Rajiv's vow repeated time and again in the past three months, particularly at election time last December, to restore integrity to politics, fight corruption and project a clean party image. The step that he talked about was more of a leap. Last fortnight when the Congress(I) Parliamentary Board (CPB) finalised its list of candidates for 2,534 assembly seats in the 11 states and one Union territory that go to the polls next month to elect new legislatures, it had axed no fewer than 40 per cent of its sitting MLA's and replaced them with younger, often unknown and untried but fresh faces. In a bold move, it dropped no fewer than 63 ministers from the outgoing state governments. So sweeping was the clean-up that even so staid a person as the party's Working President Kamalapati Tripathi, who had protested against some of the changes made in the Lok Sabha lists, was moved to say: "The Congress party has been rejuvenated after Mrs Gandhi's martyrdom."

Revitalised or not, only the election would show. But there was no doubt that given the massive mandate earned in the Lok Sabha election and the fractured state of the opposition parties, the upcoming contest was already set to be an unequal one. Nobody was quicker off the mark in launching the campaign than the tireless prime minister who hit the campaign trail on February 10 in a gruelling *tour de force* of Uttar Pradesh.

In contrast, the opposition parties were slow to get cracking, demoralised as they were by their drubbing in December. Banking on the charisma of a few leaders and on the performance of the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh and the Janata Party in Karnataka, they had precious little to offer other than the sure knowledge that historically, state elections have always turned in poorer results for ruling parties than Lok Sabha polls have done (*page 67*).

But clearly they had only a patchy success where it mattered most: in avoiding multi-cornered contests that tend to cripple the Opposition to the advantage of the Congress(I). Unity eluded them in the major states such as Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat though they were able to come to credible arrangements in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

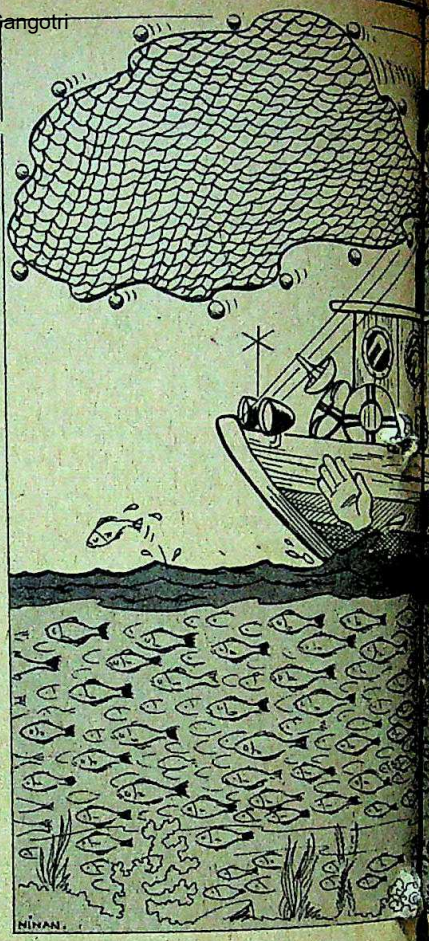
For the moment, however, it was not the Opposition which grabbed public attention but the ruling party which had just undergone the most thorough spring-cleaning in its history. That this was the handiwork of the prime minister was never much in doubt. The wave that carried the Congress(I) to its triumphant victory in the Lok Sabha poll was of Rajiv's creation, and there was no doubt that he was once again reaching out to the people over the heads of the party bosses and its local stalwarts—and the corrupt and ineffective who littered its ranks—to ask the electorate for a fresh mandate in what amounts to a mini-general election with some 280 million voters entitled to exercise their franchise. A newcomer to politics, Rajiv was not only presenting a new team of potential legislators to the people, he was also in the process seeking to rebuild the party from the grassroots.

To do this, Rajiv and his aides drew up a 10-point list of guidelines sent out to all the election committees set up in the states last month. Sitting party MLA's would be disqualified if they were of doubtful loyalty and integrity, if they were believed to be casteists or if the Congress(I) had lost their assembly segment in the last Lok Sabha election held in December.

Clearly, with some 250,000 applications pouring into party offices throughout the country, an average of almost 100 applications per seat being contested, fulfilling these criteria was going to be an uphill task. The task was performed at two levels: the Pradesh Congress(I) Committees were first asked to make a preliminary selection. They were aided by some 50-odd trusted MP's who helped recommend names to the CPB and who finally brought some 6,000 names to Delhi.

Then began the hard part. Along with the short list came legions of aspirants. From February 1 to 7, when the first list was finally made public, more than 50,000 ticket seekers camped in the capital, taking up every square inch of the state bhawans, spilling into the homes of friendly MP's, and company guest-houses and hotels. Some bhawans reported 10 occupants to a room, while a 50-member Karnataka Congress(I) team took over one entire floor of the Janpath Hotel. Said a harried party General Secretary, Sreekant Verma: "The Congress party has never received so many applications for assembly seats."

It wasn't just aspirants who descended on the capital. The rows of state government-owned planes parked on the apron at Palam indicated the shuttling presence of an array of chief ministers. While the leaders debated the lists, the



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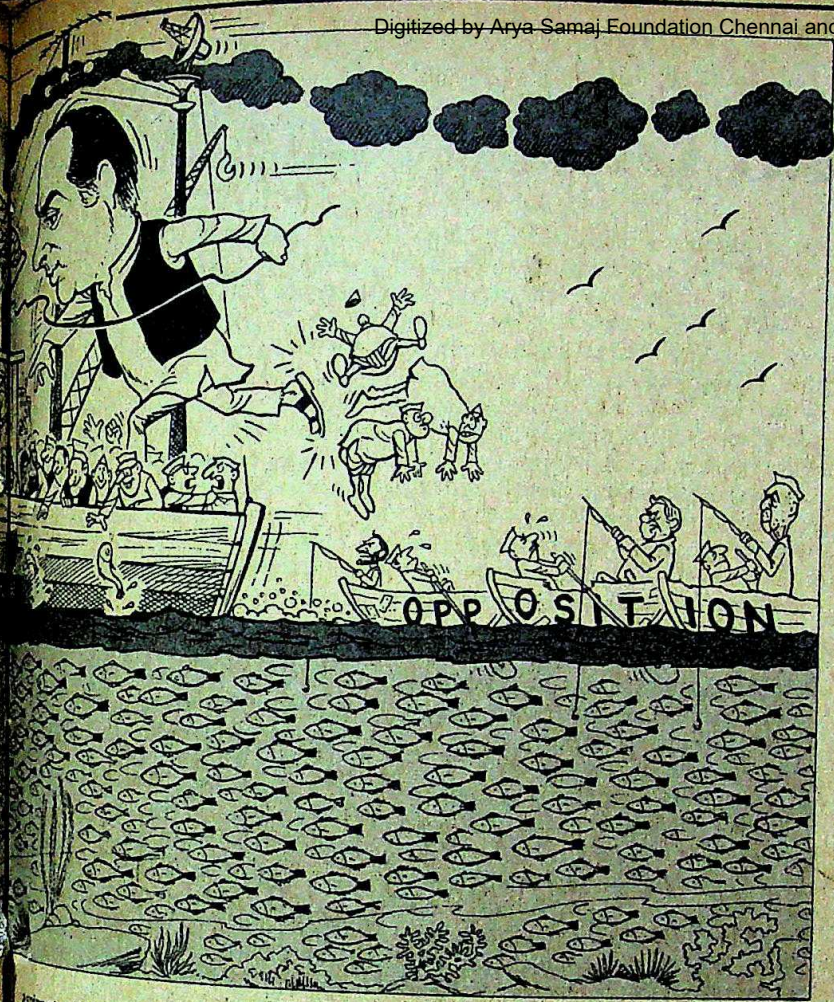

aspirants did the rounds calling on anyone and everyone, dropping off their curriculum vitae neatly inscribed by electronic typewriter, some even roping in local journalists to put in a good word where they thought it mattered.

In the end, none of this paid dividends. Presided over by Rajiv, a tightly-knit team of selectors spent four days and nights working round the clock (the prime minister didn't go home for three nights) to make a final selection. And it was approprate to such an operation that the patient came to know of his fate in the stillness of the midnight hour. When the list was released in the early hours of February 8, it came as a shock to one and all. The unexpected was the clean-up. Maharashtra lost 125 of 215 Congress(I) MLA's, Himachal seven of 33, Orissa 50 of 117, Bihar 70 of 186, Andhra Pradesh 17 of 57, Karnataka 26 of 88, Rajasthan 70 of 149, Madhya Pradesh 77 of 230, Uttar Pradesh 153 of 306, and 81 of 142 in Gujarat.

True, all nine Congress(I) chief ministers had been awarded tickets. But if their opponents in the party had been asked, so had their supporters. Few of them had much to be cheerful about.

It was, after all, no real vote of confidence in them that their ministerial teams were so thoroughly stripped. The operation was thorough-going in all the states. While ministerial axings were not relevant in opposition-ruled Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka (*see boxes*), they cut at the very heart in the other states.

IN MAHARASHTRA, 13 ministers who were dropped included 11 who had signed a memorandum supporting former deputy chief minister Ramrao Adik when he was asked to resign following incidents of unruly behaviour on a visit to West Germany last year. Not only were Adik and the ineffective former chief minister Babasaheb Bhosale denied tickets, so were Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil's rivals Irrigation Minister Shivajirao Patil Nilangekar, Civil Supplies Minister Pratibha Patil and Energy Minister Baliram Hiray who flew to Delhi to make a vain protest. There was a lesson in Maharashtra for defectors: of the 40 former Congress(S) MLA's who switched loyalties with Y.B.Chavan in 1980, only nine were given tickets. Nor was there much leniency shown to some of the Central ministers: Chemicals Minister Vasant Sathe's nephew Arun Diwekar was denied a ticket as was an associate of Ghulam Nabi Azad, Azhar Hussain.

In Orissa, five of J.B.Patnaik's 15 ministerial colleagues failed to make the grade including Finance Minister Raghunath Patnaik who is facing corruption charges and Minister of State Kuanria Majhi, accused of rape. Out of the running were others in important party positions or at the head of state units, such as strongman Basant Biswal, a contractor-turned-Congress(I) treasurer who had been widely dubbed "super chief minister", Lalit Mohan Gandhi, dropped from the ministry three years ago after being convicted in a jeep theft case, state party General Secretary Baikuntha Swain and chairman of the State Housing Board, T. Samantaray. Said opposition leader Damodar Raut: "If anything, the list has confirmed our charge that the Patnaik government was dominated by thoroughly corrupt characters."

In Bihar, no fewer than seven ministers including four of cabinet rank, Ramasay Prasad Singh, Nagendra Jha, Jagnarain Trivedi and Buddhdeo Singh went by the board. Also out were speaker Radhanandan Jha and a majority of the followers of former chief minister Jagannath Mishra whose supporters urged him not to accept a nomination for himself. But this did not mean that Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh was pleased. In Delhi he had to fight hard for his own nomination and (often unsuccessfully) for many of his supporters, who as a result jeered him as well as the state party chief Bindeshwari Dubey. Said Singh meekly: "The list prepared by the high command is a balanced one. Only controversial party legislators have been denied tickets to give the party a clean image."

In Rajasthan, Chief Minister Shiv Charan Mathur found it difficult to jump with joy at the list. But equally unhappy were his rivals for the job, former chief ministers Jagannath Pahadia and Harideo Joshi. Mathur lost four cabinet colleagues among 11 ministers who didn't get tickets: Finance Minister Brij Sunder Sharma, Law Minister Ahmed Bux Sindhi, Social Welfare Minister Dularam and Health Minister Khet Singh Rathore. Nor could he have been overjoyed that three dissident ministers that he had dropped on charges of indiscipline, Narendra Singh Bhatti, Surendra Vyas and Hanuman Prabhakar, were awarded tickets.

In Madhya Pradesh, though the inte-

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rests of both major factions in the state, led by Chief Minister Arjun Singh and former central minister Vidya Charan Shukla were accommodated, no fewer than seven of Singh's ministerial colleagues were dropped including Law Minister Krishna Paul Singh, Finance Minister Jhumak Lal Bhedia and Industry Minister Rajendra Jain. Claimed state party chief Moti Lal Vohra: "The high command chose each candidate on merit" explaining why only 153 sitting MLA's were nominated for the 320 seats the party is contesting.

In Himachal Pradesh, those axed included Revenue Minister Shiv Kumar Singh and Animal Husbandry Minister Daulat Ram Shankhayan, both defectors from the Janata Party in 1980 along with a number of others who came over from the Janata Party to enable former chief minister Ram Lal to form a ministry.

In Uttar Pradesh, no fewer than seven ministers and four general secretaries were denied tickets including Information Minister Abdul Rehman Nashtar, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ram Singh Khanna, Urban Development Minister Vidya Bhushan and general secretaries Ammar Rizvi, Gulab Sehra and Baccha Pathak. Gone too is hijacker Bhola Pandey but retained is fellow hijacker Devendra Pandey.

In Gujarat, Solanki's cabinet of 17 was decimated with no fewer than 11 being dropped, a loud and clear message that he cannot take the Centre for granted. Axed were Home Minister Prabodh Rawal, Health Minister Kolila Vyas, Finance Minister Harihar Khamboljia and Social Welfare Minister Devji Vanvi. Solanki critics Sanat Mehta and Manoharsinh Jadeja fared no better. Faction leader Jinabhai Darji, executive director of the state's 20-point programme, failed to get his supporters tickets but was game enough to acknowledge: "We have fought to introduce morality in politics and to ensure justice to the poor. Now this seems to be coming around and in the process some of us will have to lose."

If those dropped from the Congress(I) lists were men and women of such importance, who came in to replace them? The answer for the most part was: young, fresh contestants. In state after state, the lists are dominated by young people, by Youth Congress or student activists or professionals. In Orissa, for example, 95 candidates were younger than 45 years and another 45 aged between 45 and 60. Only seven were older than 60. In Rajasthan, the pattern was similar with the added distinction that more than half the

ELECTION ANALYSIS/PRANNOY ROY

The Safety Margin

IF THE Indian electorate didn't change its mind between Lok Sabha and state assembly elections, the Congress(I) would be sitting pretty with huge majorities in 10 of 11 states that will elect new assemblies on March 2 and 5, 1985. A detailed breakdown of the 1984 Lok Sabha results by assembly segments—each Lok Sabha seat generally contains between six and eight assembly seats—shows the overwhelming dominance of the Congress(I) in each state except Andhra Pradesh (*see boxes*). But, historically, the voting patterns in assembly elections has never been the same as in general elections and there are messages from the recent past that should make the Congress(I) all but complacent.

The Lok Sabha elections in 1977 and 1980 were followed closely by state assembly elections in a number of states. In both cases the party that won the Lok Sabha election did somewhat worse in the subsequent assembly elections. The trend was most significant in 1977 when the Janata Party won the general elections and, although it did well in the state assembly elections too, found that its vote percentage had dropped substantially (*see table*).

In 1980, the assembly elections were once again held within six months of the Lok Sabha elections. Although the Congress(I) held its own in a number of states there was still a clear swing away from the party, for instance in Bihar of 2.6 per cent, Gujarat 3.9 per cent, Maharashtra 8.8 per cent and Orissa 8.4 per cent. Uttar Pradesh proved to be an exception when it turned in a 2 per cent swing in favour of the Congress(I).

However, in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, the margins of victory were so large in each assembly segment that similar, small swings away from the Congress(I) will have very little impact on the number of seats it should win. All that would happen in such circumstances is that the Congress(I) would retain the seats but with lower margins of victory.

A detailed study of all the assembly elections since 1967 and the Lok Sabha results analysed by assembly segment shows that the Congress has generally tended to do better at general elections than state assembly elections. This is probably because the Congress(I) is a national party and can capitalise the most on national issues. In assembly elections local issues become more important and the Congress(I) loses its relative advantage.

The most important issue in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections was the widespread anxiety over the unity of the country (INDIA TODAY, December 31, 1984 and January 15) which brought out sections of the electorate to vote who do not normally vote. For example, the exceptionally high turnout, especially of women, probably helped the Congress(I). The 1984 election result virtually closed the issue of unity with the huge mandate given to one party. In any case it is unlikely to be such an emotive issue with the voter in these assembly elections. Consequently, the Congress(I) must face the electorate without the most important factor that contributed to its recent landslide victory.

On the other hand, the new government has made a remarkably favourable impression in its first two months and this may tend to stem any swing away from the party. In fact, more than a swing away from the Congress(I) the factor that will work most against the party repeating its performance is the over-confidence and complacency of both the voter and, perhaps, the party worker. Expectations of any easy victory by the Congress(I) may keep many voters at home and a lower turnout than the 1984 general elections would tend to work against the Congress(I). The first warning signals of this occurring were given in the by-election or countermanded election results that were held on January 28.

The result from Chail, in Uttar Pradesh, show that the Congress(I) cannot be complacent. The average swing to the Congress(I) in Uttar Pradesh between 1980 and 1984 was a high 14.5 per cent but in the Chail election the swing over 1980 was less than half that at 6.1 per cent. Moreover, coupled with this diminished swing in favour of the

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Congress(I), the Opposition was much more united in Chail which resulted in the Congress(I) just scraping through with a narrow victory margin of 3,415 votes. The ruling party also needs to note that in Chail it lost in six of the seven assembly segments in the constituency.

Part of the explanation for the same swing in Chail must be the low turnout of 43.2 per cent which is much below the average turnout for the state of 54.8 per cent in the Lok Sabha poll. The lower turnout coupled with a smaller swing suggests that many over-confident Congress(I) voters stayed away.

Other elections held on January 28 in Kerala and Tamil Nadu also revealed setbacks for the Congress(I). In Tamil Nadu, where the Congress(I) and AIADMK had averaged about 60 per cent of the vote in the Lok Sabha election constituencies they fought, their vote dropped dramatically to around 45 per cent. This could have been temporary in the absence of Chief Minister MGR, but the reverses in Kerala were more significant and augur ill for the Congress(I) if they are indicative of the regional mood.

The result of the coutermanded election in Bhopal was an exception to the reverse swings. The swing in favour of the Congress(I) in Bhopal was 18.2 per cent, almost twice the state average swing of 9.8 per cent between 1980 and 1984. The marginally lower turnout here of 50.2 per cent compared to 55.6 in the 1984 and their position in this state seems increasingly invincible.

The Congress(I) is more likely to lose votes on account of its supporters not bothering to vote than switch in voter behaviour. This is because voter loyalties tend to last for periods longer than only a few weeks as it is difficult to rationalise a switch in such brief periods.

Consequently, in assembly elections the attributes of the candidate rather than the party tend to get emphasised and independents invariably get a much higher percentage of the vote. The elaborate and much-publicised exercise that the Congress party has undertaken in the selection of its candidates is likely to be a major point in its favour in the context of assembly elections. This, however, should be tempered with a finding repeatedly reported in opinion polls—the Congress voter tends to vote more for the party than the candidate while supporters of the opposition parties, especially the BJP vote more for the candidate than the party.

When one election follows so closely on the heels of another two conflicting trends emerge: the "bandwagon" effect versus the "sympathy for the underdog" effect. The bandwagon effect works on the innate preference of those voters who like to back a winner. It also attracts voters who feel that unless they vote for the obvious winner, in this instance the Congress(I), their vote would be wasted. On the other hand, a landslide victory in which the Opposition is decimated often evokes a feeling in the electorate that while the overall result was warranted, the extent of the victory was excessive. This sympathy for the loser is exaggerated in our kind of voting system which gives the winning party many more seats than the votes it receives—the Congress(I) won 80 per cent of the seats on the basis of just under 50 per cent of the votes.

The most obvious problem that the Congress(I) will face in the assembly elections is the mediocre portfolio of potential chief ministers that it has to offer. This legacy of the past will be sharply exposed in states where the Opposition has particularly strong contenders as chief minister: Hegde in Karnataka, Sharad Pawar in Maharasthra, Biju Patnaik in Orissa, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat in Rajasthan and, of course, N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh. Against this, however, the continued disunity of the opposition parties will be a major advantage for the Congress(I). Even in those states where the Opposition has arrived at an agreement on seat adjustments, it is unlikely that they will have shed their image of disunity and the consequent fears of post-election internal bickering would cause a swing away from them. It is not enough to arrive merely at a technical seat adjustment—though this does help in the arithmetics of the electoral game—as long as perception of disunity persists.

In the final analysis, however, the overwhelming victory of the Congress(I) in the recent elections with large victory margins in the assembly segments would require a very major swing away for the picture to be changed substantially. Though such major swings are unlikely to occur in such a short span of time, the Opposition certainly has more and the Congress(I) less going for it in these assembly elections compared with the recent Lok Sabha elections.

Results of the Lok Sabha & Assembly Elections held in the same year

❶ Lok Sabha elections held in March 1977
❷ Assembly elections held in June 1977
❸ Swing—% change in vote
❹ Lok Sabha elections held in 1980
❺ Assembly elections held in May 1980
❻ Swing—% change in vote

	1977 Janata vote %			1980 Congress vote %		
	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺	❻
Bihar	65	47	−8	36	34	−2
Gujarat	50	—	—	55	51	−4
Madhya Pradesh	58	47	−9	47	47	0
Maharashtra	31	—	—	53	45	−8
Orissa	52	46	−6	56	48	−8
Rajasthan	65	50	−15	43	43	0
Uttar Pradesh	68	48	−20	36	38	+2

Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were not held in the same year as the Lok Sabha elections. No assembly elections were held in 1977 in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

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candidates have never contested an election before. The state's list also boasts as many as 30 lawyers, doctors and engineers.

The new look Congress(I) is partial to women: typical of the new lists are 30 women candidates in Madhya Pradesh and 20 in Gujarat where party Secretary Hasmukh Patel said: "Last time, most of the candidates had not seen the corridors of a school. This time, practically all of us can read, write and speak."

Encouraging though this may be, it camouflages some of the more traditional values that have gone into candidate selection: caste. In Bihar, for example, the upper castes maintain their domination of the lists: of 324 Congress(I) candidates in the state, 40 per cent are upper caste comprising 52 Rajputs, 44 Brahmins and 34 Bhumihars. The so-called backwards number only 58. In Madhya Pradesh, the Brahmins and Thakurs walked away with 80 seats—25 per cent of the total—even though they comprise only 18 per cent of the population.

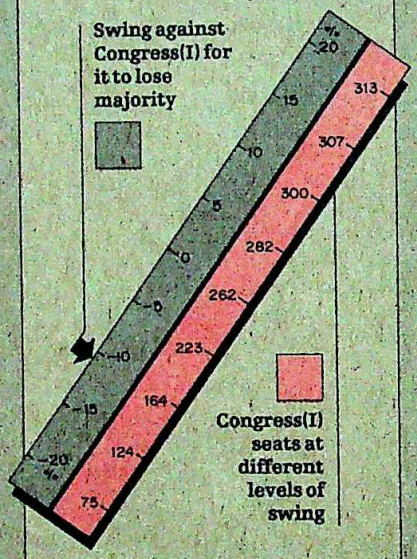
If such caution is understandable, less easy to explain are the ones that got away, candidates who ought to have been rejected by the criteria laid down but nevertheless scraped in. The exceptions abound—and dilute the overall impact of the party's new, clean look. In Himachal Pradesh, several ministers given tickets have corruption charges against them. In Madhya Pradesh, Rama Shankar Singh, president of the state unit of the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP) till he defected last month has been given a ticket. In Bihar Raghunath Pandey from Muzaffarpur, a transport tycoon who has been controversial and defected to the Congress(I) after contesting the 1980 Lok Sabha election unsuccessfully as an independent has been given a ticket. So has Mala Devi from Fatwa who has an excise case and a warrant of arrest pending against her for alleged involvement in liquor rackets. And, so was Saghir Ahmed who was dropped from Mishra's cabinet three years ago for allegedly being involved in goat skin smuggling across the Nepal border. Party circles in Bihar are particularly sore that this should have happened when someone like Ramashray Prasad Singh, considered an effective and non-controversial parliamen-

BIHAR

Total seats 324

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	DMKP
1984	Lok Sabha	262	7	19
1980	Assembly	169	13	42
	Lok Sabha	169	53	39
1977	Assembly	57	214	—
	Lok Sabha	6	297	—



► An analysis of the 1984 Lok Sabha election shows the Congress(I) won in 262 of the state's 324 assembly segments on average with a margin of 19 per cent.

► Surprisingly, the party won exactly the same number of assembly segments in both the Lok Sabha and assembly elections in 1980—unlike the Janata Party which lost ground between the 1977 Lok Sabha elections and the assembly poll that year when its tally dropped from 297 to 214.

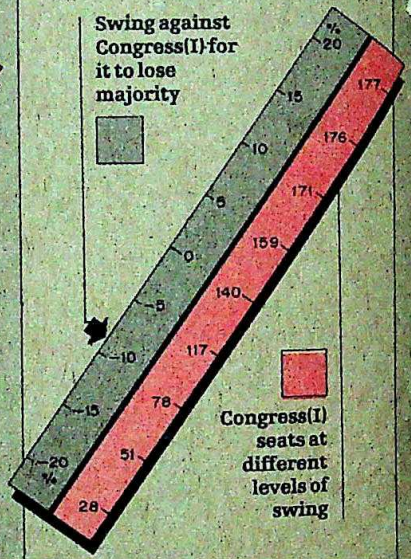
► The Congress(I) is relatively secure, and it would require a 10 per cent swing away from it for it to lose its hold on the assembly. But Bihar is sensitive to swings: a 1 per cent swing costs 10 seats in the assembly.

GUJARAT

Total seats 182

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	BJP
1984	Lok Sabha	140	19	19
1980	Assembly	141	13	9
	Lok Sabha	152	30	—
1977	Assembly	79	103	—
1975	Lok Sabha	75	56	18



► If everyone in the forthcoming assembly elections votes in exactly the same way as in the 1984 Lok Sabha election, the Congress(I) would win 140 out of 182 seats.

► However, in earlier elections the electorate did not vote in the same way in the two elections and in 1980 there was a swing away from the Congress(I) of 4 per cent after the Lok Sabha elections and its tally in the assembly constituencies dropped from 152 to 141.

► The Congress(I) stands to lose its majority in the Vidhan Sabha only if there is a substantial swing of 7 per cent against it since last December, provided the opposition remains as united as it was in the Lok Sabha elections.

Vote swings in all the charts are calculated from the 1984 Lok Sabha elections

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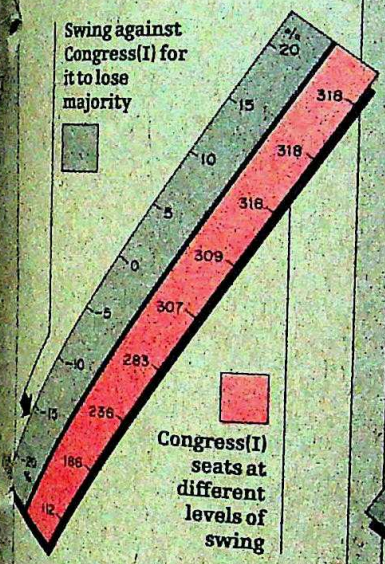
MADHYA PRADESH

Total seats 320

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	BJP
1984	Lok Sabha	307	—	10
1980	Assembly	246	2	60
	Lok Sabha	247	58	—
1977	Assembly	84	230	—
	Lok Sabha	21	281	—



► The Congress(I) appears to be very safe, going by the Lok Sabha results and the recent Bhopal election. Of 320 assembly segments, the ruling party lost in only 13.

► It would require a massive swing of 17 per cent away from the Congress(I) for it to lose its overwhelming majority in the Vidhan Sabha.

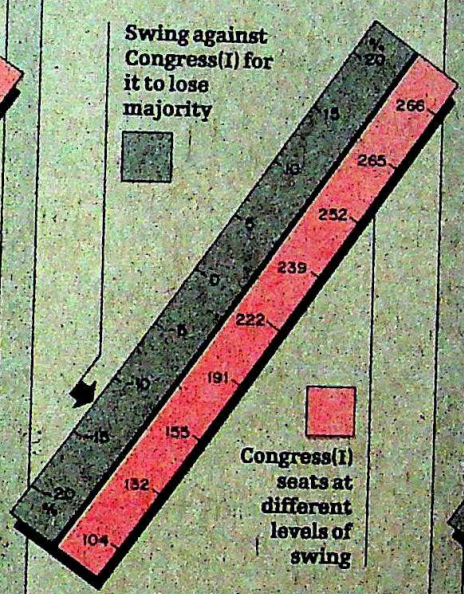
► Moreover, unlike in most other states, the Congress(I) did not lose ground between the 1980 Lok Sabha and assembly elections — unlike the Janata Party which had slipped considerably between the 1977 Lok Sabha and assembly elections.

MAHARASHTRA

Total seats 288

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	Cong(S)
1984	Lok Sabha	222	8	29
1980	Assembly	186	17	47
	Lok Sabha	235	37	11
1978	Assembly	62	99	69
1977	Lok Sabha	127	104	—



► The results of the Lok Sabha election last December showed that the Congress(I) won in 222 of 288 assembly segments.

► Only a massive swing of 12 per cent away from the Congress(I)'s Lok Sabha vote would enable the Opposition to form a government in Maharashtra, and even then provided it is more united than it was in the last election.

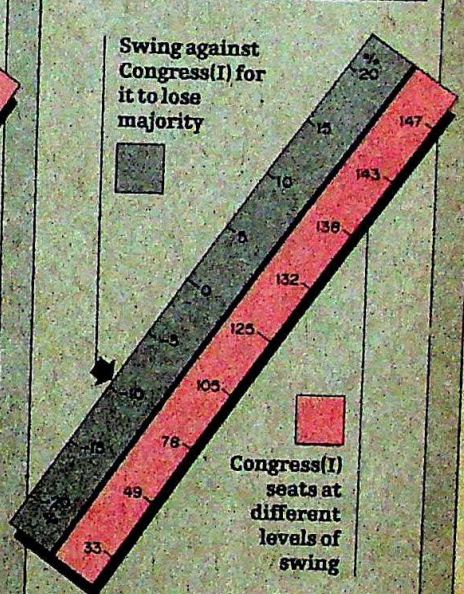
► In 1980, the Congress(I) lost considerable ground in the months between the Lok Sabha election and the assembly poll in as many as 49 assembly segments.

ORISSA

Total seats 147

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	DMKP
1984	Lok Sabha	125	21	—
1980	Assembly	118	3	13
	Lok Sabha	143	—	4
1977	Assembly	26	110	—
	Lok Sabha	33	104	—



► If the electorate votes in the assembly election as it did in the Lok Sabha poll, the Congress(I) will hold 125 of 147 assembly constituencies.

► However, in 1980 the electorate swung away from the Congress(I) in as many as 25 constituencies between the Lok Sabha and the assembly elections that year.

► But in order to form a government, the Janata Party would have to encourage a swing away from the Congress(I) of just over 10 per cent.

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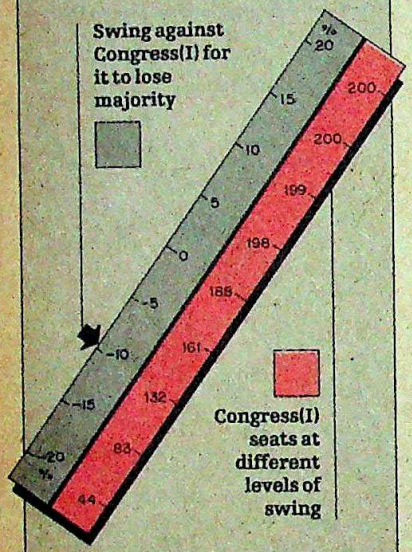
RAJASTHAN

Total seats 200

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	BJP
1984	Lok Sabha	188	—	2
1980	Assembly	133	8	32
	Lok Sabha	126	46	—
1977	Assembly	41	151	—
	Lok Sabha	13	183	—

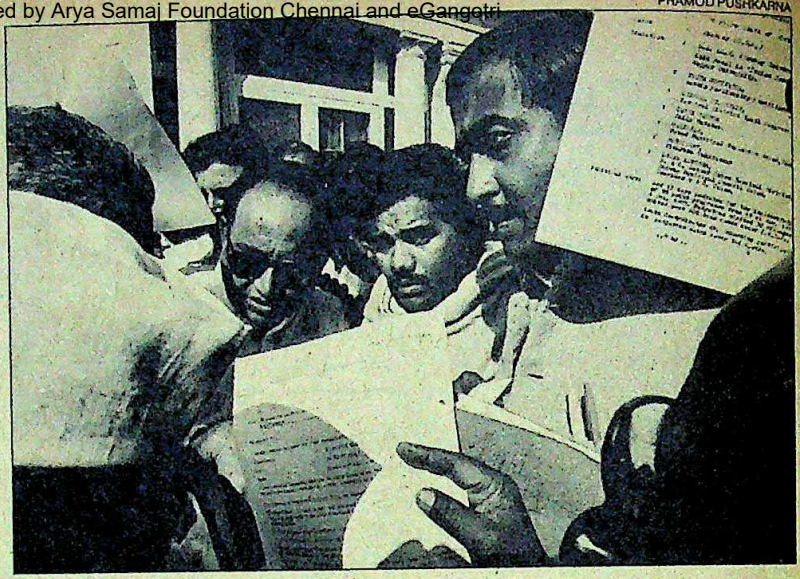


► In a remarkable performance, the Congress(I) won 188 of the state's 200 assembly segments in the 1984 Lok Sabha election.

► The ruling party can be shaken in this state only by a huge 13 per cent swing away from it.

► On past record, this is extremely unlikely: the Congress(I) has steadily improved its position with every election since its nadir in 1977 when it won in only 13 assembly segments. Its opponents have, on the other hand, steadily lost ground.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Congress(I) ticket-seekers with their bio-datas throng party office in Delhi

tary affairs minister, was denied a ticket. Dropped minister Raghunath Jha went so far as to charge: "All those involved in sex-scandals, smuggling and booth-capturing have been given tickets, the defectors have been rewarded and the list is loaded with close relatives of the leaders."

Jha's may be a case of sour grapes, but he was on the ball with his accusation about relatives. In one state after another, a close scrutiny of the lists shows how influential politicians have managed to get their relatives nominated. Worse, the party seems to have given with its left hand what its right has taken: scores of sitting MLA's and ministers dropped have been consoled by the nomination of their relatives to the lists. Among them:

► Orissa: Deputy Speaker Himanshu Shekhar Padhi has been replaced by his son Sujit while Chairman of the Agro Industries Corporation K.I. Kartikeswer Patra, has been replaced by his wife Uma Rani.

► Bihar: Speaker Radhanandan Jha was replaced by his son, Harkhu; Education minister Nagendra Jha by his son, Madan Mohan; Minister of State for Rural Reconstruction Kamneshwar by his brother Mithileshwar. Relatives of other politicians who have made the grade include: former minister Ramesh Jha's brother Satish Chandra, MP Manoj Pandey's mother, Kamla, and MP Prabhavati Gupta's husband, Rajendra.

► Madhya Pradesh: Finance Minister Bhedia was denied a ticket but his wife Saz was given Durg. Relatives of former chief minister D.P. Mishra, and politicians such as Bhagwat Rao Mandloi, Leila Dhar Joshi and Takhat Mal Jain have been given tickets, as have Andhra Pradesh Governor, S.D. Sharma's wife Vimla, and the relatives of a number of princely families including Pushp Raj Singh, son of MP Martand Singh of Rewa, Rashmi Devi, sister-in-law of MP Shivendra Bahadur Singh of Khairagarh and Rajawarelhas Singh scion of the former Narsingharh ruling family.

► Uttar Pradesh: Party secretaries Sehra and Pathak were denied tickets, but some of their relatives weren't. Other relatives to make the grade included Rewena Kumari, daughter of MLC Indira Mohini, Izhar Alim Khan, nephew of Central Minister of State for External Affairs, Khurshid Alam Khan, and Imran Kidwai, brother of Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Mohsina Kidwai.

► Gujarat: Tickets have been given to the wives of Jadeja, the health minister, Harihar Khamboljia minister of state for finance, and Jaswant Chauhan, south Gujarat Congress leader, all of whom were denied tickets.

This unprecedented intrusion of kinsmanship in the elections was, of course, a sop to keep disappointed MLA's and ministers in line, and curb potential rebel activity. The high command seems to have adopted a two part strategy in coping with this problem. First, it agreed to make modest changes in its list. After that it moved swiftly to act against those who persisted. That the selection of candidates took by surprise even some of those known to be close to the high com-

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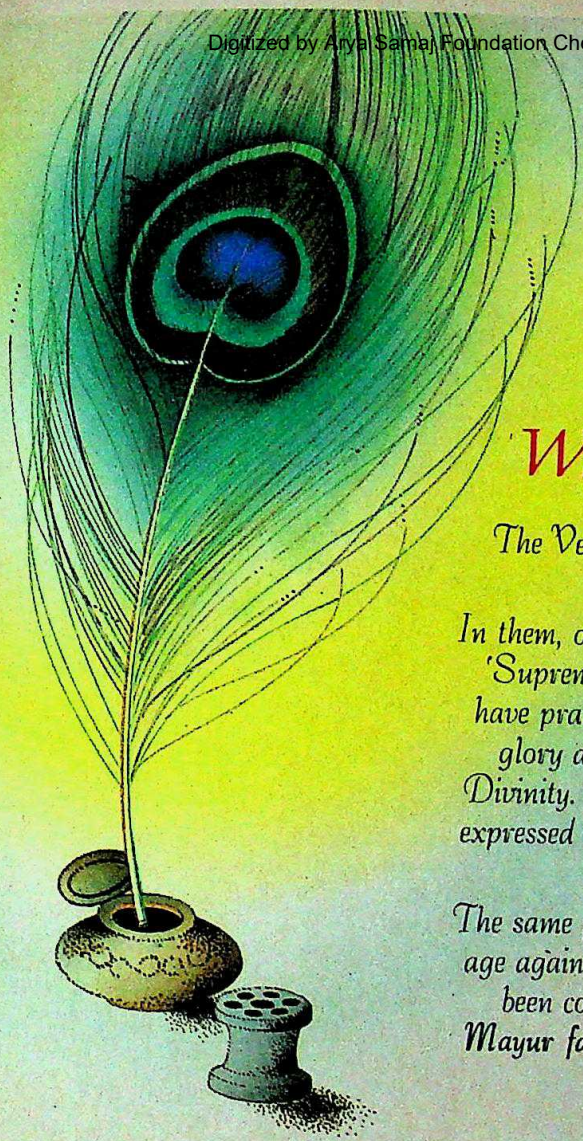

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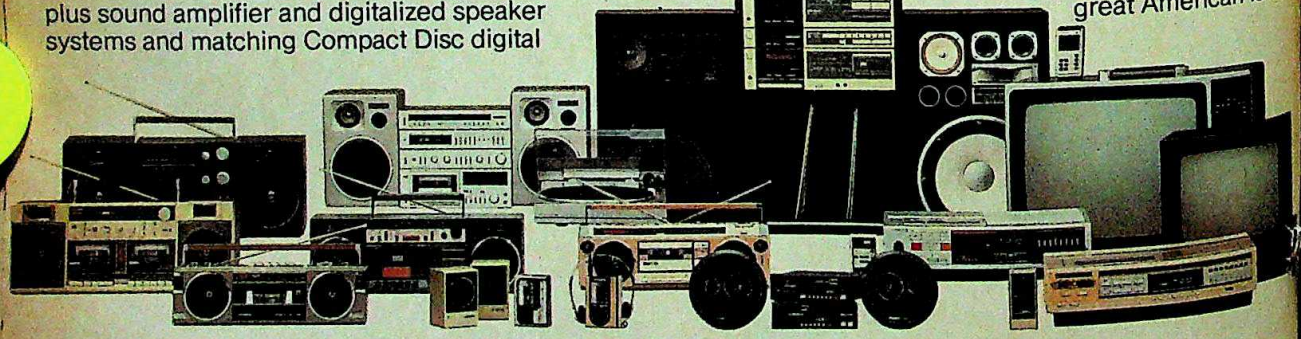

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mand was evident when Minister of State for Railways, Madhavrao Scindia, intervened with the prime minister on behalf of rejected applicants from the Gwalior region.

Indeed, the protest took strange forms. In Bihar, Jagannath Mishra and his associates declined to vote in the Rajya Sabha election on February 7. In Madhya Pradesh, three towns in Chhindwara district observed a strike in protest against the denial of tickets to the sitting MLA's.

In some cases, the list was indeed changed. On one particular day, Vishwanath Pratap Singh flew to Lucknow twice to calm protesters and, as was the case in some other states like Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, was able to push through some marginal changes. Said Singh: "These changes have been done purely to ensure victory. Moreover we want to make it very clear that all those denied tickets are not unnecessarily unclean." Holding out a further sop to them, he added that some of those dropped would be accommodated in organisational positions after the election.

The timing of this was, clearly, the key for the high command was obviously watching to see where the loyalty lay of those it had so unceremoniously sliced from its legislative wings. Some of them resigned right away, like a former ministerial colleague of Antulay, Satish Chaturvedi and Naresh Pugalia from Maharashtra. In Himachal Pradesh, over a dozen rebels filed their nominations as independents, including former revenue minister Shiv Kumar and the state party general secretary Vidya Dhar. In Bihar, Raghunath Jha and 20 MLA's did the same while in Gujarat two former ministers, deputy revenue minister Mohammed Hussain Baloch and deputy prohibition minister Lalit Parmar resigned from the party.

While the indications were immediately not so clear, and the high command was waiting to see how far the revolt would persist, there was also evidence that the party had done all it intended to by way of appeasement and would come down hard on the rest, armed as it is with the anti-defection bill. Said Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh, clearly echoing party policy: "All of them will ultimately fall in line, otherwise they have no place in the Congress(I)."

If the Congress(I) had its tremors of tension on account of these incipient revolts here and there, its problems paled in comparison with what the opposition parties were going through. Apart from Andhra Pradesh (*page 74*) and Karnataka (*page 72*), there seemed little effective fight left in the non-Congress(I) camp for the campaign. The opposition parties are focussing on local issues. In Himachal, for instance, Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal's suggestion for the merger of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, has become a campaign issue and the state Congress(I) has been obliged to veto the idea.

The opposition parties will also focus their attack on those chief ministers, Gujarat's Solanki, Orissa's Patnaik and Madhya Pradesh's Arjun Singh, who have lasted their full term of five years but have been unable to provide effective or clean administration. Indeed, the Congress(I)'s clean sweep of so many ministers is grist to the Opposition mill, but they will be on less sure ground when it comes to fighting on a plank of a strong and unified opposition.

The painful fact is that the opposition parties are going to the polls in little better shape than they were in the Lok Sabha election. In part, this is due to the demoralisation that hit the national opposition parties after their Lok Sabha rout. And, in part it is their inability to come to terms with one another yet again, except in some key states where they may gain some of the ground they lost last December.

The villain of the piece was the inability of the Janata Party and BJP to come to an understanding. In Karnataka, their once close relationship lies in a shambles, and state level leaders were unable to work things out in both Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Where agreement did come, as in Maharashtra and Rajasthan, it was largely due to the ability of former chief ministers Sharad Pawar and Bhairon Singh Shekhawat to carry the main parties with them. Said Shekhawat: "Opposition unity is not a topic of discussion in the media; it must be shown in the field."

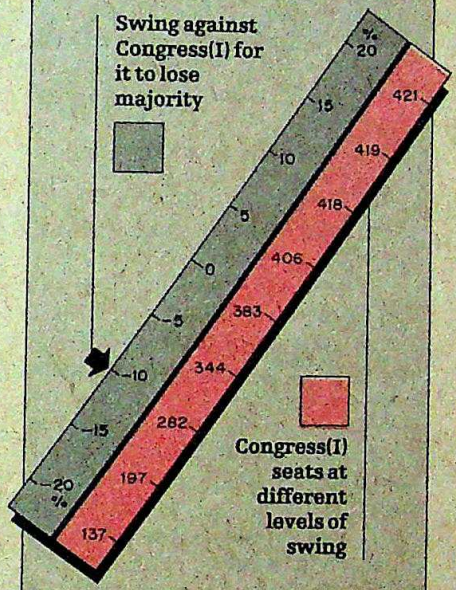
Where they did work, arrangements among the opposition parties were the result of dominant parties conceding ground to less powerful groups. In Himachal Pradesh, for example, the BJP's former chief minister, Shanta Kumar, conceded five seats to the DMKP and six to the Janata Party even though in the outgoing assembly the former had none and the latter only two. This obliged the Congress(I), which had a mere four seat majority in the house of 68, to take the opposition challenge a little more seriously, and Kumar declared: "We

UTTAR PRADESH

Total seats 425

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	DMKP
1984	Lok Sabha	383	—	33
1980	Assembly	309	8	59
	Lok Sabha	222	25	165
1977	Assembly	47	352	—
	Lok Sabha	1	420	—



► In the 1984 Lok Sabha election, the Congress(I) swept 383 of the state's 425 assembly segments.

► As a rare exception to the general rule which shows that the ruling party loses ground between a Lok Sabha poll and an assembly election some months later, the Congress(I) actually improved its tally in 1980 from 222 to 309 assembly segments due to a small swing of 2 per cent in its favour and a sharp deterioration in opposition unity.

► The DMKP, on the other hand, has suffered a sharp reverse since the 1980 Lok Sabha election when, contesting as the Lok Dal, it held 165 assembly segments, falling to 59 in the assembly poll and 33 in last December's Lok Sabha poll.

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will not let the Congress(I) walk away with a landslide victory this time."

In Maharashtra, the opposition parties united behind Pawar as the accepted leader of the Progressive Democratic Front. The Front, comprising the BJP, Janata, Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) and the Congress(S) has succeeded in creating an upbeat sense of mission, and was greeted by a crowd of several tens of thousands when Pawar, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Madhu Dandavate shared a Shivaji Park platform last fortnight.

Pawar's campaign scheme is shrewd: he praises some of Rajiv Gandhi's innovations and policies while attacking the state Government. "I want to give back Maharashtra its lost prestige," he says pointing out that there have been three chief ministers, constant infighting and several bloody riots in the last five years.

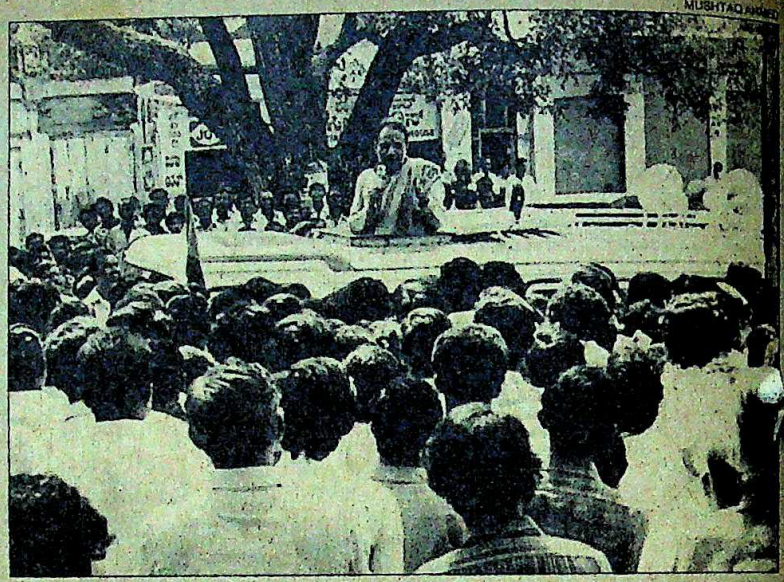
The state that made surprising news was Rajasthan where for the first time the BJP, DMKP and the Janata arrived at an oral understanding by which the BJP would contest 110 seats, the DMKP 60 and the Janata Party 30. Said BJP state president Hari Shankar Bhabhra: "We were determined to reach an understanding, because if the Janata Party had not been accommodated, it would have vitiated the atmosphere." Added the DMKP's 71-year-old Kumbha Ram Arya: "The parliamentary poll results have been a lesson: the people clearly want us to put up a united front, and we are going to do exactly that."

Elsewhere, the opposition front was as fragmented as always, and it seemed to be because of the absence of any formidable leader who could pull the flock behind him as in Maharashtra for instance where Pawar is deliberately being projected as chief minister. Congress(S) Rajya Sabha member, Suresh Kalmadi, says: "The Congress won the election by projecting a young prime minister in the Lok Sabha poll, we are now giving a young chief minister to replace an old chief minister."

Shekhawat in Rajasthan and N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh are other obvious pillars of the Opposition, and it is in states which lack such figureheads that the problems have been at their most acute. In the absence of men such as these, there's been no one to whip the Opposition into shape or make magnanimous gestures of accommodation so necessary for political compromise.

In Orissa, the state of the Opposition is a cause of hope in the Congress(I) camp. The Janata Party is contesting 130 seats, the BJP 137, Nandini Sathpathy's Jagrat

MUSHTAQ AHMED



KARNATAKA

The Hegde Factor

KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has started taking brisk early morning walks in an attempt to reduce weight. By last fortnight, however, that seemed to be the very least of his problems. After the massive jolt his Janata Government received in the December elections, the party's prospects of retrieving lost ground in the March assembly elections have further deteriorated after it failed to reach an understanding with its alliance partner, the BJP.

There was, however, some consolation for Hegde in the fact that his main rival, the Congress(I) had also run into a political headwind after the high command decided to drop many party heavyweights including the burly Gundu Rao and H.C. Srikantaiah, a former minister, and instead opt for people with a "clean image, loyal to the party, and hardworking". Thus, only 62 of the 88 sitting MLA's found berths while as many as 57 new faces appeared on the Karnataka political scene.

Political observers view the dumping of former chief minister Gundu Rao as well-planned strategy. According to their interpretation, it is wiser to avoid any undue comparisons on the part of the electorate with Gundu Rao's stormy three years in office and the relatively placid Hegde rule. Even Hegde grudgingly admitted that "by keeping Gundu out, Rajiv has effectively removed one of our main targets for attack". But in the process, the party high command has alienated many senior politicians who see themselves being replaced by unknown upstarts. Says one, S. Sivappa, former chairman of the Legislative Council: "In India, people respect their elders. It is going to be counter-productive for the party to have humbled us in this fashion".

But there could be an element of sour grapes in their claims. Among those dropped was Manik Rao Patil, former food minister who faces charges of illegally allotting cement to certain builders when he was in power. Srikantaiah, another minister in the Gundu Rao cabinet, is known as the king of the defectors for his role in helping Rao form the government in 1980 by inducing 80 Congress(U) and Janata MLA's to defect with him. He has also been a rabid dissident and is in the process of clawing his way back into power.

Another disgruntled leader is C.K. Jaffer Sharief, MP and former Union minister of state, who has threatened to resign from the party. Sharief is upset that none of his nominees was chosen for the four assembly constituencies

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Hegde campaigning in his Jaya Vahini: tough battle

that make up the Bangalore North Lok Sabha constituency which he represents. Although Sharief does not wield much clout among the Muslims his dissidence has assumed importance because the Muslim League which supported the Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha elections is reportedly fielding 20 candidates as independents for the assembly poll. This is likely to result in a split in the Muslim votes and with Sharief's disenchantment, the Muslim vote for the Congress(I) could be badly affected.

But that still does not explain the inclusion of the controversial S. Bangarappa, the former Kranti Ranga president who rejoined the Congress(I) only recently. Bangarappa was an outspoken critic of Mrs Gandhi and teamed up with the Janata Party to defeat the Congress(I) in the last assembly elections. Another aberration is the inclusion of Veerappa Moily, former leader of the opposition in the Assembly who was embarrassingly exposed by Hegde in an alleged bid to bribe an MLA with Rs 2 lakh to defect.

The Congress(I) has, however, taken careful considerations of caste and community. As many as 66 backward class and 35 Scheduled Caste candidates have been given tickets, almost half the total of 224 candidates put up by the party. The prominence to the weaker sections is an obvious counter to the Janata Party which is often accused of being dominated by the upper castes. Youth has also been a major consideration: 123 of the 224 candidates are below 45 and only seven are above 60. The party is also boasting about the fact that at least 50 candidates are professionals, mainly doctors, engineers and executives.

In its hurry to refurbish its image in the state, the Congress (I) has chosen to keep the prickly leadership issue in abeyance for the time being. Partymen only acknowledge that Moily and K.H. Patil have emerged all-powerful in the allocation of tickets. Says Patil diplomatically: "The present selection is not made on the basis of group politics. We all belong to only one group, Rajiv Gandhi's group."

However indications are that if the Congress(I) wins, neither Patil nor Moily will be given the top job which could instead, go to a dark horse. The active former Union minister, Digvijay Singh hinted at this when he said: "Who was Devraj Urs when Mrs Gandhi chose him to head the state and see how he grew after that."

If the Congress(I)'s selection has been adventurous, the Janata Party has chosen to play safe. Renominating all but a handful of its 93 sitting MLA's, the party's criteria for candidates was confined to the traditional caste and community factors. Candidates from the two dominant communities in the state, the Lingayats and the Vokkaligas, cornered more than half the 200 seats. Says party General Secretary J.H. Patel: "We admit that the emphasis is on the major communities which we consider as our vote banks. We are being realistic because we must win." Adds Hegde: "Only if we have a national leader of the stature of Mrs Gandhi can we cut across caste factors. Till then we cannot afford to take a risk." Hegde ran into trouble too in the selection of candidates and three of his cabinet ministers S. Revanna, R.N. Lakshmipathy and Vaijanath Patil threatened to resign protesting that their nominees had been ignored.

But the party's biggest setback has been in its negotiations with the BJP. Even before the negotiations started, a large section of the party led by Patel opposed the move. Hegde, however, reasoned that it would be ungrateful to ditch the BJP specially after it had helped prop up his government. But the BJP insisted on demanding 40 seats even though it had only 18 MLA's in the previous assembly. After much unseemly haggling, the figure was reduced to 32 but even that was more than the Janata was willing to concede and the talks finally collapsed. The split in votes is likely to affect the Janata Party's prospects in at least 30 constituencies.

Saddled with that disadvantage, the Janata Party is now banking on Hegde's charisma and his government's performance to see it through. Hegde is obviously going to be the key campaigner and has taken a leaf out of his neighbour N.T. Rama Rao's book by hiring an air-conditioned van with a hatch from where he can address public meetings. Hegde has called his vehicle 'Jaya Vahini' which means 'Vehicle of Victory' and exudes confidence. "We are still fighting fit. The people want my government. They have already decided to vote for us. The emphasis would be on continuity rather than change." That last line, however, has a suspiciously familiar ring.

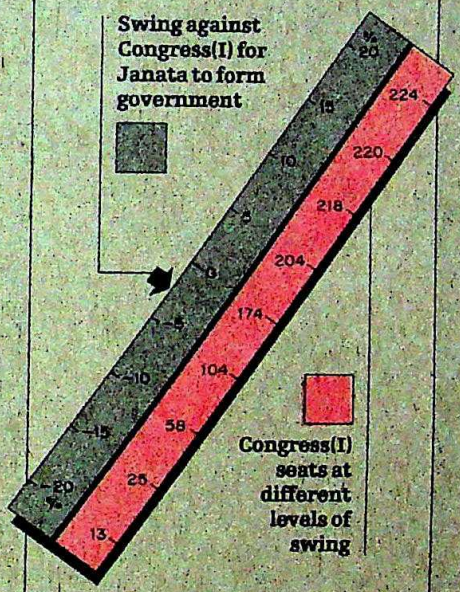
—RAJ CHENGAPPA

KARNATAKA

Total seats 224

Assembly Segments Won

	Election	Cong(I)	Janata	BJP
1984	Lok Sabha	174	49	—
1983	Assembly	82	95	18
1980	Lok Sabha	216	5	—
1978	Assembly	149	59	—
1977	Lok Sabha	194	30	—



► Although the Congress(I) won in 174 of the state's 224 assembly segments in the Lok Sabha election last December, it is precariously poised because of the Janata challenge.

► Had the non-Congress parties managed to remain united, with an index of opposition unity the same as it was in 1980, the Janata-led opposition would retain its hold on the state government if there is a small swing of only four per cent away from the Congress(I) in comparison with the December vote.

► But, with the BJP breaking away from the alliance, the Janata Party needs a somewhat larger swing, of seven per cent, to continue in power in the state.

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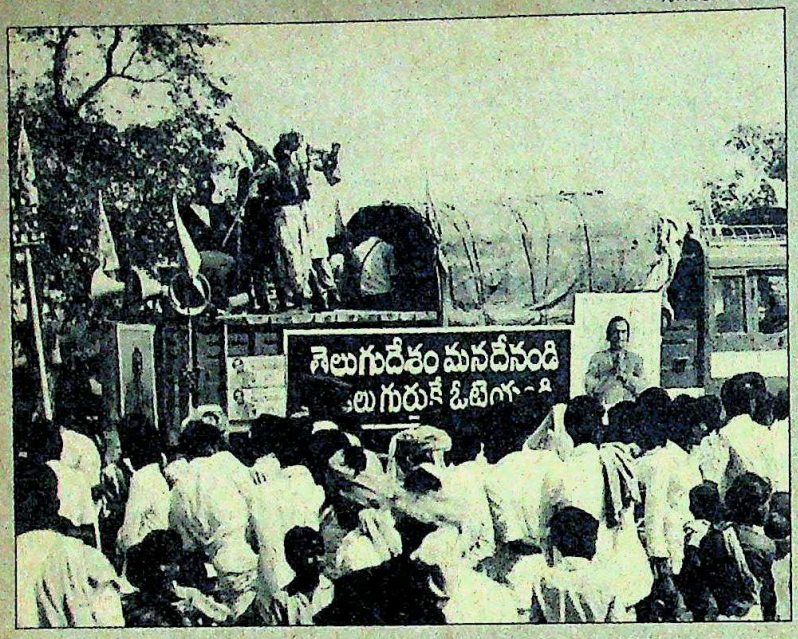
A. PRABHAKAR RAO



NTR's pilot truck announcing his arrival: electoral innovations

ANDHRA PRADESH

A Triangular Test

POLITICS is never a dull affair in Andhra Pradesh, and the coming assembly elections in the state have already produced their share of unexpected twists and turns. For one thing, there was the startling refusal by 22 Congress(I) candidates to file their nomination papers at a time when the party was being besieged by an unprecedented 2.5 lakh ticket-seekers from across the country. Even more significant, the bashful non-candidates included the leader of the party in the dissolved assembly, A. Madan Mohan, the son of former chief minister J.Vengal Rao, J.Prasad Rao, and the zilla panchayat chief of Krishna district P. Koteswara Rao.

Then, there was the equally embarrassing sight of Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao running scared and filing his nomination papers from three constituencies: his 1983 assembly base of Gudivada in Krishna district plus the Nalgonda town seat in Telengana and Hindupur in Rayalaseema. Clearly, NTR was unsure of repeating his 1983 assembly win from Gudivada, which gave the Congress(I) a majority in the December parliamentary poll, and felt the need for stepney constituencies.

If that reflected poorly on the Telugu Desam at a time when it was expected to sweep the polls, there was also the somewhat hapless sight of Nadendla Bhaskara Rao making his do-or-die attempt to stay on the state's political map. He had failed to put up any candidates belonging to his breakaway Democratic Telugu Desam (DTD) for the last Lok Sabha poll, and this time there was no sign of any attempt at joining hands with his one-time ally, the Congress(I). Nevertheless, Bhaskara Rao declared that "it is between NBR and NTR. The Congress(I) is irrelevant. Will Rajiv Gandhi become the next chief minister in Andhra Pradesh?" That sounded suspiciously like whistling in the dark for Bhaskara Rao himself has been forced to desert his Vemur constituency in coastal Andhra Pradesh and opt for the hopefully safer Malakpet constituency in Hyderabad.

The state elections this time are essentially triangular in character. The Congress(I) has put up candidates for all 294 seats, adopting independents in the places where its chosen few failed to file their papers. Bhaskara has only one ally, the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimeen, which has been allotted 15 seats, while his DTD is contesting 279. And the Telugu Desam has fielded 249 candidates, leaving the rest to its electoral allies, the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Janata and an independent. There are also the jokers in the pack, most notably the 20 candidates put up by the Rayalaseema Vimochana Samithi led by M.V. Ramana Reddi, who has been campaigning for a better deal for the backward Rayalaseema region.

The pre-campaigning thunder was stolen by the Congress(I), but not in a manner that redounds to its credit. The 22 candidates who refused to file their nominations were clearly motivated by the fear of defeat. And Madan Mohan had wanted to change his constituency from Siddipet in Medak (where P. Shiv Shanker lost in December) to Ramayampeta in adjoining Secunderabad, but was not allowed to. But the unhappiness in the Congress(I) ranks went beyond this, to the process of ticket-allocation itself. No fewer than 143 of the 294 candidates suggested by the party's state coordination committee were changed by the subcommittee headed by Darbara Singh—at the behest of state Congress(I) chief Y.S.Rajashekhar Reddy. And both Darbara Singh and AICC(I) General Secretary A.K. Antony were mobbed by protestors when they landed in Hyderabad to quell the revolt.

Nevertheless, there seemed a design to the process of selecting candidates. Antony said: "This is not the last election. Ours is a new, bold, long-term approach to build a strong base for the party, and the list has therefore upset the calculations of some old-timers. But tempers will cool down, and we are confident of giving a new shape to our party and politics in Andhra Pradesh."

If the stress on battles beyond the immediate one suggested an advance conceding of defeat, Rajashekhar Reddy said, "The candidates were selected considering, among other things, whether they were committed party workers who would keep the Congress(I) flag flying high whether they win or lose."

The Telugu Desam went through its minor upheavals too, with NTR deciding to drop 30 per cent of the legislators who had stood by him through the August-September drama last year, in-

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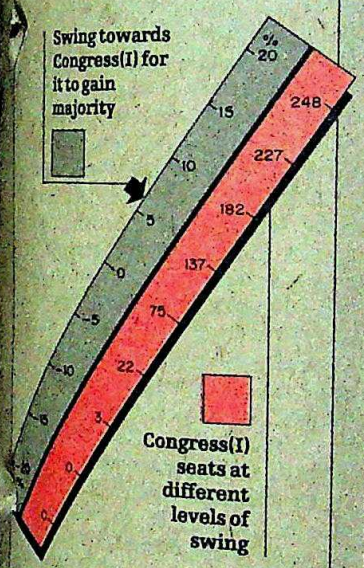
ANDHRA PRADESH

Total seats 294

Assembly Segments Won

Election	Cong(I)	T.Desam	Janata
1984 Lok Sabha	75	188	7
1983 Assembly	60	202	1
1980 Lok Sabha	272	—	6
1978 Assembly	175	—	60
1977 Lok Sabha	258	—	31



▶ A swing of 6 per cent to the Congress(I) since the 1984 Lok Sabha election can unseat NTR; his position is not as sound as it might appear from the tally of 188 assembly segments won by the Telugu Desam in the December election.

▶ As the Telugu Desam does not have a long history it is not easy to analyse its Lok Sabha performance. However, during the two years that the party has been in power it has lost some ground.

▶ The average margin of victory in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections was about 10 per cent and the fact that the non-Congress(I) vote is highly united makes the changes in seats very sensitive to swing in this state.

cluding four ministers. Said one of the ministers, Mohammed Shakir: "I was a cloth trader before becoming an MLA in 1983, and I will not hesitate to resume business if I am not given any responsibility."

With the candidate-selection process over, the focus shifted briefly to the party manifestos. Bhaskara Rao released the DTD's list of promises, clearly designed to match NTR's in its populist appeal. He offered the subsidised supply of rice and other essential commodities, reservation of jobs and educational seats for minorities, and a job for at least one member of every household. While NTR can be expected to match if not excel this, given his past record of favouring welfarism and give-aways, the Congress(I) itself was readying for the unprecedented step of releasing a separate manifesto for the state. Defence Minister P.V.Narasimha Rao was giving the final touches to the document towards the end of last fortnight, and a party spokesman said it would counter "some of the misapprehensions spread by NTR about Centre-state relations."

The start of campaigning brought its own innovations. Bhaskara Rao took to NTR's style of campaigning in a specially designed van, calling his vehicle the Prajaswamya Ratham (the vehicle of democracy). But NTR went one better, introducing a pilot truck for his Chaitanya Ratham (the chariot of awakening). In the truck were burra katha singers (folk form reconteurs) extolling the Telugu people and NTR, and serving the useful purpose of collecting the crowds well in time for NTR's arrival and characteristically rousing speeches.

But the end result of all this drama and effort would have remained the big question. Going by the results of the December Lok Sabha poll, the Congress(I) should win 75 of the 294 seats, and might stand a chance in 50 others where it trailed by margins of fewer than 5,000 votes. But the fact also is that the Congress(I) has traditionally got fewer votes in assembly elections than parliamentary ones. By that reckoning, the Telugu Desam should improve on the 53 per cent vote that it got in December in conjunction with its allies—unless Bhaskara Rao tilts the scales. What seemed certain at the moment, meanwhile, was the fact that the coming weeks of an advancing summer would witness rising political temperatures as the contestants warmed to the battle.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

Orissa Party 147, the Marxists 15 and even the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch 60.

The scene is bleaker still in neighbouring Bihar and apart from the Janata and the CPI, which have an understanding on 180 seats, the rest couldn't agree on anything. The contest is going to be another *tamasha* with the Janata fighting 236 seats, the DMKP 280, BJP 250, CPI 167 and the Marxists 50.

In Madhya Pradesh, the problem couldn't be resolved because the BJP, the largest opposition party in the state, couldn't agree on who should call the shots from among former chief ministers Kailash Joshi and Sunder Lal Patwa. As such, it hasn't picked up any local issue with which to hammer the ruling party.

Much the same was true of Uttar Pradesh, the country's most important state politically, where each of some 400 constituencies will see a field of four major contestants. The parties contesting include DMKP with 380 seats, Rashtriya Sanjay Manch 200, and BJP 280. Here too, the opposition parties lack leaders who carry credibility and are well-known through the state, and repeated talk of unity has already caused a credibility problem. Says state BJP president Kalyan Singh: "The more one talks of opposition unity, the greater is the possibility of our losing credibility with the electorate."

The Opposition honeymoon is, likewise, done with in Gujarat, with each party fighting for a larger slice of the cake than the others were prepared to yield. Unity talks, which started late last month, soon became a joke even though former chief minister Babubhai Patel, who doesn't belong to any party at present, worked hard to bring the parties together. Said Patel in disgust: "At least now the Opposition must read the writing on the wall. No one wants to introduce a new morality in politics, these kind of moves always fail."

While the Congress(I) gets off the starting mark with a headstart, there are several reasons to believe that this election will be different from the last one. The December poll was won on the issue of preserving national unity, of ushering in change, of settling the Punjab problem, and to some extent on the strength of a sympathy vote. None of these are live issues in state elections, and the voter is not being asked to choose a young, fresh prime minister but a variety of chief ministers. If all these factors mean that the Congress(I) must find new issues to put before the electorate, the ruling party had quickly found its pitch. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said Centre-state amity was necessary for all-round development, and

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Congress(I) leaders asked voters to complete the job begun in December and to place full faith in them.

On the strength of past trends, it seems entirely likely that the voter will do just that. In 1972 Mrs Gandhi repeated her parliamentary sweep of 1971 at the state level. In 1977, the Janata Party did likewise, and in 1980 it was once again the Congress(I)'s turn to establish that the voter does not change his preferences quickly. In the present case, the new government in New Delhi has also done well in its month-and-a-half in office, with quick action on a number of fronts giving promise of more to come. There is, quite simply, no reason to expect the voter to decide on switching his preferences, and the only real hope the Opposition has is that state-level issues and state-level personalities will help turn the tide in at least some states.

The other, less tangible prospect is that of a major revolt gathering momentum within the Congress(I), and of rebel candidates marring the ruling party's chances. But most pre-election revolts of this kind have tended to fizzle out, and even if things seem more serious this time round the ultimate result might not be very different. The mid-February picture suggested that the revolt might turn serious only in selected pockets: Vidarbha in Maharashtra, and perhaps in Bihar where the Jagannath Mishra faction might make its unhappiness felt.

If all this does not materialise, it will be the Congress(I) that will be laughing all the way to the hustings. The party is still riding a wave and Rajiv is still riding high on its crest. His message is that of change, a new generation in charge, and even with the blemishes that undoubtedly remain in the Congress(I)'s data sheet for the assembly election, the message is being powerfully conveyed. Rajiv himself will undoubtedly be prime campaigner, once again, and it will be in his name that the election will be fought. The gamble he has taken is a calculated throw of the dice. Many of his party bosses who are unhappy with the way he has shaped the new party are obviously watching closely.

But if Rajiv is able to succeed in his effort to bring about a revolution in values, particularly political values, then it might just mean an end to meal-ticket politics, and just as the discarded MLA's and ministers will fall by the wayside, so too will the doubters of today. And Rajiv will then have succeeded in creating what he now lacks: a party of his own.

—SUMAN DUBEY with PRABHU CHAWLA and bureau reports

RAJIV'S CAMPAIGN

An Unrelenting Pace

THE CONGRESS(I) has no campaigner to match Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who blazed an unprecedented campaign trail during December's Lok Sabha elections. With the assembly elections to 11 states and one Union territory scheduled for the first week of March, Rajiv was back on the trail, back to his punishing schedule of a couple of hours of sleep a night and up to a dozen scheduled public meetings hundreds of kilometres apart each day. On the very first day of his campaign, February 10, Rajiv covered 1,500 km in Uttar Pradesh visiting Bareilly, Hardi, Shahabad, Basti and Gorakhpur before visiting Jaipur and Agra and returning to Delhi. He was on the trail for 15 hours of non-stop electioneering. Accompanying him for the day in jetliner and helicopter was INDIA TODAY *Washington Correspondent,* INDERJIT BADHWAR *in Delhi on a visit. His impressions of the new prime minister:*

AFTER 15 hours of jetting, helicopteering, and motorcading during a whistle-stop election stump that could have made a Harry Truman green with envy, Rajiv Gandhi alighted in Delhi at 11.30 p.m. from his Air Force Boeing 737 fresh and bright-eyed—as if he had spent the day in a leisurely sauna bath.

By all biological logic the Congress(I) leader should have been bleary-eyed and catatonic. During the past six days he had been absorbed in the political bedlam of selecting candidates, for the forthcoming state elections from among hundreds of thousands of aspirants. The pace had been frenetic. His wife, Sonia, hadn't seen him for two days. Confided Dr A. Sahai, his portly and affable personal physician who accompanies him on his trips: "He slept perhaps a total of four hours at the most during the last week. His stamina amazes me. He catnaps every now and then on the plane for five minutes but he wakes up refreshed and rearing to go."

Nine stops, nine rallies, and nine speeches later Rajiv sat relaxed, confident and in an amiable mood in a small private cabin staring fascinated at a crowd of langoors in the trees surrounding the runway as the Boeing hurtled into the sky from Gorakhpur airport. "Actually this trip is pretty cushy, compared to what we went through last week," he remarked referring to the battle over MLA tickets.

But that was only the beginning of the battles that lay ahead. On this election tour, the first of many to come that will take Rajiv to about 400 out of more than 2,500 assembly constituencies over the next 18 days, his strategy was to appeal directly to the people.

Yet, throughout the hectic stump in Uttar Pradesh, Rajiv kept by his side Vishwanath Pratap Singh and Narain Dutt Tiwari—godfathers to many of the formerly powerful and now newly-ticketless Congress(I) members. And from the mood of the people at the rallies and from the speeches of local politicians and Tiwari and Singh it became rapidly clear that coat-tails—at least for the present movement—hang solidly from Rajiv Gandhi.

If there are any doubts about Rajiv being his own man they are dispelled quickly. His body language speaks of a man possessed of an easy confidence and deeply ingrained sure-footedness about life. His stride is purposeful, his handshake effusive, his gaze level, even mischievous. As an old friend put it, "The thing about Rajiv is that the guy is all there. What you see is what he is. He is basically a no bullshit man."

He transmits his obvious personality into his political life so easily that he begins to exude the impression to people who see him in action that basically he is having fun. His closest advisors will tell you that he doesn't really have the time to think whether his new job is fun. But it certainly is not a drag.

The happy warrior image that he projects stems from the fact that the burdens of office sit lightly on his shoulders. His sense of politics is instinctive, his style unrehearsed, his image unforced. Observing him on his Uttar Pradesh stump and listening to politicos on the campaign trail, it dawns on the observer that the lightness with which he manoeuvres and talks comes from a deep belief he is said to harbour, that he owes no great political favours to anybody and that protecting his job—a job he never really wanted—is furthest from his mind.

It is this— and not vigorous political counselling— that has enabled him to take hard decisions with nerve-shattering rapidity. Rajiv's aides maintain that his decisions regarding Antulay, Gundu Rao, Sajjan Kumar and Dhawan were obvious ones, period. Most politicians avoid acting on the obvious— Rajiv doesn't. Even his political approach to the

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Rajiv in Amethi: whirlwind schedule

state elections is startling in its simplicity —get rid of the bad guys, no matter how influential and then go straight to the masses for their mandate.

Rajiv's hallmark is his unerring simplicity and earnestness. He has yet to think out his views on complicated issues such as economic and industrial policies. But he makes one thing absolutely clear: he wants change and he wants it quickly. He wants to return to an old-time morality, and he has a religious-like belief in the common sense and uncanny political sophistication of the farmer and the paan-wala. This was the message he took to Uttar Pradesh.

The day-long itinerary— spelled out in meticulous printed detail and including even blocks of time that were chalked out for packed lunches and dinner on board the aircraft, reflected the tight managerial, clockwork control that has become the hallmark of Rajiv's campaign juggernaut. The schedule is formidable. A small illustration: 0835 arrive Bareilly airport; 0910 arrive Shahabad helipad by MI-8 helicopter; public meeting; 0940 depart Shahabad helipad and arrive Gola Gorakhnath 1005 hours...

At most places the crowds were between 50,000 and 60,000 strong and from the spontaneous outpourings of "Rajiv Gandhi Zindabad" it was clear whom they had come to see. The whole process hummed with computer-like efficiency. Rajiv, wearing a kurta and churidar and a buff jacket would climb down rapidly followed by his tall, dark and watchful Security Officer Ravi Nath. A fleet of Ambassador cars, a jeep, an ambulance, stood at the ready and were used only when the speakers' stand was at a distance or if a rally had been planned in the main town. Rajiv would climb to the platform and the rally would start.

There is a unanimous opinion among Rajiv watchers that he has emerged as a powerful public speaker. His delivery is booming but not stentorian. He speaks without notes, weighing his words, and yet effortlessly. The inflection and cadence are distinctively Nehruvian. There are no pregnant pauses. He gropes little and stutters not at all. The Hindi is surprisingly fluent and effective.

Again and again, throughout the day, Rajiv emphasised the need for India "to show the world what we can do...and when India speaks about uplifting the poor people she speaks not only for India's poor but for poor people all across the world. You gave me the strength to strengthen the land," Rajiv told the hundreds of thousands who had come to hear him, "now give me the strength to do it again."

Most of the constituencies Rajiv visited were fielding "clean image" Congress(I) candidates many of whom had never seen a political campaign before. In one district, for example, a Congress(I) ticket had been given to Mohammad Khan, a long-haired, poetic looking eccentric who has a Ph.D. in astrophysics from Cambridge. Rajiv was simple and forthright in his explanation for why so many old-time loyalists had not been given party tickets. He told the crowds: "We want new blood to invigorate this land." And he received thunderous applauses during several speeches in which he stressed special programmes for "uplifting our suppressed women" and launching schemes to clean up pollution from the Ganges.

The sights and sounds of Uttar Pradesh are difficult to miss even during the flurry of a campaign: From the Bareilly runway lined with tiger grass almost touching the plane's wingtips, to the helicopter descent at Gola Gorakhnath in Lakhimpur district bordering the Terai where the smell of putrefying mollasses from sugar factories hangs heavy in the air. As the day wears on, the Delhi chill, where the campaign party started, has given way to the heat of the mid-day sun at Balrampur in Gonda district where women and children from miles in each direction come running out on dusty trails and crowd their roof-tops as they see the helicopters approaching. Local officialdom, out in full force, and proud of its organisational capacity, has provided colourful tents with toilet facilities and aggarbattis redolent of roses for campaign aides while chief stumper Rajiv works his magic before the crowds.

There was laughter among the campaign officials as they scurried out of real choppers in Basti. "Now we're in real Eastern UP Bhaiyya Country," one said. "Use your ears and listen to what that guy's saying," he said. A local politico was introducing Tiwari to the crowd and urging them to be seated. "*Apne apne asthaan pe baithiye, asthaan pe.*' Stay in your seats," he said, "Did you hear?" the aide said, "The speaker says *as-thaan*, not *sthaan*."

In the evening hours the campaign Boeing rises above Gorakhpur airport and heads for a totally new *asthaan*—Jaipur. After a long drive through the pink city Rajiv addresses an all-India police duty meet, promises the police less political interference in the future and heads for a *bara khana* in an open-air roofless tent adorned like the Jaipur fort. Under the starlight, 2,000 policemen of all ranks sit a Rajasthani-style on the ground and eat out of *thaals* and *katoras* made out of Dhak leaves. On a floodlit stage a troupe performs the traditional ghoomar dance. Rajiv and his party were to eat at a special table indoors. But Rajiv just plonks himself on the ground, crosses his legs and insists on eating traditional style.

Ahead—according to the campaign schedule—lies Agra, the last stop before flying back to Delhi. The local Congress party in Agra is still reeling from the aftermath of a political slaughter. The high command under Rajiv has just wiped out four of the five sitting MLA's from there. Rajiv is uncertain how enthusiastic the rally in Agra will be or whether he will be besieged by the disgruntled ticketless on his arrival there. But that is 45 minutes into the future. Right now the shehnai is soothing and the puris and vegetable koftas and hot crisp jalebis and the starlight somehow just do not mix with politics.

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HENRY KISSINGER

"We expected too much of India"

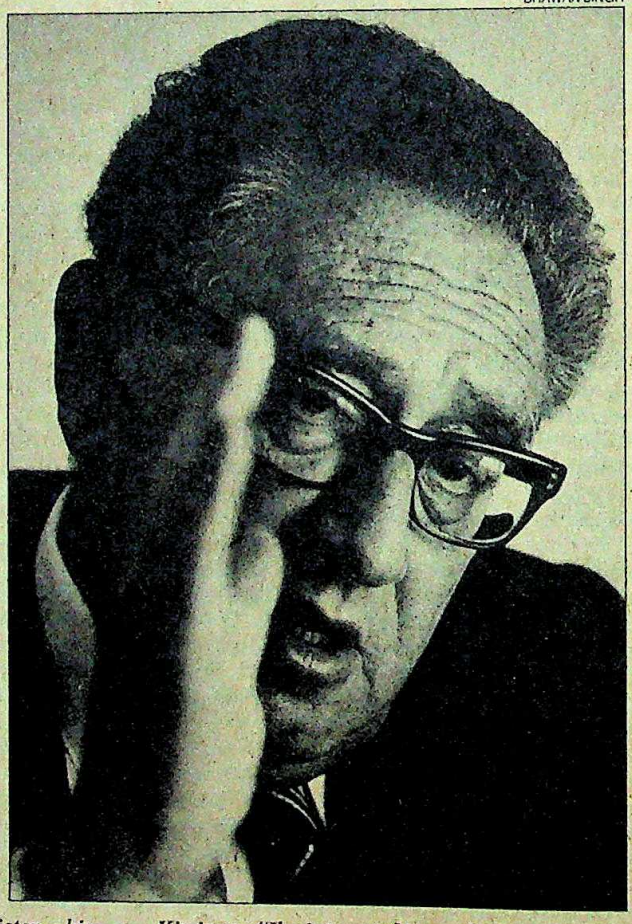
NOBEL Prize winner, once the most powerful person in the US establishment next to the President and now an advisor-about-the-world, Dr Henry Alfred Kissinger was in Delhi last month on his first visit in more than 10 years. "I am a student of international affairs, I write articles, I advise and I have to keep myself informed about various affairs, and there have been tremendous changes in this country," the 61-year-old one-man think-tank said, explaining what he was doing here as a guest of the Indian Government.

It's not an area that he is reputed to know well. Kissinger is best remembered here for the notorious tilt to Pakistan engineered by him on Nixon's behalf during the build-up to the Bangladesh war in December 1971. Visiting India as secretary of state in 1974 on a fence-mending visit, he boosted his image somewhat, but his interests then lay elsewhere: Indo-China and ending the disastrous war there, the opening with China, detente with the Soviet Union.

As a private citizen, Kissinger has become a professional advisor to governments and corporations, a celebrated member of the lecture circuit and an author. His book of the Nixon years, from which INDIA TODAY *excerpted the chapter on the Bangladesh war over four issues in late 1979, was a controversial work, not just in its handling of India, but in its narration of those eventful years.*

A master diplomat and negotiator—his shared Nobel Peace Prize was recognition of his role in negotiating the end of the Vietnam war—Kissinger had strong views about one adversary he could not beat: Mrs Indira Gandhi. His writings betray a certain admiration for a person who proved to be his equal in diplomacy. "Once one cut through the strident, self-righteous rhetoric, Mrs Gandhi had few peers in the cold-blooded calculation of the elements of power," he wrote in his book. At another point he said: "Mrs Gandhi was a strong personality, relentlessly pursuing India's national interest with single-mindedness and finesse. I respected her strength even when her policies were hurtful to our national interest." Not surprisingly, one of Kissinger's first acts on reaching India was to lay a wreath at her samadhi. "I felt I owed it to her," he said. During his brief visit, Kissinger gave Managing Editor SUMAN DUBEY *an exclusive interview. Excerpts:*

BHAWAN SINGH



Kissinger: "I'm interested in good relations with India"

Q. *Lots of Americans seem to feel that with the change of government in this country, there is now a new opportunity for better Indo-US relations. Do you share this view?*

A. Yes. I share that view, but one has to keep in mind that the foreign policies of great nations like ours and yours are determined by certain realities which confine possible changes to certain limits. I say that in order not to put an undue burden on your prime minister. The previous prime minister was a strong leader who defended India's national interest. So will the current one.

I believe that there is considerable room for improvement of relations. Much of it would have happened also under the previous prime minister. The new prime minister can give this additional impetus, and in addition, he represents a new generation and therefore has perhaps fewer of the preconceptions of the previous generation that grew up in the colonial period.

Q. *Are you satisfied that the Reagan Administration is doing all it can to help Indo-US relations?*

A. No, I don't think they are doing all they can to help things along. The Reagan Administration came into office with certain preconceptions, and they have changed very importantly in their relations with the Soviet Union. I suspect they will now change in their relations with the developing world. But since we cannot deal with the whole of the developing world as a unit effectively, we must deal with some of the key countries, and that again makes India one of the principal countries.

Q. *What do you think the Indian Government should do?*

A. I think that there should be a continuing dialogue on perceptions of international problems. We don't have to agree, but we should explain to each other periodically what we think the key issues are as we see them and see how we can avoid needlessly irritating each other even while we maintain our national positions. Secondly, there must be something on which Indians and Americans can work together—economic and scientific projects. That would create a body of people on both sides that at least know each other. Thirdly, it is strange how little systematic contact there is. I'm part of a group in which leading Europeans and Americans from

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the private sector meet once a year. The same exists with Japan. It does not exist with India. The advantage of these private groups is not that they can make policy but it means when there is a problem you can call up and say, look I don't understand this, explain it to me.

Q. Some of us are bothered by the fact that even though India and the US are both democracies, this particular aspect does not figure in American calculations of what is good for this part of the world or what is bad for it.

A. I think India has had an enormous reservoir of goodwill in America and one of the problems is that we expected too much of India. We thought that because India is a democracy, it could act as a judge of all international relationships. In 1961, I was an advisor to President Kennedy and my friend John Kenneth Galbraith was ambassador to India. At that time, there was the Berlin crisis and many in the Kennedy administration thought, if we conducted a certain kind of policy, India would support us. There was the nonaligned meeting in Belgrade in which India took a position between the two sides. There was terrible disappointment in the Kennedy administration—except me, because I said to myself, if Nehru took a position on Berlin critical of the Soviets, he would be jeopardising Indian interests for a subject of no conceivable concern to India. India has no view on Berlin for which it needs to risk a great deal. That is our problem. So paradoxically, if India had been a military dictatorship, we wouldn't have expected it to play that sort of role.

Q. But that role has been resented as well?

A. That's right. India, precisely because it speaks English, is a democracy, and all of us know Indians, we like and have easy relations with them, there is an exceptional demand put on India which isn't fair to India. But I think India has had really more influence in America than it gives itself credit for, and I can tell you at one time I opposed India (during the Bangladesh war in 1971) our media and much of our bureaucracy gave me a terrible time.

Q. In retrospect, that tilt, was it the right thing to do?

A. Yes. I'm not saying that every tactical move was the right thing. When I was security advisor I saw very few ambassadors. L.K. Jha will tell you, he was one of four that I saw regularly before 1971. I did that because I was convinced that we wanted to establish new relationships with many countries, with China, with the Soviet Union, with Europe and with India. For me, for all of us, the events of 1971 were a tragedy. We didn't want them, but we felt that we had no choice. But as soon as the crisis was over, we worked energetically to restore good relations and I came here in 1974. I wouldn't be here today if I weren't interested in good relations with India. I have no other motive for being here.

Q. There's a feeling here that successive US administrations, including the one you were part of, have never treated India as the central point of their south Asian policies. Why is this so?

A. I can't speak for all administrations. I attempted to treat India as a leading country and a central point of south Asian policies. We had in 1971 an inevitable clash that would take too long to explain but which, given our new relationship with China and the role Pakistan played in that at the time, had its own necessities. Then the question is, what does one mean by central role and how does one articulate it, and does that mean one can do nothing without the permission of India? I would say, we should do nothing without discussing with India, but I don't think we should give any country the veto power over our foreign policy in any part of the world.

> **"India has had really more influence in America than it gives itself credit for, and I can tell you at one time I opposed India (during the Bangladesh war in 1971) and our media and much of our bureaucracy gave me a terrible time."**

Q. Well then, to what extent do you think Indian sensibilities should be taken into account in the formulation of American policies towards this part of the world?

A. I think Indian sensibilities should be taken very much into account.

Q. More than at present?

A. Well, what is lacking at present and has been lacking is a systematic review of policy when there is no problem. For example, Britain had a major influence on American foreign policies for a long time and it still has a big influence—not because they raise an issue every two weeks, but because there is so much dialogue between Britain and America at all levels of government that they have an influence even on policies already formed. As a general proposition, we don't deal with India or India with us until there is already a problem and until both sides have gone a long distance down whatever road they are going. I think we can pay more attention and I think India should pay more attention to us, and that I say without any prejudice to any existing Indian relationship.

Q. One of the reasons this doesn't happen is that the US views problems from a global point of view and India from a very regional point of view, and these perceptions do not meet.

A. Yes and no. Because it seems to me... what does the US want in this subcontinent? Peace, stability and progress. Not even many Americans present this as self-interest. Supposing this area became like the Middle East, divided—which it could be—between seven or eight conflicting states, all in constant rivalry with each other. It would of course not be desirable for the people of the region, but it would lead to endless international conflicts in which everybody could fish in troubled waters. I think that peace, stability and progress in the region is a joint interest.

There are, of course, conflicts between India and Pakistan and between India and Sri Lanka or Bangladesh in which the US does not have the same intensity of interest that India can have, and there we may part company, but we have conflicts in Europe and Latin America of which India has a different perception. We have to learn to live with them.

Q. Couldn't the Americans do more to bring India and Pakistan closer and help the India-Sri Lanka problem instead of, as it is now perceived here, doing things that drag them apart, such as the arms aid?

A. Let's take the India and Sri Lanka problem. I think that your high officials will agree that the US has attempted to play a helpful role and has had many discussions on a serious level with the Indian Government trying to bring about reforms that would make it possible for all the nations here to join in a constructive solution. And we have also expressed a view very similar to that of your government and the President's speech to Parliament, that a purely military solution of the problem is not possible. I think in Sri

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Lanka I would be surprised if your government had a substantial disagreement with us or our role, but you'd have to ask your government.

Now, on the Pakistan issue, there are two separate problems. There's the arms relationship and there is the general relationship between India and Pakistan. I think the US would like nothing better than improved political relations betwen India and Pakistan. I know for certain, having talked to our leading officials at the very highest level before I came that they would be willing to play any facilitating role that they could in improving this relationship. I have the impression that both parties, specially India, preferred to conduct the negotiations between India and Pakistan as a bilateral matter which is very understandable. I think we could play a facilitating role designed to meet the various concerns of both sides.

On the arms supply, if the Soviet army could be removed from Afghanistan, I think the American perceptions of the problem would alter and remove one of the causes of the arms relationship as it now exists. Secondly, if one looks at the overall strength of the Indian and Pakistan military forces, it is difficult to visualise any rational motive that would cause a Pakistan leader to attack India. But, still, this is a problem. I understand the Indian view but I think considering that I have not yet been to Pakistan, I should not pronounce on this.

Q. *Do you think a squadron or two of F16s or whatever is being given to Pakistan really adds to its security against a threat from the Soviets in Afghanistan?*

A. There will never be enough arms with Pakistan to protect itself from a full scale attack from the Soviet Union. What American arms can do is to raise the threshold of and the price for harassment of the border regions and for the sort of psychological warfare at which the Soviets are particularly adept.

Q. *What would the American reaction be if Soviet forces were to make retaliatory strikes into Pakistan?*

A. Well, it is very hard to predict but we have a treaty relationship with Pakistan in relation to such a contingency which would force us to extend some assistance—whether in the form of weapons or in any other form would depend on the situation and on the extent of the attack.

Q. *You don't think that the induction of arms to guerrillas in Afghanistan through Pakistan creates a situation for precisely this sort of problem? The Indian perception of Afghanistan is to work for a political settlement whereas the Americans seem to be opting for a military settlement.*

A. With all due respect, it is wrong. When there are 130,000 Soviets in Afghanistan, you cannot say that the US is opting for a military settlement. We did not put the troops in Afghanistan. We have nothing in Afghanistan. We were content with what we considered a pro-Soviet government headed by Daoud who certainly gave our allies plenty of trouble and was never considered a source of great comfort to us. I believe that if Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan, American aid to the freedom fighters or whatever you call them should stop. Refugees should be permitted to return and then normal political processes should continue. Countries of the region should guarantee the neutrality, independence, non-alignment and demilitarisation of Afghanistan with the US having no role in this whatsoever, or the Soviet Union.

> "If the Soviet army could be removed from Afghanistan, American perceptions of the problem would alter and remove one of the causes of the arms relationship (with Pakistan) as it now exists."

Q. *How do you think this can be brought about?*

A. India or even Iran or any other country of the region that is acceptable should do this. We want nothing in Afghanistan except the withdrawal of Soviet forces. I think there should be negotiations, initially including the US and the Soviet Union. I think India could play a very major role in this and maybe make a specific proposal.

Q. *Do you believe that the Soviet Union does indeed threaten Pakistan in search of a warm water port as is commonly hypothesised?*

A. Well, I happen to think that the fundamental thrust of Soviet policy will be aimed towards Iran, but each of these moves has its own corollary. And so I believe that Pakistan, through Baluchistan, will not be able to escape those pressures. I think the major thrust is against Iran, and when I say that I don't mean next week, or month or even next year. I am saying as a strategic direction, because I think that the Iranian economy complements the Soviet economy, and because it gives them an easy and direct outlet into the oil regions of the Middle East.

Q. *What you're saying is that the Soviets would like to secure Iran as an area of their influence?*

A. At a minimum. But you see, the way the Soviet Union acts depends on many factors. I am not saying that the Soviets have a fixed timetable in which they are going to do this; and they may possibly never do it. This is, I think, a strategic objective.

Q. *One of the nightmares here is of Pakistan getting a nuclear bomb. There is speculation and some evidence in scientific circles that it is very close to it or already has it. What would you do in such circumstances, knowing that it is going on and in spite of the best efforts to prevent it?*

A. There is an amendment, the so-called Symington amendment, that prohibits any security assistance to any country that is actually working on a bomb. And if we should have any irrefutable evidence to that effect, we would be bound by our law to carry that out. Secondly, India is the only country that has set off a nuclear explosion and that has also announced that it would not build nuclear weapons, which is a great tribute to India. I think, therefore, perhaps it might be possible for both India and Pakistan to sign a joint statement or two separate statements that they will neither build weapons of this kind nor ever use them against each other, or any other set of measures of that kind. I would greatly welcome this.

Q. *Do you think we are entering a less tense and violent phase in the rest of this century? What do you think the 21st will be like?*

A. I think the next four years are really very important. We have a president with a huge mandate. You have a prime minister with a huge majority. The Soviets have certain necessities. If we all act in a far-sighted spirit, we can by the end of this decade bring about a change which will see us to the end of this century. Then what happens in the 21st century is hard to foretell, but I hope we can bring about a qualitative change in relationships.

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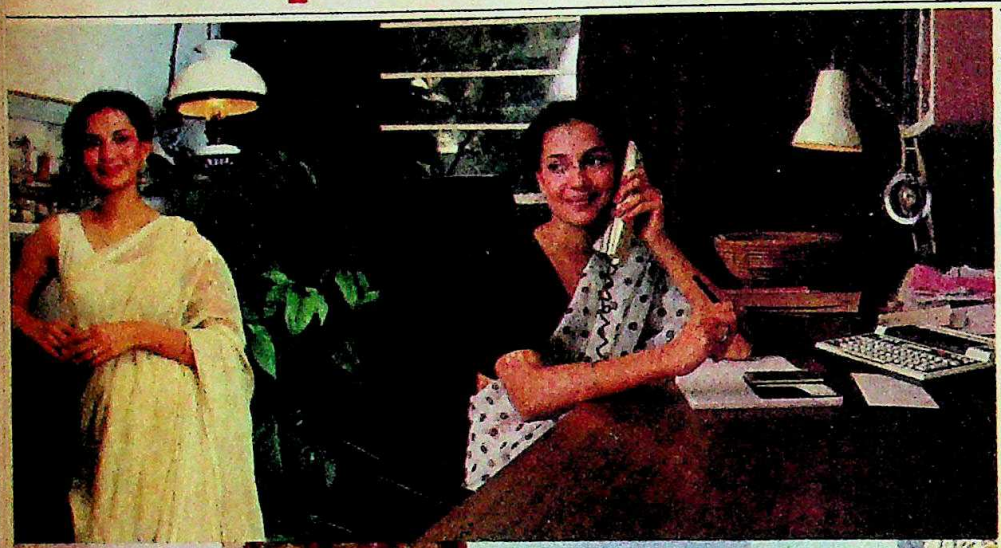

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DESERTERS

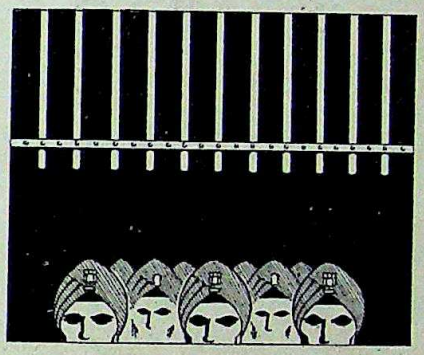
Taking a Hard Line

EIGHT months after it suffered the severest trauma since the Chinese invasion the Indian Army is now all set to bring the curtain down on the infamous Sikh "mutiny" of June last year. Nearly 2,000 Sikh soldiers, a majority of them recruits or jawans with very short service, are being committed to General Court Martial (GCM) at Jabalpur and Allahabad and most of them face dismissal from service if not worse. The decision to court-martial them, taken after a great deal of thought and discussions with the Government, is considered a landmark of sorts. Such a large number of men have never been collectively prosecuted for insubordination in the history of the Indian defence forces barring the mass trial of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's men on the eve of Independence.

The decision to commit the errant troops to GCM follows a detailed inquiry conducted by a committee headed by the major-general commanding the Madhya Pradesh area. The committee, which included a Sikh brigadier, visited practically all the places where major acts of desertion or insubordination had taken place and submitted a detailed report to the chief of army staff. It is reported that while GCM proceedings are being launched against most of the mutinious Sikh troops and non-commissioned officers, inquiry proceedings are also being launched against a few officers—including a brigadier—for alleged dereliction of duty on account of their failure to correctty foresee the brewing discontent.

Sources in the Defence Ministry point out that a large majority of the 2,000-odd troops are being tried for insubordination and may get away with mere dismissal from the army. But a much stiffer punishment may be in store for about 40 others, most of whom were involved in the mutiny at the Sikh Regimental Centre at Ramgarh, in Bihar, where the Centre Commandant Brigadier S.C. Puri was shot dead and another officer injured. The inquiry committee has painstakingly separated these men, alleged to be the ring leaders who misled and incited others, for trial under specific sections of the Army Act for serious offences like murder, seditious activity and armed revolt.

The committee's report is believed to be severe on a number of middle-rung officers who have been indicted for failing to read the situation and take preventive steps before trouble broke out. For example, at Ramgarh as well as at Sriganganagar in Rajasthan, the officers failed to detect the presence of agent provocateurs who spread rumours about destruction of the Golden



Temple and alleged army atrocities on Punjab villagers, particularly women. In a number of places ring leaders organised meetings of young jawans at the unit gurudwaras and delivered inflammatory speeches, followed by the *ardas*—the holy pledge—to avenge the attack on the Golden Temple. In some cases irate jawans had gathered at the gurudwaras in a drunken state and it had been reported to the officers either by some junior commissioned officers or the army *granthis*. Yet corrective steps were not taken immediately in most places resulting in unpleasant incidents in units spread all over the country, from Kashmir to tripura.

Within defence circles, the decision to prosecute the troops has come after an intense debate with officials in the Defence Ministry taking a softer line and advocating leniency since the "incidents had taken place in a peculiar set of circumstances." Supporters of this view pointed out that while by and large the Sikhs soldiers and officers had remained faithful, a small number revolted due to purely emotional reasons and a show of leniency, could win them back to the fold. This was also the argument of the group of retired Sikh generals, including figures like Lt-General Harbaksh Singh, who commanded the Indian forces in the western sector in the 1965 war and Lt-General Sartaj Singh, who wrote a joint appeal to the President seeking pardon for the Sikh troops. "The Sikh soldiers," the letter said, "are steeped in religious tradition" and pointed out that all Sikh units go to the gurudwara before going into action and take a copy of Guru Granth Sahib into battle. With their religion so deeply imbued in their martial tradition, the generals argued, it was understandable that they got upset on hearing of the army's action at Amritsar and "set out to protect their shrine".

It seems that initially the Government too was inclined to share this view and Mrs Gandhi had, in fact, made a statement that the mutineers' cases would be considered sympathetically. Some officials in the Defence Ministry also mentioned the case of almost complete mutiny in a battalion of the Assam Regiment posted in Kashmir in 1959 following which the unit was disbanded and the troops sacked. A large number of troops in the battalion were Mizos. Later, these frustrated, jobless men formed the core of the Mizo National Army in 1965. It was argued that sacking of a large number of trained Sikh soldiers could lead to a similar situation.

But what ultimately clinched the issue was the tradition of the Indian defence forces where insubordination in the past was not pardoned even when it was caused purely by patriotic fervour. For example, even the nationalist government decided to proceed with the trials of the captured INA men as indiscipline in the armed forces was considered unpardonable. Similar examples were cited from the 1857 struggle and, in the post-Independence period, the uprising in an armoured corps unit and several battalions of the Uttar Pradesh Armed Constabulary and CRPF. In each case stiff follow-up action was taken. According to those supporting a tough line, including Lt-General Tirath Singh Oberoi who retired on November 30 as general officer commanding-in-chief, Southern Command, a show of leniency now could set a dangerous precedent which any other communal group could exploit in future. "We have a multi-religious, multi-lingual army. Special treatment for any one group can only spell danger as all others would seek the same treatment for themselves. It will really be like sanctifying mutinies," said a senior Defence Ministry official.

But trials and punishment now will only solve a part of the problem and senior officers are now engaged in a pro-

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cess of rethinking on the best possible way to repair the emotional damage within the forces. As a beginning, Sikh officers are likely to be included in GCM's wherever possible. On a broader plane, sources point out, an effort is made to underline the fact that the Sikhs are still trusted with sensitive posts. The key to discipline and harmony, said an officer, will be a successful expression of this confidence. And obviously, no one could be more aware of that grim reality now than the men entrusted with the job of running the world's fourth biggest army.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

NATIONAL SECURITY GUARDS

Cutting Edge

FROM conception to the first stages of growth it has been a long road for National Security Guards (NSG), the fledgeling, super-elite anti-terrorist force now being trained at a number of defence establishments. After a series of doctrinal changes,cuts in manpower and funds,the idea has now boiled down to the raising of 5,000 fighting men like the famed Special Air Service (SAS) of the British Army.

Last month, the very first elements of the new force were coming into being. The initial batches hardly needed any special training drawn as they are from the by now well-known Special Group of the Chakrata-based Special Frontier Force (SFF) which participated in Operation Bluestar and now looks after the prime minister's security. The entire strength of this group, about three companies in all, is to be integrated into the NSG. Officials explain that since the SFF special group men already have training in anti-terrorism operations it will be easy to build the force around them.

The plan is being executed by R.T. Nagrani, currently Director-General (Security) in the Cabinet Secretariat. He is aided by Major-General Naresh Kumar who recently retired from the army and has commanded the 57 Mountain Division looking after Tripura and K. Dadabhoy, a former CRPF inspector-general besides a string of officers drawn from the army,Indian Police Service, BSF, CRPF and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

The force is likely to be a cross between the SAS and West German Grenzschutzgruppe-9, popularly known by the acronym GSG-9. The West German force was raised out of the country's paramilitary border guards to counter the growing menace of the Baader-Meinhoff gang and proved its worth in the Mogadishu raid. Officials who have been studying the doctrine and charter of the various special anti-terrorist forces the world over feel the NSG will end up looking more like GSG-9. But it will be much larger in terms of manpower, even though the Government has heavily slashed the original proposal to raise 25 battalions. What prevailed ultimately was the argument that not only was the cost of raising such a large elite force prohibitive, but that it could also lead to a dilution in standards as commandos are a very special breed of men, physically as well as psychologically.

While it is understandable that the bulk of the strength will come from the army, volunteers are also being sought from the BSF, CRPF and ITBP. Even in the army, the search is not confined to the commando and para units. Like the SAS, men and officers from all fighting arms are eligible to seek a short tenure in the NSG and the selection would be based on their record, fitness and motivation. The NSG idea is to hire dedicated volunteers in the 20-25 years age group so as to utilise them in the prime of their youth.

Commando on duty

BHAWAN SINGH

The men's training will consist of specialised skills in commando warfare, priming and defusing of explosives, slithering from helicopters, diving, close-quarter combat and subversion. Officials have already begun scouring the world markets for suitable weapons. The choice of a sophisticated assault rifle has fallen on the West German Heckler and Koch. The shopping list includes night sights, silencers, laser and thermal imaging equipment and the latest bullet-proof gear. Similarly, special simulated conditions are provided for training. For example, the airlines have been asked to loan various types of passenger aircraft for training in anti-hijacking operations. The idea, said an officer, is to ensure that when the guards raid a Boeing 737 to rid it of hijackers they should know the layout of the aircraft like the palm of their hands.

The project, however, is bound to run into some difficulties. For example, many officials feel that the force will suffer because it has been put under the charge of the Union Home Ministry which was never known for professional, efficient handling of the paramilitarty forces under its command. Said an officer: "Giving NSG to the Home Ministry is the best way to convert it into yet another of the usual, lathi-wielding, overused and overstretched forces. Most of our operational officers are bound to be drawn from the army and it would be best to leave it to the Defence Ministry. Also, there are doubts as to the wisdom of drawing men from paramilitary forces. Too much variety, it is feared, could result in a hotch-potch.

But the men raising the force are making light of these fears. As the insignia of the new force they have chosen the Sudarshan Chakra,the legendary cutting wheel on Lord Krishna's finger. That is what NSG is expected to grow into, a fast-moving, razor-sharp force that zeros in on difficult targets with telling effect. And with terrorism now having come to stay it will not be short of opportunities to prove itself.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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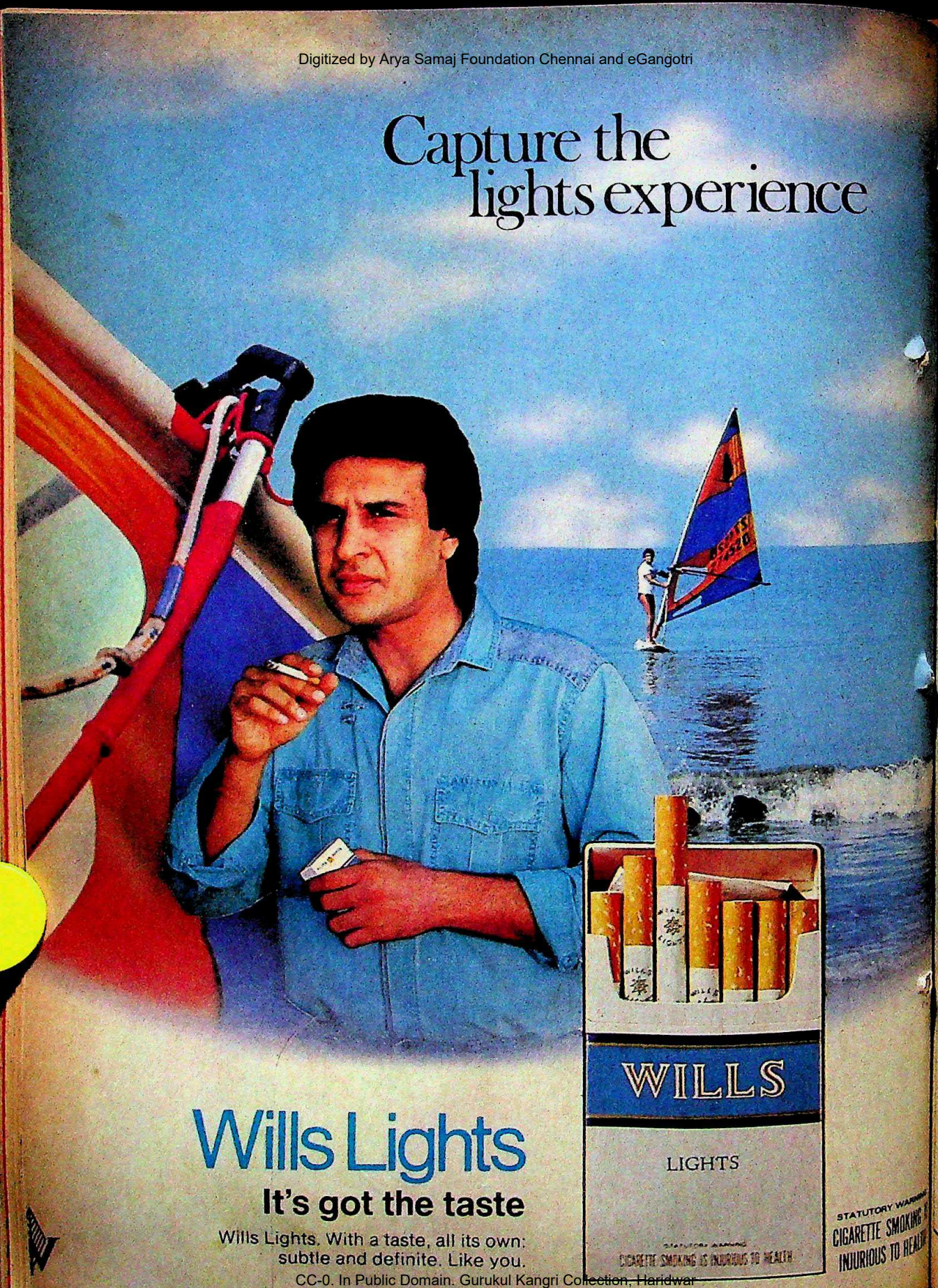

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IFAD

Food for Thought

AT A TIME when it has become an almost obsessive ritual to berate multilateral institutions of the United Nations system in forums ranging from New York to Vienna, some genuine tears are being shed over the funding crisis faced by the rising star of the UN system, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The real irony here is not provided by the crucifixion of UNESCO amid the efforts to save IFAD, but by the fact that a generally acclaimed agricultural development organisation cannot be given money at a time when European television screens are full of haunting images of dying Ethiopian children and the catastrophic famine afflicting large areas of Africa.

The philosophy of the small group of professionals at IFAD is to extend a different kind of help: self-help. Not handouts but hand-ups to a better life. IFAD's tightly defined mandate focuses sharply on helping small holders, landless labourers and country craftsmen in developing countries to increase their food production. To them, a hoe may be more precious than a tractor, a fishing net more relevant than a deep sea trawler, and a reliable market outlet more important than anything else. Even the world's poorest farmers and fishermen know how to farm or fish. What they lack is the means to do so effectively and profitably. IFAD's role is to help make these means available through low cost, grassroots projects designed to reach the maximum number. And against the backdrop of the perilous situation in Africa, it seems suicidal to destroy a well-tuned weapon against hunger.

The problem is money, with squabbles over future contributions breaking out between the 20-member group from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and the 12-member OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) group. Despite encouragement from benefactors like UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar and former Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, IFAD has fallen prey to various diplomatic gremlins: the Americans wanted to contribute less, OECD wanted parity in 'burden sharing' between its members and those of OPEC. In fact, some OPEC members like Libya and Iran have stopped contributing to IFAD. So while IFAD has committed nearly $ 2 billion in rural development projects throughout the world, the donors cannot even agree to the agency's threadbare $1 billion level. IFAD officials told INDIA TODAY that it would have less than $100 million available for activities in 1985: close to starvation level for the organisation.

IFAD

IFAD has won near unanimous approval since 1978, with even the parsimonious Reagan Administration's officials saying that it has 'out-performed' every other agency.

And yet, IFAD was a child born of UN remorse. It was established when it became evident that all the international development agencies were not really able to attain their objectives because they could not get down to the grassroots: the farmers. The agency grew out of the UN World Food Conference in Rome in 1974. Its advocates saw the need for a new agency to focus on the needs of the rural poor so as to step up food production. So IFAD was established in 1977 with its headquarters in Rome, and began its operations the following year with $1 billion in funds for 1978-80.

From the start, IFAD has been a different kind of agency. Unlike UNESCO or the United Nations itself, it is not another sprawling international bureaucracy. It employs no more than 80 professionals and 101 support staff. It is also the only international financial institution in which the OECD and OPEC are major constituents. And the traditional donor-nations of the West had been delighted to see the oil-rich nations taking over the burden of running the agency.

IFAD has won near-unanimous approval since 1978, with even the parsimonious Reagan administration's officials saying that it has 'out-performed' just about every other agency. As of now, IFAD has financed 152 projects in 83 developing countries at a total cost of about $8.2 billion, of which its own share is $1.9 billion. The balance has come from other donors and the governments concerned. Most of the projects are in 65 countries classified as low income, food deficit states. And the expected addition to agricultural production resulting from the IFAD-aided projects is estimated at 20 million tonnes, including 16 million tonnes of food (in terms of wheat equivalent). This equals 25 per cent of the 1981 cereal deficit of all developing countries.

Some of the innovative approaches to providing credit to small farmers and landless labourers in south Asia have produced impressive results. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh ('A bank for the Landless') started as a pilot project in one district and with IFAD support was expanded to five others. Ten thousand groups have been formed with membership from among landless men and women. The credit recovery rate is reportedly 96 per cent—thus exploding the myth that the poor cannot repay loans. In Nepal, under the Small Farmer Development Project, 1,500 groups have been formed with a membership of 20,000, involving a total population of one lakh.

In India, IFAD projects include the Bhima Command Area Development, where 13,000 hectares of the proposed 62,000 hectares have been brought under irrigation, enabling farmers to raise an additional groundnut crop. There is also the Sunderbans Development Project, the Madhya Pradesh Medium Irrigation Project and last year the second Uttar Pradesh Public Tubewells Project.

So far so good. But now the funding crisis threatens to make IFAD a 10-year wonder. A fresh round of negotiations is about to begin at the Rome headquarters. And if a compromise solution is not swiftly found, it will signal the untimely demise of this least well-endowed but most resourceful of UN agencies at a time when its innovative experiments seem indispensable in those indigent nations ensnared in the poverty trap.

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Does your child suffer from persistent sore eyes? Are they red and watery? Have small, pinkish-grey lumps formed inside the eyelids giving the feeling that there is sand in the eyes? These could be symptoms of Trachoma. And Trachoma can lead to blindness. So, if the symptoms persist, contact a doctor or the nearest government health unit without delay for prompt and proper treatment.

Remember, Trachoma is spread by human touch or flies and is commonly seen in people living in crowded, dirty areas. So, to avoid infection, wash your child's eyes with clean water, drying them with a clean cloth, at bedtime every night. Also, if you cannot avoid *kajal*, use a different finger for different people and keep *kajal* away from dirt and dust.

Thousands of children go blind because of Trachoma every year. Don't let this happen to your child.

For a free booklet on the prevention of blindness in children, write to the following address indicating the language of your choice: Voluntary Health Association of India, C-14, Community Centre, Safdarjang Development Area, New Delhi 110 016.

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ITALIAN INVESTMENT

SNAMPROGETTI, the Italian fertiliser giant, may soon invest in the share capital of two fertiliser projects in the country. To start with, the company will be investing up to Rs 25 crore in the project being set up by the Birla-owned Zuari Agro-Chemicals at Sawai Madhopur in Rajasthan. Snamprogetti has also offered to invest in the equity capital of the Kakinada fertiliser project, which has been hanging fire for some years and which was recently bagged by the Andhra Pradesh-based Nagarjuna group. This latter project had been virtually pocketed by Larsen & Toubro, which had entered into a pact with Haldor Topsoe (50 per cent of whose shares are held by Snamprogetti). Larsen & Toubro's Chairman, N.M. Desai, had in fact announced that his company planned to invest in the fertiliser plant. But the state Government preferred a local enterprise and Larsen & Toubro was pipped at the post.

WANGLING WASTELANDS

A NUMBER of companies have staked their claim to a role in afforesting the country's wastelands. With the Government announcing the setting up of a National Wastelands Development Board that will undertake massive forestry programmes on the country's wastelands, private industries that need wood-based raw materials (the paper industry is one) have told the Government that they would like some of the wastelands to be allotted to them. One demand is that the Government hand over 5 per cent of the total wastelands in the country to private industry. Meanwhile, companies like Hindustan Lever which had earlier sought the Government's permission for relatively modest allocations of land are now upping their demand. Lever had initially asked for a few thousand hectares in the Andamans, but this is now being upscaled. Industry as a whole senses that the Government might be inclined to allow private corporate enterprise a role in afforestation.

CLEARING HURDLES

THE GOENKA take-over of Dunlop India ran into unexpected hurdles recently when the Reserve Bank decided to ask a series of clarificatory questions on the precise details of the take-over. This followed a formal application by the Goenkas for acquiring 10 per cent of Dunlop's shares in partnership with the Dubai-based M.R. Chhabria. But it is understood that answers to the Reserve Bank's questions have been to the RBI's satisfaction. The Goenkas might eventually acquire 20 per cent of Dunlop's equity in collaboration with Chhabria, which means that Dunlop Holdings of UK will continue to hold on to the remaining 20 per cent of its initial 40 per cent holding.

A FITTING FINALE

THE GOVERNMENT has finally emerged the winner from its longstanding dispute with the Motion Pictures Export Association of America (MPEAA). The powerful Hollywood-based MPEAA has conceded the Government's demands, which will vastly enhance the Government's revenues from film imports. The Government-owned National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), which will sign the new deal, will receive a minimum canalising fee of Rs 26.5 lakh annually for the import of 75 to 100 Hollywood films. The highest earning so far was Rs 3.8 lakh in 1981-82.

BREAKING EVEN

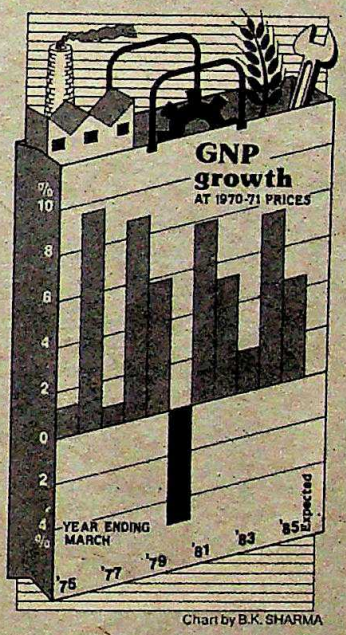

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

THE SEVENTH Five-Year-Plan may face a serious resource crisis, but the sixth plan will end next month with an overall growth rate of around 5.4 per cent, the best in any plan so far. This is partly helped by the fact that the base year used for this calculation was a depressed one (GNP fell 5.1 per cent in 1979-80). Nevertheless, two of the five years of the sixth plan saw above average growth, two witnessed below average performances, and one recorded a middling performance. Yet the future outlook is uncertain.

COMPUTER CONTENTION

SEVERAL computer companies have been presented with hefty tax demands by the excise authorities, following investigations and raids conducted in recent weeks. The Government has charged the computer companies with excise evasion through the practice of splitting their sales bills and showing a part of the sums payable as software and technical service fees. Hindustan Computers and its sister companies have been presented with a Rs 5-crore bill, and the industry as a whole has been asked to pay up roughly Rs 15 crore. But the computer companies have contended that separate fees for software and technical services are in line with international practice, and that the Government does not levy any excise duty on companies that provide only software and maintenance services. One verdict on the subject so far, delivered by the Collector of Central Excise (Appeals) in Madras in a case concerning Sunray Computers, has gone against the Government, but the excise authorities remain convinced that much of what was being charged as software and technical service fees was in reality a part of the price of the hardware sold. If the courts agree with that, the computer companies could be in hot water.

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The Money Multipliers

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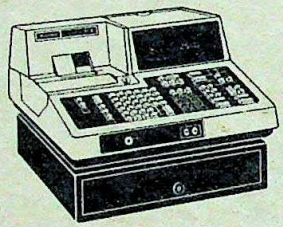

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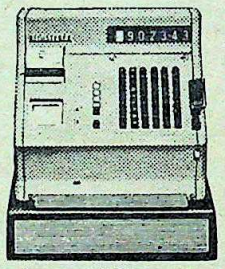

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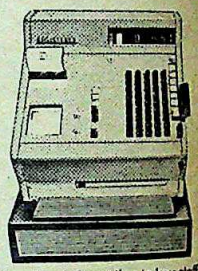

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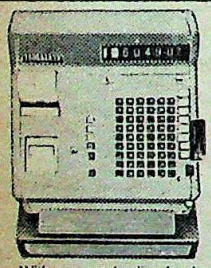

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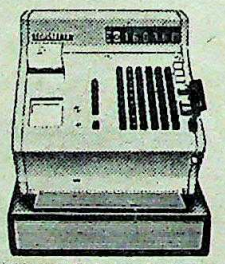

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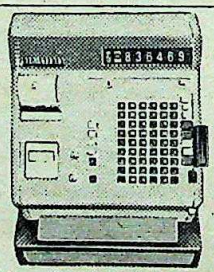

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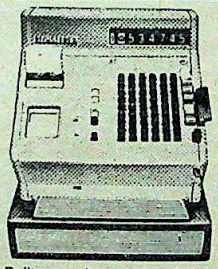
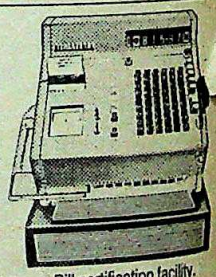


Built around a memory system.



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GROWTH RATE

Dubious Declines

WINSTON Churchill was in the habit of sending curt memos to his ministers and officials during the war. "Pray let me know, on a foolscap sheet of paper, what we should do to draw the United States into the war." Rajiv Gandhi would benefit greatly if he were to take a page out of Churchill's book, and dash off an urgent memo to the Planning Commission. "Pray let me know, on a quarto sheet of paper, what we should do to step up our measly rate of growth."

It is not so much the poor rate of growth, which is more or less frozen around 3.5 per cent a year, as the slowdown in the growth rate, particularly industrial growth rate, that seems to be the main problem. There have been ups and downs, of course, but the annual industrial growth rate has come down steadily from an average of 5.8 per cent between 1952 and 1959 to 4.3 per cent between 1968 and 1975. Since then there has been a slight improvement—the growth rate between 1976 and '83, the year of the record harvest, was 5 per cent—but it is still less than what it was in the '50s and early '60s.

The Planning Commission ought to appoint a task force to find out why this is so. It is not enough to say, as some apologists of the establishment do, that the slowdown is a feature of most economies and has undoubtedly something to do with the world-wide disruption in industry following the heavy rise in petroleum prices. At a seminar held at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) not long ago, four reasons were cited for the slowdown, namely:

► Slow growth is a result of the overall industrial policy regime which, as a result of comprehensive controls and a systematic blunting of foreign and domestic competition, led to inefficiencies and creation of a high cost industrial structure. The way out obviously is to liberalise the economy.

► It could well be that the inefficiencies themselves are a result of inadequate aggregate demand. Government policies since the mid-'60s have not been expansionary enough and things can be improved by pumping demand through higher public investment and/or better income distribution.

► Public investment has declined because there are not enough resources, despite the fact that the savings ratio is higher than ever. There are two ways out: tax agriculture and/or get more funds through foreign investment.

► Capital output ratios have been rising and this has affected growth. But that by itself is no explanation. It is possible that the answer lies in the nature of the political structure, in which case liberalisation may not be an easy policy.

The prime minister has done well to announce that the industrial sector would be thrown open to competition but this should apply both to public as well as private sector industry.

The rise in the capital-output ratios may be a contributory factor but it is not only in India that capital-output ratios are rising. They are going up all over the world. In the world market economies, they have gone up from 4 per cent in 1960-1965 to 7 per cent in 1970-1980, an increase of 75 per cent, and from 3 per cent to 5 per cent in the developing economies during the same period. But in the case of India, the high capital-output ratios are due as much to the high cost of capital plant as to the poor performance of the system as a whole. The public sector functions with much less efficiency than the private sector and the fact that the bulk of resources go into the former must be an important factor contributing to poor growth. Every industrial unit consumes resources at the same time as it generates them.

It is wrong to say that the inefficiencies themselves are a result of inadequate aggregate demand. The state electricity boards function at what is almost certainly a pretty low level of efficiency but that is not because of lack of demand for power. The boards lose around Rs 600 to Rs 750 crore a year and are totally dependent on the exchequer for their expansion plans. The public sector steel plants are also in the same boat. If there was no demand for steel, we wouldn't be importing so much steel year after year, while the steel plants lost money at the rate of a crore of rupees a day.

The prime minister has done well to announce that the industrial sector would be thrown open to competition but this should apply both to the public as well as the private sector industry. Let the Planning Commission or the Industry Ministry be asked to draw up a five-year plan for modernisation which should cut across the two sectors and whose main purpose should be to raise industrial efficiency all around. Its performance should be judged not by how much it invests—the steel industry has been gobbling up resources year after year without much improvement in its functioning—but what resources it is able to generate from within. It should be dissuaded from going to the Government for funds and should instead compete in the open market for resources for expansion. A report that three public sector companies will soon be issuing debentures is to be welcomed. Rajiv Gandhi said the other day that the administrative system should be separated from the political system. This applies to the public sector system also. The more the industry has to fall back upon itself and not the Government for all its requirements, the more efficient it will be.

Modernisation need not be confined to the import of plant and equipment only. Know-how is one thing but do-how is even more important and there is no reason why we can't learn to do things the others do by buying and operating plants abroad. This is what the Chinese are doing. They have sent out scouts to look over companies in the US and elsewhere which are for sale and can be picked up for a song. These are brand new companies in such sunrise sectors as electronics and not old fossils rusting in the sun. The Chinese are reported to be spending over $ 100 million a year on such purchases, which is a flea-bite. It is, of course, one thing to buy companies abroad and run them there in their kind of environment and quite another to run them here but there is no reason why we should not try the Chinese experiment. Modernisation means nothing unless we come out of our shell and that is precisely what the Chinese seem to be doing. Incidentally, the industrial growth rate in China was nearly twice ours throughout the seventies.

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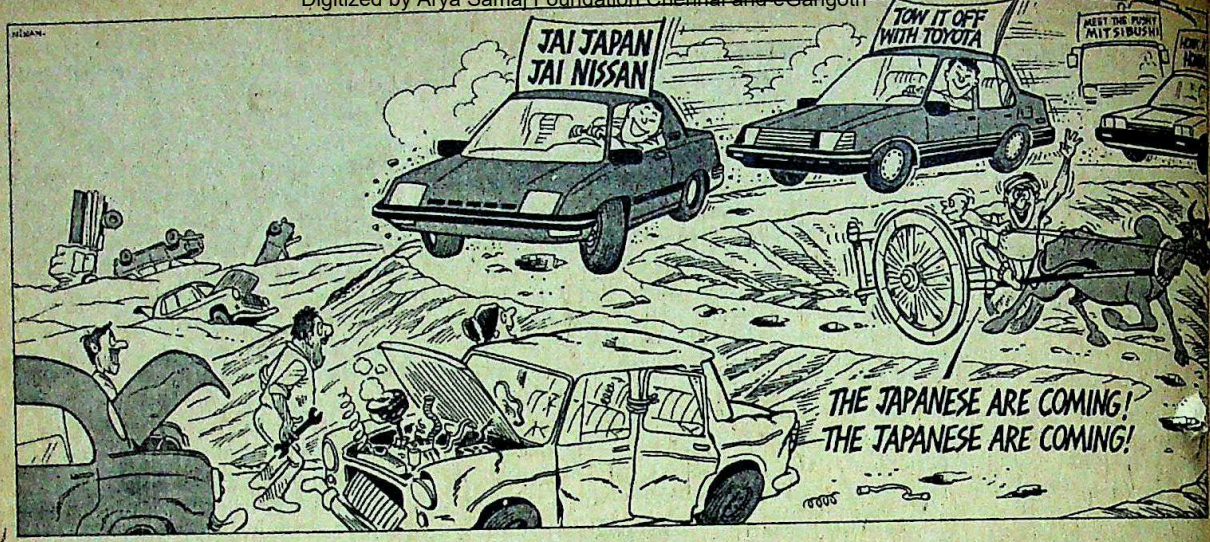

AUTOMOBILES

Clearing the Way

FOR THE motorist, it's heady news. Next year may see the first home-assembled Toyota, Mitsubishi, Nissan and Peugeot cars roll out on to Indian roads. More world famous models could be round the curve. For automobile companies are revving up to cash in on a landmark government decision that allows even truck manufacturers to make cars, and vice versa. Predicts Subodh Bhargava, chief executive of the tractor company Eicher Goodearth: "The Government's decision will push products closer to the state of art than the consumer has been used to for years."

The official notification has come like high-octane fuel to an industry that is only now astir after years of technological slumber—and thrown up for grabs a market dominated by clunky, obsolete roadsters. A truck company executive gleefully says that he receives three or four phone calls a day from people asking him when his firm will move into car production—willy-nilly sending thoughts spinning in that direction. And auto firms are casting about for opportunities, charting unplumbed waters and giving notice that they will poach on others' traditional, jealously guarded preserves.

But even as the dovecotes are aflutter, several questions remain unanswered. Will the new cars be too pricey for a mass market to open up? Can a large market come into being with 35 per cent of the price of a car going to the exchequer with high petrol prices and poor roads? Will the Government permit auto manufacturers to expand capacity to attain economies of scale, and to import the equipment needed? (Manufacturers claim that much of the equipment to set up car plants has to be imported.) And what of the components required? The components industry is five to seven years behind the vehicles industry in terms of technology, and the scramble has just begun.

For all that, auto manufacturers are jockeying for the fast track. For some a venture into cars is just a question of timing. The four new light commercial vehicle (LCV) manufacturers are too far gone down the production road to change track immediately, with vehicles ready to roll out of assembly lines in the next two to seven months. Still, DCM-Toyota's Executive Director Vivek Bharat Ram says his company is looking at car production possibilities. The company will turn out jeeps by the year-end and may import Toyota car components from Japan and assemble them here next year. Eicher Motors will mark time till early next year and talk to its collaborator Mitsubishi Motor Corporation before taking the passenger car plunge. Jeep manufacturer Mahindra & Mahindra is eyeing Peugeot and American Motors cars (the company has collaboration agreements with both firms). Says Balchandra Sule, managing director of Mahindra & Mahindra, "We don't want to make something which everybody else is making. And Allwyn Nissan will review the car option in the next few months. But it could also move in the opposite direction, from LCV's into heavy tonnage trucks and mini-buses.

Other automobile corporations are still cagey about plans, but cars could roll over their horizon too. Says Jayant Talaulicar, vice-chairman and managing director of Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO): "We have plenty of ideas but nothing that we would like to disclose at this stage." He adds that though TELCO could design a car, design imports would be a quicker route to production. TELCO displayed an estate wagon called the Tatamobile at a trade fair in the capital five years ago, and is believed to be among the best equipped to swiftly shift to other vehicle manufacturing lines.

But not all are making a foray into cars. Truck and bus heavy-weight Ashok Leyland is surveying the LCV market. R.J. Shahaney, the company's managing director, says that Leyland has on its agenda LCV's "of a different load carrying capacity altogether from the type Allwyn Nissan, DCM-Toyota or the others are planning".

The flurry of activity in the industry is grounded in a number of calculations. The Government's relaxed guidelines are at raising capacity all round. The market is still in the dumps, and heavy tonnage truck makers with flagging figures can use idle capacities by broadening their product range. But this inevitably raises the question of priorities. Should truck capacity be diverted to cars, should foreign exchange be spent to enable this diversion? D.V. Kapur, secretary in the department of heavy industry, is carefully non-committal: "The aim was to encourage automakers to develop

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their own technology. The Government will look at the question of foreign technology and a number of other issues, including the foreign exchange question.".

MEANWHILE, the automobile and auto component industries are in for a major convulsion. While a leaner, more on-the-ball industry may eventually be born, the birth pangs are likely to be painful. With so many companies looking for a piece of the action, dog-fights over markets are on the cards and some will inevitably scald their fingers. Yet the new policy will help breathe life into ancillary industry segments where real growth is slack. Automobile companies may farm out more work to attain speed and efficiency, with even in-house ancillary "aggregates" like standard engines, axles and transmissions being contracted out to component makers. Finally, with component manufacturers catering to different requirements, the on-going process of specialisation will be speeded up. As International Instruments Ltd (IIL) Chairman and Managing Director N. Sudhakar puts it, "A speedometer will become not just a speedometer but a speedometer for an LCV, another for a passenger car, and a third for a motorcycle."

Automobile and component industry executives are clearly excited about the dramatic turn in official policy, but many point out a rash of car factories coming up overnight. For the long road to more car production is pot-holed, and a roster of problems could come in the way of the industry. Some companies may have to plough into new car plants up to 70 per cent of the amounts now sunk in plant and machinery, since much of the equipment is not common to truck and car production. Argues an automobile company executive: "Entire production lines have to be built, the sheet metal is different, the engine block is different." Much of the new plant and equipment may have to be bought abroad. The big questions are whether the Government will sanction the foreign exchange needed and the capacities that some firms will have. Eicher plans to ask for a raise from 12,000 to 40,000 or more, and DCM-Toyota from 15,000 to 50,000. Even if the Government gives the green signal, some of the cars could be billed in the Rs 465,000 to Rs 90,000 range. Sniffs a company executive: "Cars have to compete with houses when it comes to consumer buying decisions."

The biggest roadblock may be the time lag between the automobile and ancillary firms' schedules. As company officials put it, component companies were caught napping by the technological ferment and vehicle component indigenisation programmes will be thrown out of gear and cost estimates may go haywire. Says Vivek Bharat Ram: "Virtually no automobile part made in the country is of international quality today. At least Rs 400 crore has to be invested in the ancillary industry. This is not happening and even if it is, it's happening with a time lag. Vehicle company schedules will be upset unless new component plants come up." Most auto manufacturers plan to use 40 to 45 per cent Indian components in the first year of production, to be raised to 100 per cent in the fifth year, but such programmes may have to be staggered out over seven to 10 years.

"Virtually no automobile part made in the country is of international quality today."

VIVEK BHARAT RAM
Executive Director DCM-Toyota

"The Japanese want to extend CKD exports to India as long as they can."

PRAN TALWAR
President, Automotive Component Manufacturers' Association

But ancillary producers tell a different story. Says Pran Talwar, president of the Automotive Component Manufacturers' Association of India, "Maruti and DCM-Toyota haven't given us enough lead time," needed to produce heavy duty components to new specifications. Ancillary units have genuine problems in getting raw materials, face equipment limitations and suddenly have had to meet the requirements of a host of new generation vehicles.

Much of the pessimism among auto men stems from the crop of problems Maruti Udyog has run into. The public sector company was supposed to achieve 30 per cent indigenisation by this March; it will be lucky if it hits the 25 per cent level. Maruti will be turning out over 20,000 cars this year, almost a third of the industry's output, and the component volumes required aren't around. Many suppliers did not sink money into new production facilities, believing that Maruti would not get off the ground or would fail to stick to production schedules. Chloride India was supposed to feed Maruti with batteries, but is now importing them and supplying them to the company since it is servicing a large Soviet order.

Government officials concede that technology has to be upgraded in areas like fuel injection equipment, pistons and shock absorbers and capacity has to be expanded for a few products. But the Government is licensing new capacity, excise on ancillary products may be cut to lure in entrants to the business, and the overall position is not worrisome, an Industry Ministry official claims.

The silver lining in all this is that both vehicle and component manufacturers are finally moving on the ancillary front. Maruti will invest up to 26 per cent of the equity of a few new units that will bring fresh know-how and capacity to areas where these are scarce. Eicher is talking to 25 to 30 small units about meeting its needs and putting them in touch with Mitsubishi for technology, and Allwyn Nissan is following suit.

The bigger component manufacturers are independently winging their way abroad in quest of new technology. Thus Clutch Auto has tied up with Aisen Seiki of the Toyota group, IIL signed up last September with Nippondenso, also of the Toyota stable, for dashboard instruments, Bharat Gears has a collaboration with Koyo Seiko for steering gears, Pran Talwar's Talbros Automotive Components approached UK collaborator Payen and struck a deal for gasket know-how with Sanwa, a Japanese company in which Payen has a stake, and Lucas is making overtures to Hitachi. And in a deal that dovetails the investment needs of Shri Ram Fibres and the product requirements of DCM-Toyota, Shri Ram Fibres is venturing into electrical parts

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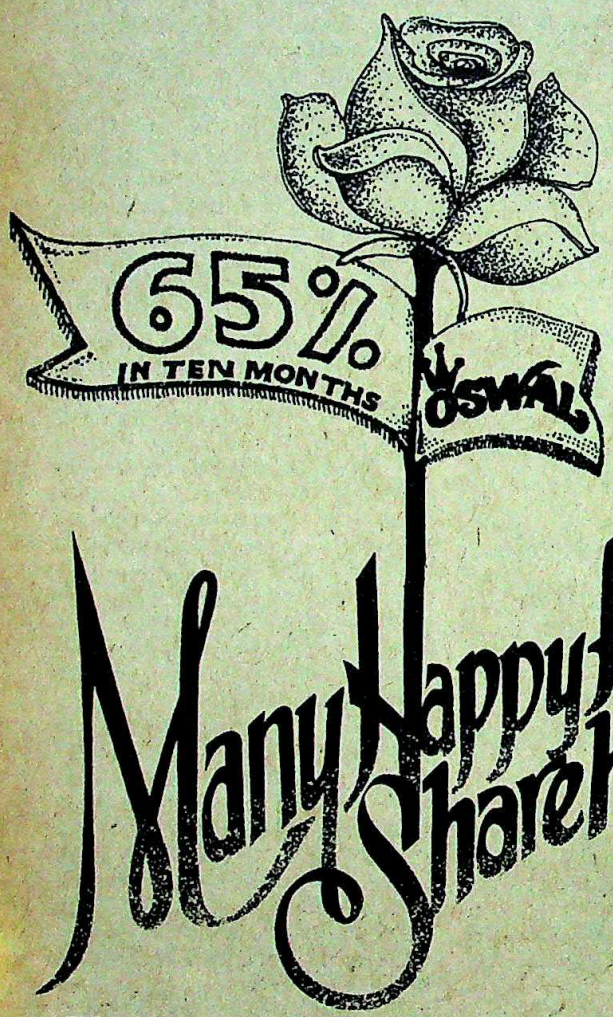
With a view to augmenting its long term resources for normal capital expansion and also to strengthen its equity base, Arihant Fabrics is offering 22,880 13.5% Convertible Bonds of Rs. 250/- each. A total of Rs. 57.20 lacs is being raised; Rs.52 lacs through the Rights Issue to Equity Shareholders while Rs. 5.20 lacs has been reserved for the Employees and Fixed Deposit Holders of the Company.

Once again, here is a good reason for you to invest in Arihant Fabrics and reap a return of 65% in just 10 months.



HERE'S HOW

Ratio of Allotment : 1 Bond for 25 Equity Shares

Investment in each Bond	Rs. 250.00
Conversion of 60% of the Bond value i.e. Rs. 150 into 15 equity shares of Rs. 10/- each on 31 Dec. 1985 15 Equity Shares x market price Rs. 20	Rs. 300.00
Interest on full Bond value @ 13.5% for 10 months	Rs. 28.13
	Rs. 84.38
Sale of Non-Convertible Portion of Rs. 100 assuming yield of 16% p.a.	Rs. 412.51
Less initial investment	Rs. 250.00
Gain	Rs. 162.51
Return in just 10 months	65%

Letters of offer have already been mailed to all the Equity Shareholders. In case the Letter of offer has not been received, kindly contact the Company at the Registered Office.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

* Rapidly Growing Company–Excellent Past Performance
* Dynamic Management–Highly Competent Board
* Popular Range of Fabrics–'Oswal' Suitings, Shirtings and Dress Materials
* Diversification Programmes on the Cards
* 60% Conversion on Dec. 31, 1985
* Interest from Day one.
* Easy Liquidity-Listing at Bombay, Delhi and Ludhiana Stock Exchanges.

Issue Open from Feb. 6 to Mar. 8, 1985

Issue Managed By
STATE BANK OF INDIA
Merchant Banking Division

ARIHANT FABRICS LIMITED
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manufacture with Nippondenso.

Confirms Eicher's Bhargava, "Several component companies are talking to the Japanese." Many of these are visibly aware of the importance of a Japanese connection, and fear that vehicle manufacturers will be tied down by Japanese collaborators to buying components made to Japanese specifications. Secondly, many believe that Japanese know-how provides cost savings of up to 20 per cent, compared with US or European technology, with its emphasis on conserving materials and using plastics to make lighter vehicles, thus saving on fuel. TTL's Sudhakar convinced West German collaborator VDO that if his firm did not tie up with the Japanese, it would "be like being in a rowing boat while my competitors whizz past in Japanese-made motor boats."

The joker in this pack is the Japanese presence in the auto and ancillary industries. The money lies in CKD exports of vehicles and components, not in technology transfers. Ancillary manufacturers are worried that auto makers will continue to buy Japanese components. Says Talwar darkly, "I feel that the Japanese want to extend CKD exports to this country as long as they can." The import duty on raw materials used to make components in the country ranges from 35 per cent to over 100 per cent, making domestic components more pricey.

Such perceptions are dismissed as "absolute nonsense" by vehicle makers. They argue that the soaring dollar, combined with freight and duty, makes shopping for components at home cheaper, and Japanese calculations could run to eventually buying components from here for their plants in other nations. Nissan, for one, may have a component buying scheme on its drawing-boards. Nevertheless, screw driver imports could continue for quite some time with the proliferation of car models, each with its own phased Indian components programme. Component manufacturers therefore plan on investing some Rs 750 crore in the industry over the next five years, excluding the amounts spent on updating know-how.

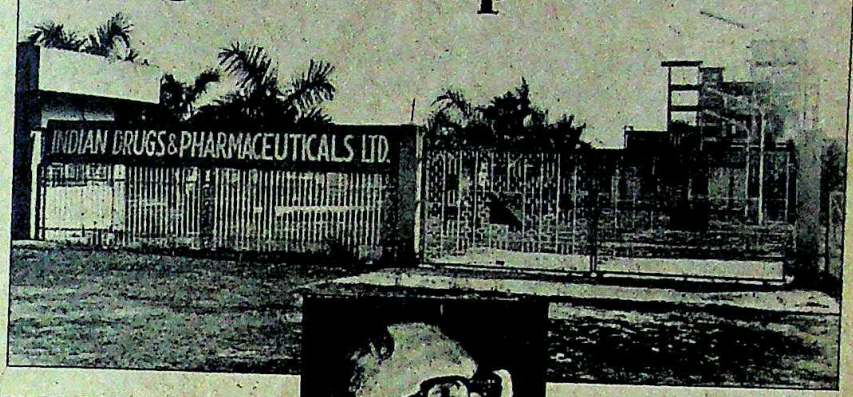
Given the time lags and the host of problems that dog them, auto makers clearly face a long haul. While the immediate future may see home-assembled Toyotas, Mitsubishis, Nissans and Peugeots on Indian roads, the outlook for their home-made counterparts is hazy now.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

K.M. KISHAN

IDPL

Caught in a Trap



Garg: an economy problem

ITS LOCATION could not have been better: a unit that depends on alcohol as a raw material being situated in the heart of a belt that has nine distilleries which produce alcohol. Yet the Muzaffarpur unit of the public sector Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd (IDPL)—claimed to be the largest of its kind in Asia —now lies closed for want of alcohol. And the harassed company officials, despite repeatedly petitioning the state Government authorities in Patna, have drawn a virtual blank.

The plant had been working only intermittently since August, but October brought a virtual famine of alcohol, and the unit was finally closed. All that the excise authorities finally doled out last fortnight was 30,000 litres —less than two days' requirements for a plant that can consume six lakh bulk litres every month. And IDPL General Manager R.V. Garg said: "We have decided to keep the plant closed as it is uneconomical to run the plant with such a meagre quantity of alcohol, and then shut it down again." Understandably, Garg was short of ideas on what to do next. "When the plant was set up, the Bihar Government had assured adequate supply of alcohol, but the Government has backed out. We don't know what to do now."

The Rs 83-crore plant produces nicotinamide, nicotinic acid, mythelethyl pyridine, acetaldehyde and acetic acid, all chemicals and intermediates used to turn out drugs. And it requires 7.2 million bulk litres of alcohol every year to keep the plant running at full steam. The nine distilleries in the area produce 10 million litres, using as raw material the molasses supplied by the 26 sugar mills in north Bihar. And, the state Government had assured the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers that the unit's full requirements of alcohol would be met on a priority basis. Those promises sound hollow now.

There is, of course, a genuine problem this year, since most sugar mills have faced a sugarcane shortage and therefore delayed their crushing operations. Said the Additional Secretary in the Excise Department, Syed Raza Imam Rizvi: "Our distilleries are closed. When we ourselves are facing a crisis, how can we think of IDPL?"

But if these comments point to the existence of a problem, they do not tell the whole truth. For the fact also is that the distilleries get a better price for their alcohol from the liquor manufacturers than from IDPL. The drug company pays Rs 1.55 per litre, and argues that it cannot pay more without violating the Excise Act. In comparison, the liquor manufacturers pay between Rs 1.75 and Rs 2 per litre. Result: the private distilleries have no alcohol for IDPL.

This is not the first time there has been an alcohol famine. The plant was closed for 53 days in 1981 because of a combined alcohol and power shortage.

The raw material problem may ease in the near future, once the sugarcane crushing gets under way. But clearly, this is going to be a recurring problem everytime a sugar season is ending or beginning. And since the cane crops vary sharply from year to year, the IDPL drug unit is going to continue gasping for life.

—FARZAND AHMED

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BANKING

Timely Transformation

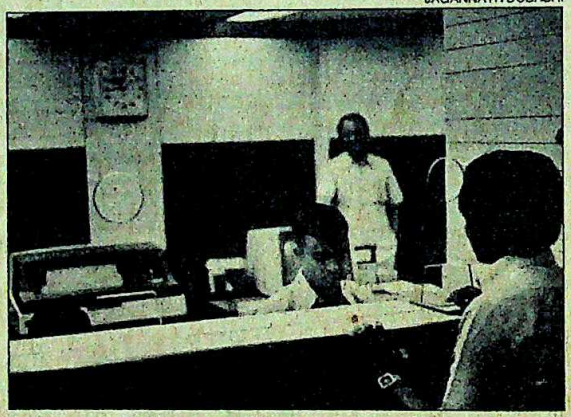
ON THE first floor of a venerable old building on one of Bombay's main arteries, a hefty stone's throw from the glistening water of the Arabian Sea, a quiet revolution is in the making. For the last six months, a team of officers of the Union Bank of India has been working with a modified computer in which specially designed software manipulates 11,000 savings bank accounts. Customers catch only a glimpse of the Rs 1 lakh machine—they still go through the usual grind of tokens and handwritten vouchers—but after they leave the machine does the same job error-free and in approximately one-tenth of the time. By March, hopes branch manager L.C. Bangera, the machine will be doing the work on its own and the ledgers will be consigned to the filing cabinets. "There are still snags to be overcome, and we cannot trust the machine until we are 100 per cent sure that it does what it is supposed to do. But we are excited about the future."

Similar scenes and enthusiastic words are seen and heard in half-a-dozen branches of the Bank of India, the State Bank of India and Central Bank of India all over Bombay, where teams of men and women crouch over green phosphor screens, buzzing floppy disk drives and crackling printers turning out bank statements and lists of accounts. They are a pleasing foretaste of the coming transformation of Indian banking, with more than a little help from the ubiquitous and indispensable microchip.

By 1987, if the recommendations in the 68-page report on the mechanisation of the banking industry produced by an 11-member committee of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are implemented in full and on time, 2,500 branches with a workload of more than 1,000 transactions a day should be equipped with 10,000 electronic ledger posting machines (ELPM), a euphemism for limited function computers, 200 mini-computers in selected large branches and offices, and 25 mainframe computers at the apex level.

That is only stage I which will cost Rs 150 crore. Stage II is to be completed by 1989 and will see an additional 6,000 branches blessed with 20,000 more ELPM's and 100 more mini-computers. The manpower requirements are massive: 40,000 to 45,000 and 1,000 systems analysts and programmers. Eventually, when the mechanisation is more or less complete—no one openly calls it computerisation for fear of hurting the union's feelings—the chip will do everything from handling customer accounts on a day-to-day basis to generating weekly and monthly reports on every conceivable aspect of banking, from savings accounts to cheque clearing, and will be aided here by the parallel MICR programme (*see box*).

JAGANNATH DUBASHI



A Union Bank clearing room

This mammoth computerisation of Indian banking is long overdue. With over 10 million customers, more than 45,000 branches handling over Rs 75,000 crore in deposits and a daily traffic of nearly 1.5 million cheques, over 3 million transactions and one million inter-branch transfers, the Indian banking system is collapsing under the weight of its own unwieldy success. As the RBI report points out gloomily, the problems are manifold: increasing delays in the posting and balancing of various ledgers with the consequent opportunity for fraud (amply borne out by recent experiences) improperly and illegibly compiled statements of accounts, out of date passbooks, disregarded standing instructions, huge delays in clearing, yet more delays in the payment of cash cheques in places where the teller system is not in operation, revenue leakage through short-collection of interest, and so on.

Thus there is an "abundance of large volumes of outdated and unprocessed data and the scarcity of vital current data needed for the fine tuning of policy measures". All this is owing to the fact that despite the multi-dimensional growth of the economy, the banking industry has remained completely insulated from mechanisation, with the sole exception of the giant State Bank of India. Says Central Bank Chairman B.V. Sonalkar: "If we don't streamline our operations now, we'll be in deep trouble." Only 100 computers now exist in banks.

But such computerisation is only at the apex and regional levels. The path to more comprehensive computerisation was cleared in September 1983, when the All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA), the National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE) and the Indian Banks Association (IBA) came to an agreement on so-called "dedicated" computers for front offices and full-fledged computers for use in the back offices.

The main objectives of the mechanisation drive are improved customer service, housekeeping and up to date data generation for management information systems. To this end the RBI committee has proposed two models. The first is the "front office" model where the ELPM with its floppy disk-based memory is placed on the counter and generates a series of reports when basic information like the amount of a deposit or a withdrawal is keyed in. Several machines can perform a number of dedicated functions: processing current and savings accounts and other daily transactions on the spot, making up the day book and the general ledger, printing pass-books at the end of the month, and so on. Says Dr Y.B. Damle, executive director, RBI, and a member of the RBI committee: "A lot of routine paper work associated with the front office will be eliminated, with the resulting bonus of accuracy and speed." The ELPM floppies can then be fed into the mini-computer to further process information and generate housekeeping data.

The second model is the back office model, with a full-fledged computer processing the transactions after they have been posted in primary ledgers. This has obvious advantages. A floppy can only accommodate about 2,000 accounts and a respectable branch would have at least 7,500. Floppies are flimsy, fragile and easily corruptible. In that context a computer getting the information from

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series of data entry machines and storing them in a hermetically-sealed and secure Winchester drive—which stores five times as much as a floppy—would be a safer and cheaper proposition. As manufacturer after manufacturer points out privately, the benefits in terms of both reliability, security and cost would be immediate. The experts concur. Says Dr S. Sharma of the National Institute of Bank-ing Management, which is conducting training programmes for bank officers and testing software: "On pragmatic grounds a Winchester storage system would be the best. Floppy disks can be lost, corrupted or easily damaged irretrievably with the help of a cheap magnet. They can be stolen and accounts fiddled with."

One bank has already opted for the back office system with its emphasis on better housekeeping. An exhaustive report prepared by the State Bank's computer service department headed by Dr C.R. Bapiraju, an acknowledged leader in the field, recommends that "initially only the back office's functions be mechanised", and plumps for an "intermediate technology in between the advanced electronic banking in the West and the manual systems prevalent in the bank". Thus front office function will continue to be manual—"every transaction input must be supported by a source document such as a voucher", with the "usual authorisation", and this will be batch-processed later. The report cites several reasons for this strategy: if the system fails the branch will still have the manual procedure to fall back on, the legal acceptability of magnetic media is still not clear, auditing methods for computer data are not firmly established, and last but not least checks and security are on a much firmer footing than with a purely mechanised system. About 1,400 of the bank's 6,800 branches will be covered by the mechanisation system, to be made up of data entry machines, main computers, display screens, output printers and Winchester disk storage drives.

GLEEFUL manufacturers are already totting it up. The banking mechanisation drive is a big bonanza for the 30-odd manufacturers jockeying for a slice of the cake. Says P. Dattagupta, regional manager of Wipro Information Technology Ltd: "The programme will give a big boost to both hardware and software development." Sanjiv Krishen, regional manager, International Data Management Pvt Ltd, which has just bagged a Rs 1.5-crore contract from Citibank for three systems for its Bombay branch, adds: "This is one of the most important market segments for the computer industry in the immediate future."

It is evident that it will be some time before the banking industry settles down with its intelligent new toys. But the prospective benefits are enormous. Before computers were installed in the clearing department of the Princess Street branch of the Union Bank in Bombay—it processes 9,000 cheques worth Rs 3 crore every day—"it was a nightmare", according to Chief Manager S.K. Ukani. Now five data machines run by half-a-dozen operators do the job of 20 people in a fifth of the time and with considerably greater accuracy. The branch is in the heart of Bombay's wholesale market heartland and it is a curiously endearing sight to watch brokers and merchants climb the narrow staircase, pull a cheque out of the folds of a dhoti and hand it over to man who promptly keys it into the computer's memory. The East and the West do meet sometimes.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

CLEARING HOUSES

Chequemate

BY JULY this year, 80 per cent of all customer cheques are scheduled to carry a string of curiously shaped numbers along the bottom. If things work out well, those numbers will help reduce the time taken for clearing inter-city cheques from four weeks to just a day.

To the special machines that will decipher these numbers, there will be available all the relevant information relating to the account, the branch and the type of transaction. In the first phase, 1,000 branches in the four cities (which handle over half of all clearing traffic) will be equipped with encoding machines, while another 80 sorter-sorter machines at large branches and selected clearing houses will sort out the cheques. The time spent in the sheer drudgery of processing millions of cheques will be cut drastically. The total cost of the first phase: $ 5 million (Rs 6.5 crore).

The need for this long-delayed step came from a visit to the Bombay Bankers' Clearing House of the RBI. On February 5, 1985, this cleared 1,25,168 cheques worth Rs 207.29 crore in the first of two daily clearings. The clearing house has 83 member banks and processes Rs 250 crore of cheque transactions every day. The only part of this gigantic task which is computerised is the settlement section, where a computer linked to a dozen terminals works out, 10 minutes after the data has been fed, how much each bank owes to the others. Earlier, this operation was entirely and exasperatingly manual and used to take all of six hours.

But everything else is still entirely and exasperatingly manual. The result is that at the 532 clearing houses in the country, clearing an intra-city cheque can take four days and clearing an inter-city one more than four weeks. No wonder then that the size of the 'float' in a system which handles anything between one million and 1.5 million cheques a day is an unacceptable 20 per cent of the total amount. The RBI working group's report on cheque processing says mournfully: "Customer service is suffering tremendously and to say the least, the bank's performance is rather sub-optimal in this area of work." The solution now being adopted is cheques with magnetic ink character recognition (MICR).

MICR will cut down the swelling float because, coupled with an inter-city centralised clearing system that the RBI is putting finishing touches to, clearing time between the four main cities is expected to be cut down to a day: "Overnight service", as Dr Y.B. Damle, executive director, RBI, and the moving force behind the plan, puts it. For another the cost of clearing a cheque will be slashed from the present Rs 6 to less than Rs 2. Human error will be reduced to a minimum.

There is some doubt about whether the tight schedule will actually be honoured. The tenders went out last month. Only one or two banks actually have MICR cheques in circulation to find out how they stand the grind. No bank actually has an encoder, even for trial. Some measure of the way things have dragged on can be had from the fact that the Damle report came out 18 months ago. But with the volume of cheques increasing at the rate of 11 per cent every year, bankers have no choice but to pull up their socks and get on with it.

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TYRES

Taking a Spin

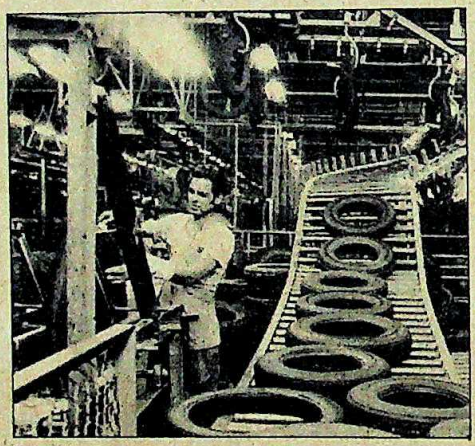
IT'S BEEN a long, downhill bumpy ride—and the bumps are showing. At least two of the 12 industry majors are in the red, three are on the borderline, and five others operate on slim profit margins. One has piled up losses of over Rs 23 crore. Another has been off the dividend list for years, has not provided for depreciating assets, and total losses exceed its share capital. Conceded S.S. Siddhu, secretary to the Department of Industrial Development till he moved over last fortnight to the Civil Aviation Ministry: "Tyre companies are not doing well."

So if the tyre companies are hollering, they have cause to. Longer-wearing "radial" tyres and better tyre retreading processes have worn down sales in the tyre replacement market, which is the mainstay of the industry's business. This has combined with plummeting sales to a troubled road transport industry and excess production capacities to send the industry skidding off the highway. Eleven big firms, excluding the producers of two and three-wheeler tyres, can in theory produce about 53 lakh more tyres than the estimated demand this year of 73 lakh tyres. Some of this capacity may exist only on paper, but with 26 per cent of the industry's total capacity unutilised, surplus capacities are now dirty words in the industry's lexicon.

Things may now get worse. The Government has issued letters of intent for fresh capacities of some 90 lakh tyres, while some existing companies have launched expansion schemes because the exchequer reimburses them half their total investment in plant and machinery. So excess capacity could become a still bigger problem. As a result the industry as a whole is up in arms.

The Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA) which represents the heavyweights of the industry, has been fighting a rearguard battle to scuttle the licence applications of Larsen & Toubro, Nirlon, and the Birlas' Kesoram Industries to make 30 lakh tyres in all. And last fortnight, industry executives pointed grimly to the experience of tyre companies world-wide. Michelin and Dunlop are in hot water, Ceat has gone into receivership, Mansfield has folded up, and Firestone has pulled out of Asia, Africa and Europe—all victims of industry-wide over-capacity. Says V.C. Vishwanathan, vice-president in charge of marketing at JK Industries: "The same situation could be repeated here." What is immediately worrying industry men is production capacities in the next five years. They argue that capacities by 1989-90 will vastly exceed what is required.

The big question raised last fortnight was: is the industry crying wolf? Some government officials voiced suspicions that the industry wants to restrict the entry of new firms and revert to the seller's market of the early 1970s. Says an official in the directorate-general of trade and development (DGTD): "Tyre companies want to be in a monopoly position." Others too contest the industry position that excess capacity is being ushered in. In fact, the draft report of the Industry Ministry's working group on tyres and tubes predicts a 36 lakh shortfall in capacity by 1989-90.



Tyres cascading: excess capacity

The working group's methods have come under fire from the tyre industry in three areas. The industry argues that the annual demand growth figures for autos and hence for tyres have been pitched too high (over 20 per cent for cars); that the installed capacity of over 50 small units has been ignored because DGTD has no data on them; and that the rapidly growing two-wheeler market segment has been clubbed together with other sectors to distort overall growth estimates. Vishwanathan, who represents ATMA on the committee, says that the group also overlooked the possibility of tyre companies resorting to the 5 per cent automatic capacity increase provision and the 25 per cent cushion that is allowed over and above the licensed capacity. Together with the 210 lakh capacity of the 50-plus small units, this would take industry capacity to a whopping 375 lakh in five years—a surplus of 104.14 lakh if the companies operate at 85 per cent efficiency. But if the Government errs on one side, the industry estimate does on the other. For the assumption that all firms will necessary plump for automatic capacity expansion has not so far been borne out by past experience.

The industry's case really rests on the capacity of the 50-odd unregistered units. A DGTD official believes that of the 210 lakh capacity attributed by the industry, 200 lakh exists only on paper and serves only to pre-empt others from entering the industry. Thus a proposal was floated at a meeting of the working group last December, to compel those companies to come under licensing regulations.

But the DGTD estimate of fictitious capacity may be too high, as many firms that are faring well in the market are not registered with it. For instance, Metro Tyres claims a turnover of Rs 30 crore, and regularly advertises on television. And Wearwell Tyre and Tube has applied for ATMA membership and has a technical collaboration agreement with a US firm. Notes M.R. Kulkarni, joint adviser in the Planning Commission's industry division and a member of the committee: "Unregistered capacity seems to be the problem. There may be some truth in the industry's allegation."

But other government officials argue that higher exports and lower costs may pull tyre companies out of the trough. Exports will shoot up to Rs 45 crore this year from Rs 12 crore last year. the 66 per cent excise on tyres may cut in the next budget and lower tyre prices could push up flagging sales. But the rising export curve may dip once closed US plants reopen to produce specialised tyres for trucks, and an excise cut may not help much if the demand for tyres is price inelastic. And unless the issue of small companies' capacities is resolved, the industry could be spinning along to harder times.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHEW

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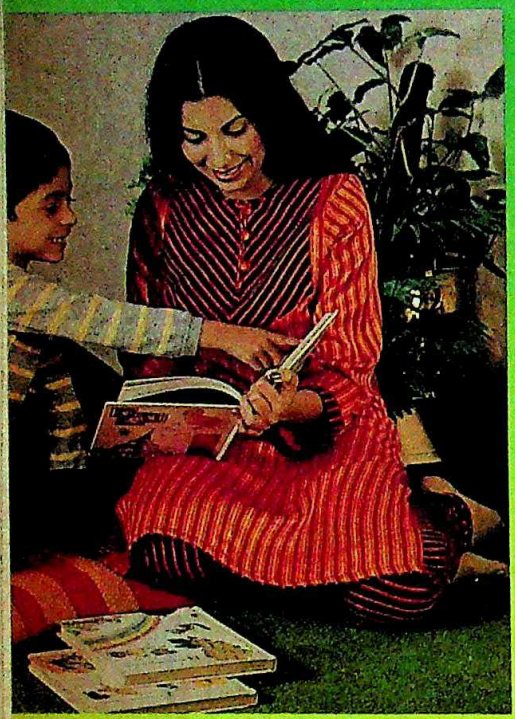
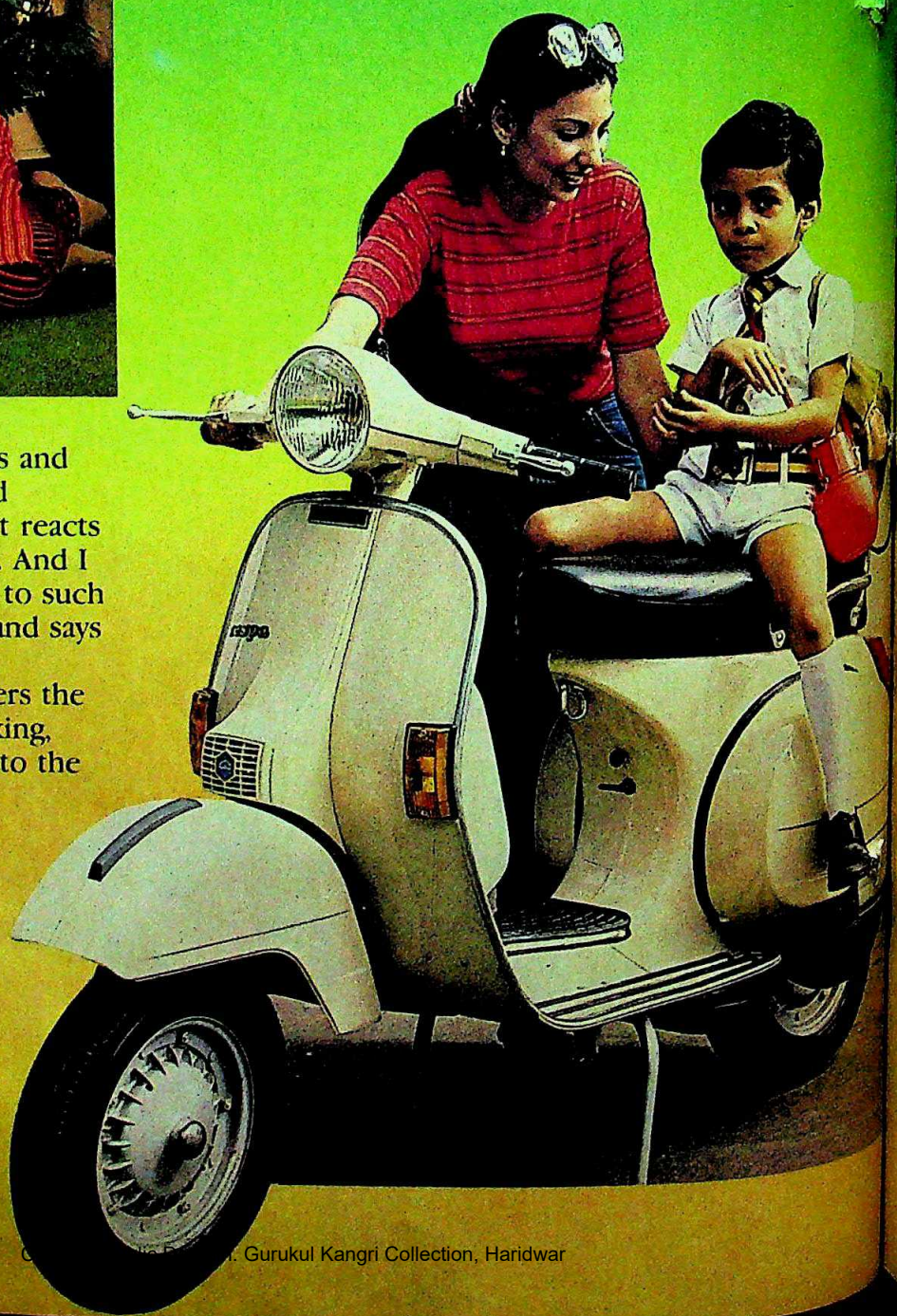
ON THE ROAD WITH A VESPA XE RIDER



"It's so safe, comfortable and easy to take care of. I'm sure it must have been designed by a woman."

It takes the bumps and potholes with care and respect for the rider. It reacts instantly to the brakes. And I love the way it comes to such a stable halt. My husband says it's because of a new suspension that transfers the impact of sudden braking, from the front wheel to the rear.



LOHIA MACHINES LTD. AND PIAGGIO OF ITALY

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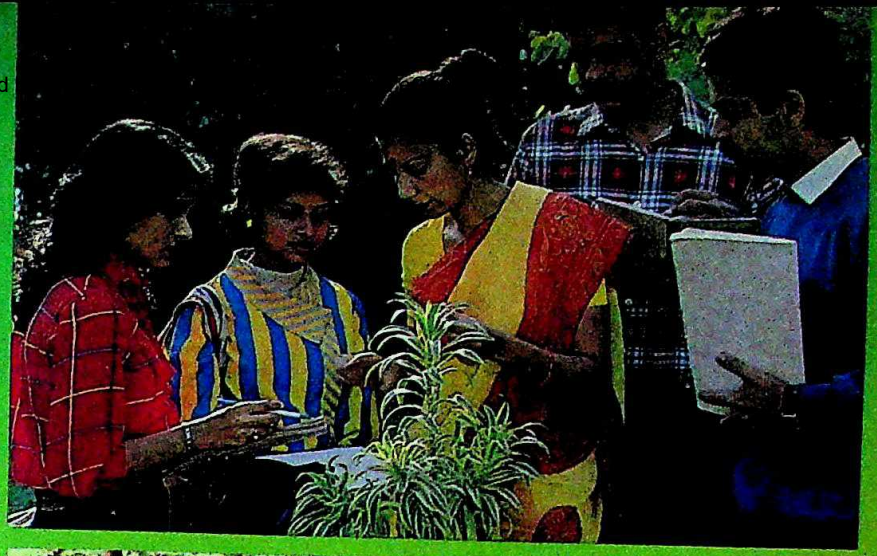
Digitized

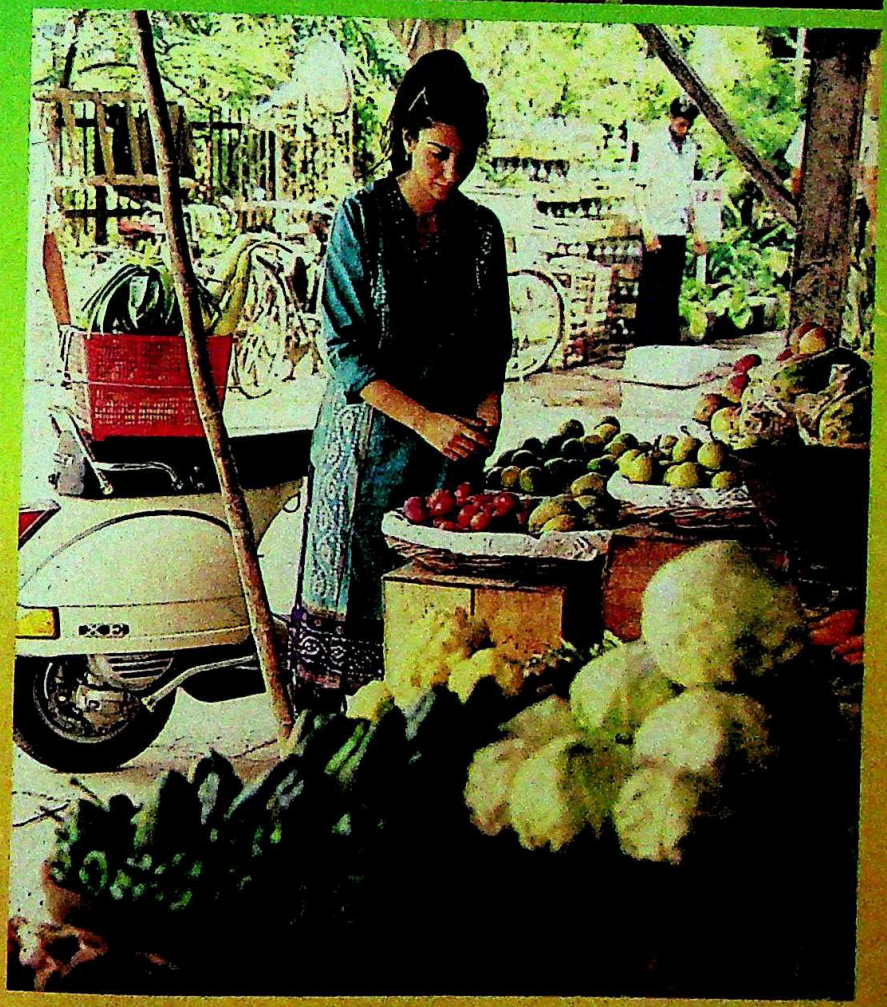
It's also balanced very well and that's important when you're on two wheels, taking your high spirited son to school or winding your way through congested bazars.

I teach Botany at the University but my husband is more mechanically inclined. He recommended Vespa XE and he can rattle off over twenty reasons why it's a superior machine.

I don't remember all of them, but I'm sure of one thing. It's such a considerate two wheeler... it must have been designed by a woman.

My husband, of course, characteristically disagrees.





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vespa XE
from
Lohia Machines Ltd
and
Piaggio of Italy

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DUNCANS

Runglee Rungliot

THE LEGENDARY DARJEELING TEA

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Centuries ago, there was a Buddhist monk, who travelled far and wide in search of the best tea Darjeeling could offer. He found it finally in a tea so exquisite, that he proclaimed, 'Runglee Rungliot'—Thus far and no further! The ultimate in tea quality had been found.

From the mists of legend comes this exquisite Darjeeling Tea, brought to you by Duncans and named after the legend.... Runglee Rungliot.

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TAX LAW

Pandora's Box

THE ISSUES involved seem arcane, but the verdict is rocking the corporate world. Hundreds of companies may have to hand over a total of Rs 150 crore to Rs 200 crore plus hefty interest amounts when the taxman comes calling, triggering off cash flow problems for the more imprudent. Those strapped for cash may have to head for the banks hat in hand. And firms could stand indicted for breaking the law.

That Pandora's box was opened by a landmark Supreme Court ruling last fortnight that lays to rest a 15-year-old controversy. The court held that in the given context the capital employed by companies excludes borrowings—a rude shock to firms that had believed the contrary and claimed tax holidays by calculating deductions as a percentage of net worth plus borrowings. Expectedly, Nani Palkhivala, chairman of Associated Cement Companies Ltd and principal lawyer for the host of petitioners led by Lohia Machines Ltd, was critical of the judgement: "On well settled principles of law which have been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court itself in earlier cases, the latest majority judgement is insupportable in law."

Unfortunately, so ambiguous is the term "capital employed" that the judges were able to quote Palkhiwala's contentions right back at him. The judgement reads cuttingly: "It will thus be seen that there is no unanimity amongst accountants and lawyers in regard to the question whether 'capital employed' necessarily includes long-term borrowings."

The law in question is Section 80 (J) of the Income Tax Act. It provides that new undertakings, hotels or ships can deduct 6 per cent of the capital employed, and private companies 7.5 per cent, from their taxable income. This statutory law has to be read along with Rule 7 (A) of the Income Tax Rules which narrows the law's ambit. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) rule defines capital employed as the net worth of the company and excludes borrowings. While giving their verdict four of the five judges on the bench ruled that the CBDT was justified in defining it that way. The problem of course was that for 19 years the definition had been quite different and no one had said anything. It was the change by a government order that made the companies go to court.

Estimates of the money at stake range from a financial daily's Rs 170 crore to a weekly's Rs 400 crore. A pointer could be Finance Ministry figures which show that nearly 2,300 corporate and non-corporate assessees are disputing government tax claims of about Rs 112 crore for the 1970-80 decade and high-growth companies which have sunk fat sums into expansion or greenfield ventures in the last 10 years will be hit unless

"The latest majority judgement is insupportable in law."

NANI PALKHIVALA

other tax shelters are available. In theory, a firm that had invested Rs 100 crore in new projects, 65 per cent of which was borrowed, could now be slapped with a Rs 5 crore tax demand.

Big borrowers like shipping companies and hotels should logically face the biggest crunch. For shipping companies are allowed to raise up to six times their equity as loans, as against the norm of two times for other companies. But shipping firms are sinking in an ocean of red ink, and the court ruling affects only those with black ink on their ledgers. Thus Great Eastern Shipping Company, perhaps the only shipping firm that is making profits will be badly hit. Says Vasanth Sheth, chairman of Great Eastern which was one of the petitioners, "This decision will impose on us an additional burden of Rs 1 crore which comes to a substantial 2 per cent of our net worth." And Moiz Pancha, general manager, finance and accounts of Indian Hotels Company, puts his company's arrears at over Rs 57 lakh and the hotel industry's liability at about Rs 4 crore.

A number of the top 100 corporations have not stashed away money to meet additional tax demands. Explains tax consultant O.P. Vaish: "Unlike in excise cases, the liability was not expected to arise because five out of six high courts had ruled in favour of companies." But many believe that the far-sighted outnumber the imprudent. Notes H.R. Gupta, vice-president, fibre project, Straw Products Ltd, a JK group firm: "Most companies have been making a provision after the Section 80 (J) amendment, except those that subsequently started incurring losses." Thus Lohia Machines has a tax liability of only Rs 25 lakh for deductions claimed from 1976-77 to 1978-79 because it switched to conservative accounting practices when the law was amended. Other firms had opted for safer tax shelters. The resourceful Reliance Textile Industries claimed last fortnight that it would not be affected because it used other provisions to trim its tax liabilities to the bone.

Some in industry are also haunted by the spectre of having violated the law. Going by Section 80 (J), firms arrived at higher profit and dividend figures than entitled to. The Government is unlikely to prosecute, but with dividends to be paid out of profits and not capital, that could be a breach of company law.

Last fortnight however, executives were charging the Government with breach of faith and arguing that the law should have been made clear. Says Vinay Kumar Jain, chief executive, corporate planning of Lohia Machines: "It's like giving a man a ladder and jerking it away once he has climbed a few steps."

The point is well taken. The Government could have withdrawn the incentive in 1975, when the Calcutta High Court ruled against it. And the rule itself is clumsily worded. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament castigated CBDT in its 75th report. Referring to a Rule 19 (A)-related case won by Indian Oil Corporation against the income tax authorities in the Bombay High Court in 1973, it pointed out that the rule was faultily framed. In this particular case, if an assessee owned four undertakings the combined debts would be subtracted from the capital employed in a single undertaking. The CBDT chairman admitted to the committee that this was a lapse on CBDT's part. Still, "the department did not take the opportunity of making suitable changes in the working of Rule 19 (A) for making the meaning clear and unambiguous".

Meanwhile, with the curtain rung down on a cliff-hanging tax drama, the business world was predicting that new projects would go on stream with other tax incentives around, and reconciling itself to the court's verdict.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI with bureau reports

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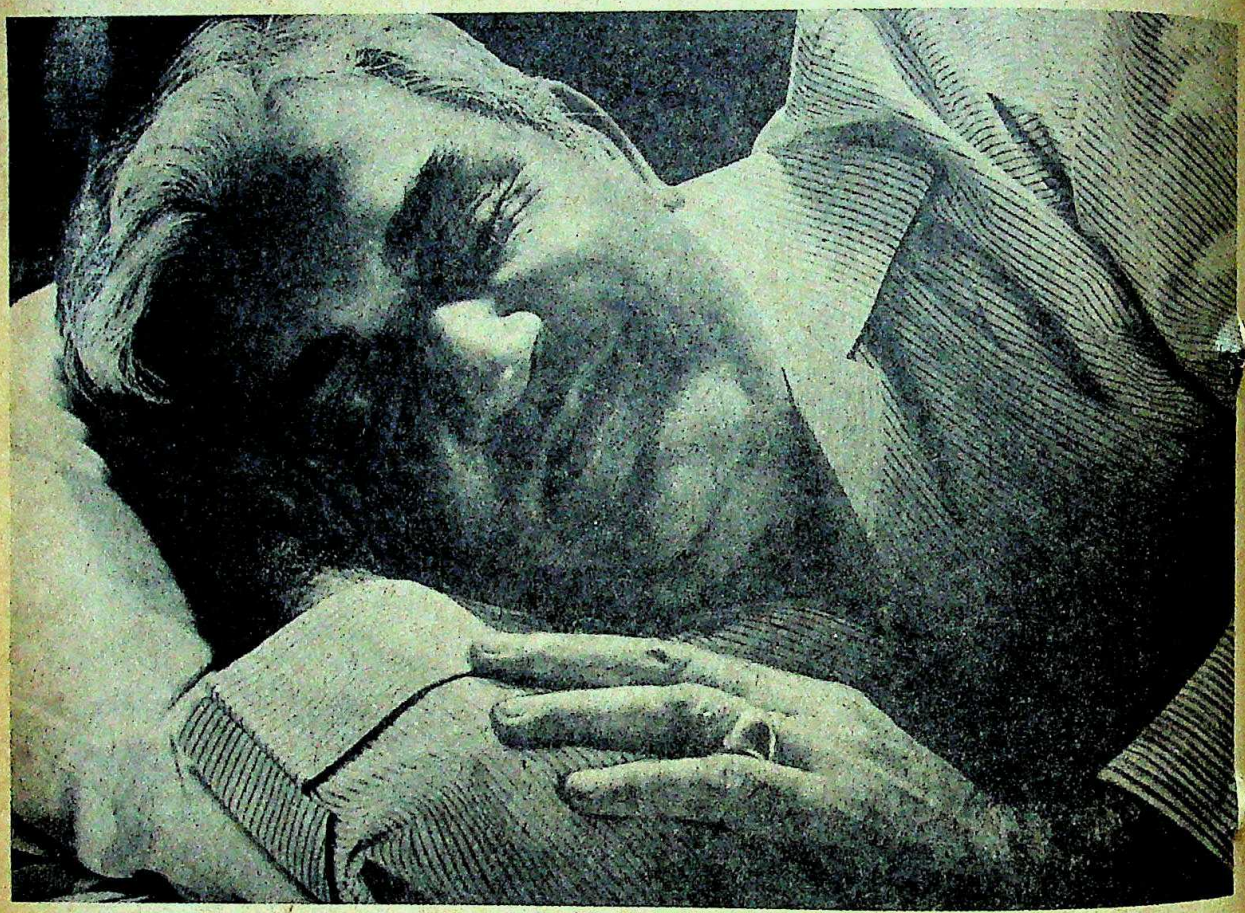
While this gentleman is very much at sea level behind his smile is an aircraft flying 25,000 feet high!



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COIR INDUSTRY

Tied up in Knots

THE COIR industry in Kerala seems to have tied itself up in knots. What was once a flourishing business that provided the major source of income to four lakh people, is today beset by a host of tangled problems. The export of coir and coir products, which brought in Rs 30 crore in foreign exchange, has been declining steadily. And more than half the coir factories in Alleppey, a picturesque coastal town that is the centre of the world coir trade, lie closed and silent.

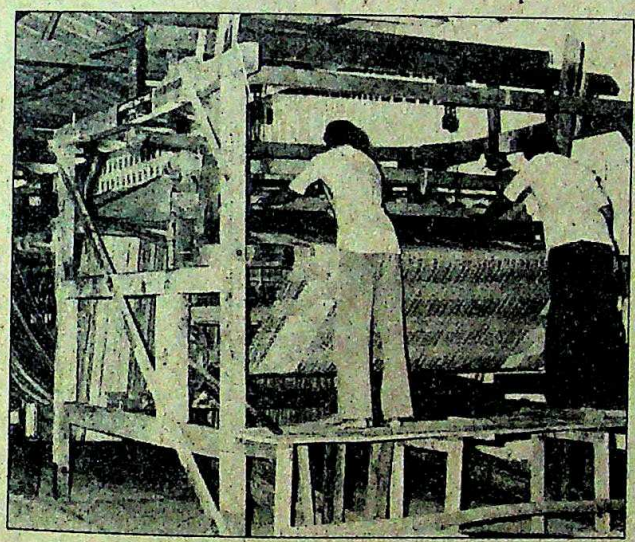
From an average of 56,000 tonnes of coir yarn in the late 1950s to an average of 29,000 tonnes in the early 1970s, exports have crashed still lower in recent years, averaging barely 15,000 tonnes in the 1980s. The drop in the quantity exported has been a staggering 72 per cent, and exports in 1983-84 were barely two-thirds of what was achieved five years ago.

The versatile fibre, extracted from coconut husk and used for making such varied products as ropes, brushes, doormats, carpets, mattresses and cushions, is classified as a premier industrial hard fibre. But a combination of forces has brought about a steady decline, including a sharp drop in raw material availability, a consequent surge in input prices, the failure to mechanise, and a confused and counter-productive government policy regulating the raw material supply.

Coconut production in the state has been hit by a severe drought and a virulent virus, the root wilt disease. The annual harvest has consequently fallen from 4 billion nuts in the early 1970s to barely 2 billion now, and adversely affected virtually every coconut-based industry in the state.

The downstream effects are close to catastrophic. "The single biggest contributor to the coir industry's dismal showing is an almost 400 per cent increase in the price of raw materials," says Ravi Karunakaran, one of the country's leading exporters of coir products. Adds Sreedharan Nair, president of the Travancore Coir Mats and Matting Manufacturers Association and manager of Aspinwall Exporters: "Every day I come to the office hoping that there is no new order on the telex. Because even if there is an order, we cannot execute it due to the raw material shortage."

Matters have not been helped by the fact that all efforts to modernise the industry have met with stiff resistance from both the Government and the labour unions, on the grounds that this will lead to labour displacement. The method of producing coir at present is both laborious and time-consuming. The majority of the half a dozen panels that have gone into the industry's ills have favoured mechanisation, especially in the post-yarn stages, but this was bitterly opposed by Alleppey's then CPI(M) parliamentarian Susheela Gopalan, on the plea that traditionally coir has been a cottage industry, with lakhs of people depending on it for a living.



A coir matting loom in Alleppey: archaic equipment

One result has been that India's traditional coir rival, Sri Lanka, has moved ahead with revolutionary pre-crushing machines. Chinese rush mats have also become a serious competitor in the world market owing to the fact that these are cheaper than coir products.

Many private exporters in Kerala also blame state government policy for their problems. The usual target of attack is the Government's licensing procedures and the restrictions placed on the inter-district movement of husk. Both were designed to help the communist-run coir cooperatives get their husk requirements at reasonable prices, with the Husk Control Order (HCO) being implemented in 1973 by the then CPI industry minister T.V.Thomas.

But the Government-controlled price of husk now is only Rs 100 per thousand husks, while the open market rate is as high as Rs 380. Not surprisingly, the cooperatives do not get as much husk as they need. And because of the restrictions on taking husk across a district border, a lot of the available husk is simply burnt as domestic fuel. So while the HCO's objectives may have been laudable, all that it has really achieved is the creation of an artificial shortage on top of the already existing scarcity of husks. And Ravi Karunakaran has no doubt in his mind that the high husk prices are clearly a creation of the HCO.

With the situation getting from bad to worse, however, and faced with the prospect of the rug being literally pulled out from under its feet, the state Government is finally having second thoughts on the HCO. Industry Minister E. Ahmed promised at a workshop held in Cochin recently that he would introduce liberalisations and a more practicable system of levy procurement. But this could be easier said than done. For the Kerala State Cooperative Coir Marketing Federation is just as determined to stop any such move. Said Thachady Prabhakaran, Congress(I) MLA and president of the federation: "We will not allow the Government to scrap the HCO, as that will kill the cooperatives." Prabhakaran in fact argues that there is a good market within India for coir products, and that this can be suitably exploited. The federation, which has about 450 cooperatives under its umbrella, has set up 36 offices in different states to popularise coir products.

Clearly, there are going to be serious hurdles in the way of any major revision of the Government's policy for the coir industry. And what exactly will be achieved eventually remains to be seen. But unless the Government takes some concrete steps, the coir industry could be in for some lean times. —SREEDHAR PILLAI

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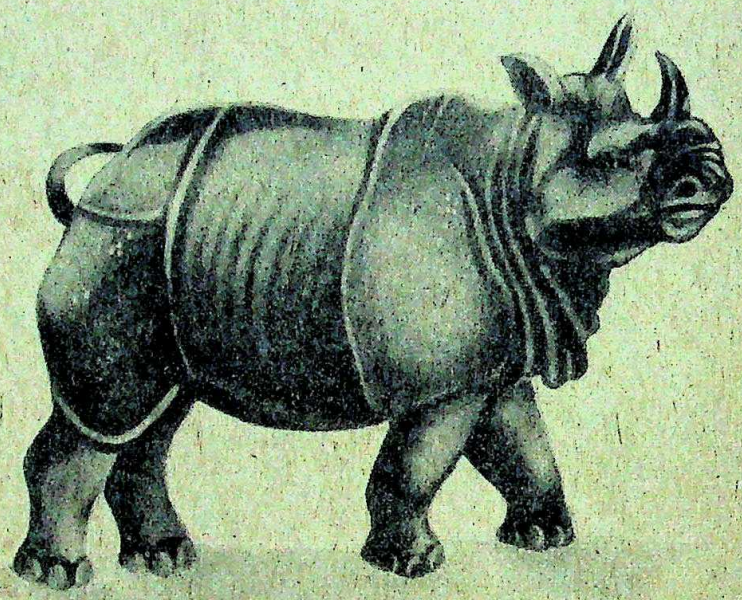

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This has been another record crop year. This year Punjab will buy more. Lots more. We can put your product amongst their purchases.

How we'll get you a major market share. From day one, our vast distribution network will rush your products into every corner of the state. From large towns like Ludhiana and Amritsar to the remotest village like Kotli, Surat Mali.

From day to day we will monitor and control distribution tightly through our 4 regional offices and 12 area offices. With constant feedback on consumer reactions to your product and consumer needs too. So you can realign strategy if you need to. Quickly and accurately. And even plan on new products.

All of this is done with strategically planned marketing programmes by our team. Senior professionals in the field. Deeply respected for their rural marketing expertise.

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And extensive consumer research data covering over 3000 homes in 6 representative districts in Punjab. Covering farms and homes in remote villages and cities. A sample that you know straight away gives you an excellent accuracy factor.

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Punjab's problems. Have they ended? Yes. Punjab has had its share of problems but

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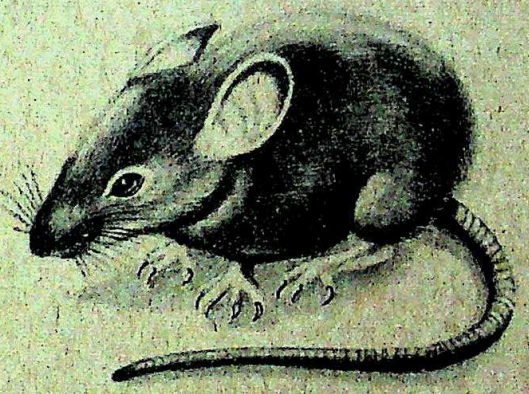

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• Segment distributon and market development: This arrangement with us allows you to develop a market in the remote areas of Punjab where you haven't been represented before. And which could be very lucrative for you.

How to start the ball rolling. Write to us right away. Tell us about your organisation and your products. And we'll get back to you with information. We'll arrange to meet you and talk over what we can do for you.

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KINETIC ENGINEERING

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Damaging Discount

BILL discounting is a common practice in business circles. Most commercial bills have to be paid 90 to 180 days in the future. And a company that does not want to wait for its money can 'sell' the bill to another company in return for instant cash, minus the discounting fee of around 15 per cent. For additional surety, the bills are often 'co-accepted' by a commercial bank, which for a small fee, stands guarantee that the company which is discounting the bill will get its money.

Hundreds of crores of rupees change hands every week in such transactions. And as in every other kind of financial give and take, there is the possibility that the money will, sometimes, go astray. Last month it did, and caught in the embarrassing glare of publicity were the Central Bank of India, the Kinetic Engineering Company of Pune (turnover: Rs 54 crore), and the sum of Rs 2.23 crore.

On a Thursday early last month, Arun Firodia, a director of Kinetic, was called to his office in Pune to find a team of officials from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The officials politely asked him to hand over a list of documents. These related to six bills that Kinetic had discounted from two companies, Technica International Engineering of Bombay and Karimbil Industries of Bangalore. The 180-day bills were to have matured on December 31, and Kinetic had expected to receive Rs 2.23 crore from the Central Bank of India. Instead, the bank had filed a case with the police charging that the bills allegedly for materials supplied were fake, and that Firodia and the other parties were involved in a fraud.

Firodia was to be a guest of the CBI for the next few days. He even bedded down in the Bureau's Bombay offices that night, unable to attend a nephew's wedding in Delhi. Nobody was sure if Firodia was under arrest, and according to one senior officer, the CBI "overreacted". Firodia himself laughs off the arrest as a "misunderstanding".

But there is more to the case than misunderstandings. According to the bank, the six bills in question had been co-accepted by the branch manager of its Napean Sea Road branch although he had no authority to do so, and that this had been done in fraudulent collusion with Firodia and the companies that originally issued the bills.

Firodia argues that it is his money that is involved, not the bank's, that he had taken the co-acceptance at face value without knowing that the branch manager had overstepped his authority, and that the discounting of the six bills had been nothing more than routine transactions. Kinetic has been flush with funds for some time because of deposits collected from people in the queue for its mopeds. It had used this money to earn a good return by discounting 491 bills worth Rs 20 crore in the six months till December.

The big question is whether Arun Firodia is involved in the fraud, as the Central Bank alleges, or whether bank officials were the culprits, as Firodia charges.

Firodia also points out a series of oddities in support of his innocence: the companies that sold their bills to Kinetic, he had later found out, had opened their accounts in the Napean Sea Road branch only a day before Kinetic paid up after discounting the bills, and the money was withdrawn the following day—not through the branch but through the regional office of the bank. Did this suggest that others in the bank were also involved? It is also alleged that the companies that initially issued the bills were "insubstantial".

So the fact of fraud cannot be denied. The big question however is whether Kinetic was involved in the fraud, as the bank alleges, or whether bank officials were the culprits, as Firodia charges. In defence of their stand, Kinetic spokesmen point out that the Central Bank has had over 400 cases of fraud in the last year, and that they had no means of knowing that a Central Bank branch manager did not have the authority to co-accept bills (branch managers in other banks do). Also, the bank had initially not charged Kinetic with being an accomplice. This, the spokesmen say, was an afterthought designed to protect the bank from legal action.

From the bank's side, the story is somewhat different. Bank officials say they first smelt a rat around September, after a broker tipped them off on the subject. D.K. Contractor, general manager of the bank, explains that Firodia was then invited over and given the facts: that a bill co-accepted by a branch manager is not valid if not countersigned by his superior, and that the Napean Sea Road branch was in any case not authorised to co-accept bills. Six weeks later, the bank wrote to Kinetic that "we are not liable and have assumed no liabilities or obligations on the said instruments". Kinetic fired back with a firm riposte: "We deny that the acceptance and the accompanying documents are not genuine. Your contentions are unbusinesslike, immoral and illegal and are detrimental to the reputation of and faith in banking institutions." Central Bank wrote back through its lawyer, charging Kinetic with being in collusion with its branch manager, and the "drawer" and "acceptor" of the bills, and said that the matter was being referred to the CBI.

Firodia now says he will answer only in court. And whatever the truth of the matter, it will be some time before the clouds clear. Meanwhile, the affair has set off tremors in business circles. Says one industrialist: "If the basic trust which underlies these deals is broken, where do we go?" That question is doubly relevant for Kinetic, which had initially invested large sums of surplus cash on the inter-corporate market, only to lose out when a large borrowing company collapsed. Kinetic had then turned to the bill discounting market, believing this to be a safer bet. But the company's problems of plenty continue.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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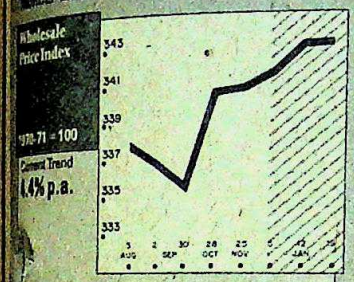
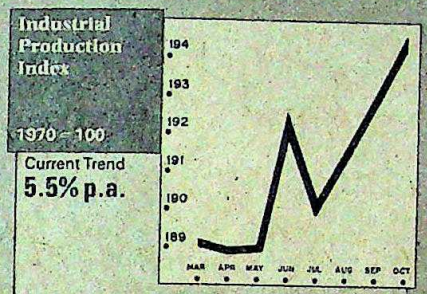
THE OUTLOOK for industry, especially for manufacturing and power, appears encouraging, with a healthy increase last month. Money supply registered a sharp increase, in spite of a credit slowdown by commercial banks. While share prices were buoyant over the last fortnight, bullion prices were stationary showing a declining long term trend.

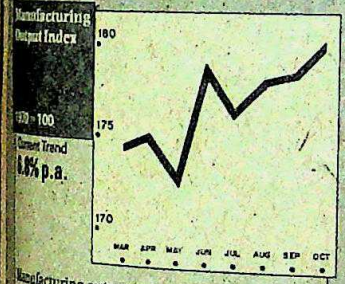
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months' data to which a regression is fitted.



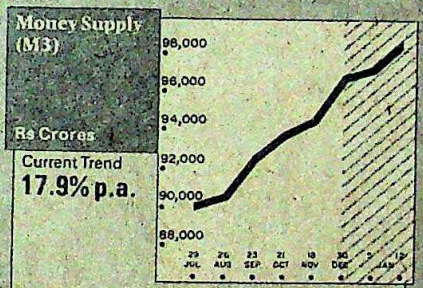
Relatively steep increases in the prices of food and primary goods led to a spurt of 0.4% in wholesale prices last fortnight.



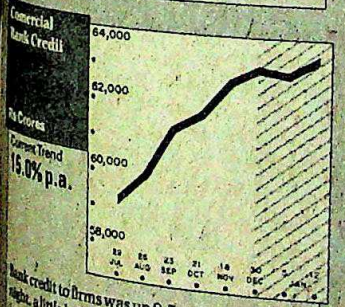
Industrial production accelerated to record 0.8 per cent growth in October, well above trend, owing to a spurt in manufacturing output.



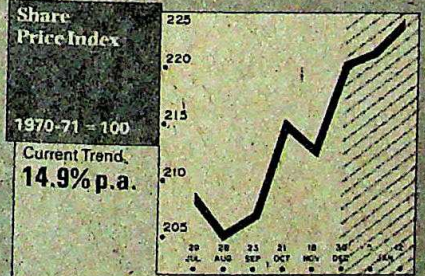
Manufacturing output rose nearly 1 per cent in October, due to increases in electrical machinery, textiles, chemicals and rubber products.



Sharp expansion of RBI credit to the government contributed to a 1.9 per cent growth in money supply last fortnight.

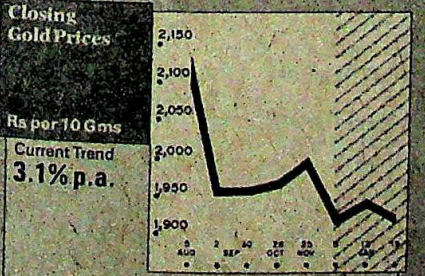


Bank credit to firms was up 0.5 per cent last fortnight, a little below the long term trend, indicating some financial austerity.



Optimism in the share market is indicated by a 1.7 per cent rise in share prices last fortnight, especially in cement, tea, paper and textiles.

Power generation registered a surge of 2.2 per cent last month, accelerating significantly over previous months.



Bullion prices recorded no change last fortnight except for a sharp peak in the middle, well above the declining long term trend.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Sectors with Maximum Growth September 1984

	% Growth
Dry Cells	46.10
Synthetic Resins and Plastics	37.98
Motor Cars	36.87
Rubber Footwear	28.18
Other Footwear	27.06
Textile Machinery	26.67
Metallurgical Machinery	26.21
Hydrogenated Oil (Vanaspati)	21.10
Power Generation Equipment	18.95
Paints	16.06
Typewriters & Duplicators	14.52
Electrical Motors	13.62
Medical Products	12.58
Tea Machinery	12.14
Artificial Leather	10.84
Airconditioners & Refrigerators	10.76
Jute Textiles	10.62
Vegetable & Animal Oil Excl Edible Oils	10.32
Laboratory Ware	10.23
Cement Machinery	10.08
Hollow Ware	9.24
Weighing Machines	8.47
Saw Mills	8.25
Iron and Steel Casting Forging	7.79
Matches	7.45
Special Steels	7.31
Tyres and Tubes	6.88
Watches & Clocks	6.71
Dairy Machinery	6.68
Power Driven Pumps	6.22
Automobile Ancillaries	5.59
Dairy Products	5.59
Sewing & Knitting Machines	5.49
MFG Leather Prdts	5.22
Jewellery	4.67
Confectionery	4.34
Boilers	3.98
Drugs and Pharmaceuticals	3.96
Paper Machinery	3.74
Storage Batteries	3.64
Organic Chemicals	3.17
Industrial Instruments	3.08
Grain Mill Products	2.82
Mathematical Instruments	2.81
Manmade Fibre	2.80
Electrical Lamps	2.66
Transport Equipment	2.35

Of 119 series considered, 69 with a weight of 55.3 accelerated and 50 with a weight of 392 decelerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1984	1983
Fertilisers		
Thousand tonnes, January	510.0	348.4
Rail Movement		
Net tonne kilometres, December	15311	15362
Letters of Intent		
Numbers, December	168	249
Industrial Licences		
Numbers, December	110	138
Foreign Collaborations		
During the year	740	673

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THE MARKETS

Boom Time

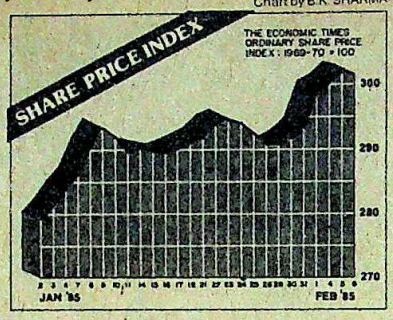
THE STOCK market is obviously very pleased with the way things are going and demonstrates its love affair with a daily mark-up on the stock exchange tote. The *Financial Express* index has gained 6 per cent since the New Year, or more than 1 per cent a week. At this rate, the index might touch 250 if not more by year end, which means that shares that are now being quoted around 25 will go up to about 45, and those around 30 might touch 50. This seems too good to be true, but then who would have thought that Larsen & Toubro, which has been marking time around 70 for months right up to polling day, would have crossed, as it nearly did last week, the century mark in less than five weeks?

It is being said that all the cash that used to go into bullion speculation is now finding its way into stock exchanges, which may be true up to a point but does not explain the runaway boom. There are reports that the non-residents are active again—rumours specifically mention Larsen & Toubro in this connection—and there are also reports about take-overs. The R.P. Goenka group is said to have cornered shares in Bayer (India) through one of their men in Dunlop in which the group has acquired a substantial holding. The Bayer scrip rose from Rs 322 on January 2 to Rs 395 on February 5, a 25 per cent rise in less than five weeks. But Bayer is not alone. A number of companies are swimming with the tide—Blow Plast up from Rs 39 to Rs 55, Hindustan Cocoa from Rs 58 to Rs 80 and Ranbaxy from Rs 49 to Rs 67, and all since January 1.

Is it just a flash in the pan or is the market trying to tell us something we don't know? According to one report current in Bombay, the budget is expected to be presented on March 15, not just a vote-on-account but a full-fledged budget. The fact that it is being held over until after the assembly elections probably means a heavy dose of taxes, but those in the know say that it may not be so. The Government is keen to make a good impression on its newest constituency—private business, which may get away lightly this time. The screw will be on the public sector which will be asked to generate its own resources.

This is the time of the year when blue chips should be given a wide berth and attention focused on the not so big chips which rarely make headlines. There are a number of such scrips and some of them are doing pretty well. Some of these smaller companies are being taken over, either formally or otherwise, by bigger groups who have the capacity to turn them around and put them to good use. Quite a few are being quoted below par which makes them even more attractive. With a little bit of luck, you may have real winners on your hand.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



ACTIVE STOCKS

	1985 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 5.2.85	Change on Fortnight
Asian Paints	124.00	87.00	96.00	4.00 +
Ashok Leyland	37.50	29.00	36.50	7.25 +
Associated Cement	424.00	382.00	409.00	0.50 –
Atul Copco	41.00	37.50	39.00	nil
Bajaj Auto	970.00	855.00	945.00	5.00 –
Ballarpur	46.25	44.50	45.90	0.90 –
Baroda Rayon	309.00	281.00	309.00	16.00 +
Bata India	50.25	48.00	50.00	0.25 –
Bayer (India)	395.00	317.50	395.00	50.00 +
Best & Crompton	68.00	61.00	68.00	3.50 +
Birla Jute	55.70	51.70	55.60	1.80 +
Blow Plast	55.00	39.00	55.00	15.50 +
Blue Star	40.50	32.50	39.50	3.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	78.50	63.00	71.00	2.50 –
Britannia Industries	50.00	46.50	48.20	1.80 –
Bruce Bond	50.50	47.50	50.50	2.70 +
Century Spinning	920.00	847.50	855.00	50.50 –
Chloride India	59.50	56.90	59.40	0.40 +
Colgate	178.50	143.50	178.50	13.50 +
DCM	51.50	45.00	45.25	1.75 –
Dunlop	24.40	22.30	24.40	0.65 +
East India Hotels	28.00	25.50	26.50	0.75 –
Elecon	64.00	56.00	62.50	1.50 –
Escorts	53.12	49.87	53.12	2.87 +
Food Specialities	92.00	86.00	92.00	2.00 +
Garware Nylon	27.50	24.50	26.50	1.00 +
Guest Keen Williams	20.80	18.70	20.30	0.05 +
Gwalior Rayon	58.00	53.75	58.00	2.00 +
Hico Products	30.50	26.50	29.00	1.00 –
Hindustan Aluminium	55.00	51.00	52.80	0.50 +
Hindustan Cocoa	80.00	58.00	78.00	11.50 +
Hindustan Lever	62.00	50.75	62.00	7.50 +
Hindustan Motors	43.50	39.58	40.10	2.20 –
Indian Aluminium	26.60	25.50	26.25	0.05 +
Indian Explosives	36.50	33.00	36.00	0.10 –
Indian Hotels	88.00	78.00	78.00	7.00 –
Indian Organic	59.50	50.25	59.00	2.75 +
Indian Oxygen	45.15	43.50	44.00	0.25 +
Indian Rayon	71.00	65.00	67.00	nil
J.K. Synthetics	55.75	52.20	55.75	0.50 +
Kelvinator	58.00	49.00	58.00	6.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	145.00	127.00	142.00	6.00 +
Kothari Industrial	22.00	20.00	20.00	1.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	96.50	72.00	96.00	16.50 +
Lipton	29.75	26.50	27.50	1.00 –
Lohia Machines	50.00	42.00	50.00	3.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	63.00	47.50	55.00	4.50 +
Modi Rubber	23.00	19.50	21.87	0.75 –
National Organic	287.50	240.00	282.50	10.00 +
Nirlon	48.50	37.00	48.50	7.50 +
Otis Elevator	99.00	86.00	91.00	1.00 –
Peico Electronics	45.60	38.40	45.60	2.00 +
Premier Automobiles	353.00	310.00	323.50	13.00 –
Ranbaxy	67.00	49.00	66.00	6.00 +
Raymond Woollen	70.00	59.00	69.00	1.50 +
Reliance Textiles	140.50	120.00	140.50	11.50 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	35.00	36.00	nil
Siemens	46.50	43.00	44.50	1.50 –
SPIC	50.00	43.50	49.87	3.62 +
Sylvania & Laxman	28.00	27.00	28.00	1.00 +
Tata Chemicals	72.50	64.50	67.50	1.50 +
Tata Steel	400.00	373.50	398.00	1.50 +
Telco	469.00	406.00	469.00	58.00 +
Texmaco	63.00	60.00	61.60	0.05 +
Union Carbide	18.80	17.10	18.30	0.50 –
Usha Martin	28.50	23.50	28.50	1.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.85	[illegible]
Austria	Schilling	100	56.75	[illegible]
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.20	[illegible]
Bangladesh	Taka	100	46.73	[illegible]
Canada	Dollar	1	9.70	[illegible]
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.15	[illegible]
Egypt	Pound	1	15.23	[illegible]
France	Franc	1	1.30	[illegible]
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.65	[illegible]
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.10	[illegible]
Iran	Rial	100	12.80	[illegible]
Italy	Lira	100	0.65	[illegible]
Japan	Yen	100	4.95	[illegible]
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.79	[illegible]
Kuwait	Dinar	1	41.85	[illegible]
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.05	[illegible]
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.79	[illegible]
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.69	[illegible]
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.50	[illegible]
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.85	[illegible]
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.70	[illegible]
Spain	Peseta	1	0.07	[illegible]
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.49	[illegible]
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.40	[illegible]
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.70	[illegible]
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.68	[illegible]
Thailand	Baht	100	44.71	[illegible]
UK	Pound	1	14.37	[illegible]
USA	Dollar	1	12.92	[illegible]
UAE	Dirham	1	3.22	[illegible]
USSR	Rouble	1	13.86	[illegible]
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.96	[illegible]

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd. New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 9.2.85.

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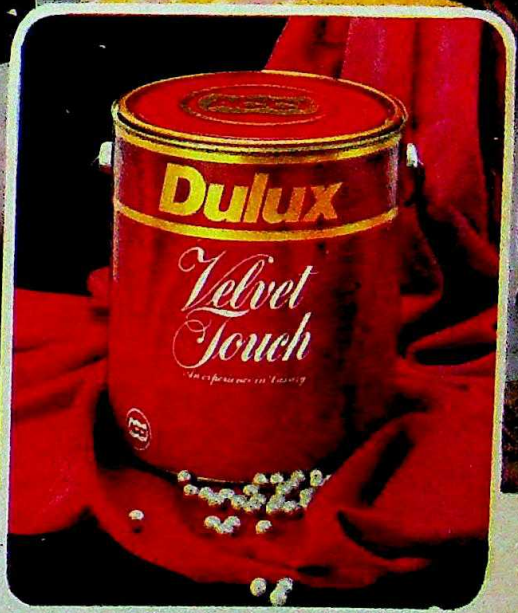
Turn on the lights and it's like the glow of a thousand pearls



Only once in a lifetime comes a luxury like this. The rich smoothness of velvet and a soft sheen, like the glow of a thousand pearls. For your walls. That's the unique offering of DULUX Velvet Touch. A premium wall finish in 29 shades, including 4 Natural Whites. Apple White, Rose White, Heather White and Lily White. Such an exclusive range is a beautiful persuasion to create different moods in your home. So that you can come home to luxury every time.

Dulux

Velvet Touch

CLARION C-ACCIVT-2

The feel of velvet, a glow of pearls

Come home to luxury with Dulux Velvet Touch

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Break away to the No1 in mini-computers.

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These days the task of choosing a computer is as complex as the number of options the market offers. But you've got a choice: work your way through the maze of product claims or come to the No 1: WIPRO. Here's the case of a leading magazine publishing house which made the right choice.

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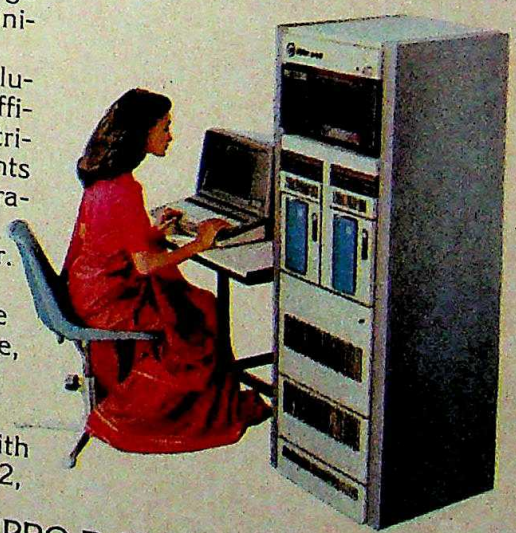

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WIPRO's product range. Today WIPRO has the widest range of mini-computers with features such as upgradability to meet a user's growing needs. The software developed by WIPRO is compatible across the entire range of its systems.

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* Data Quest—July 1984

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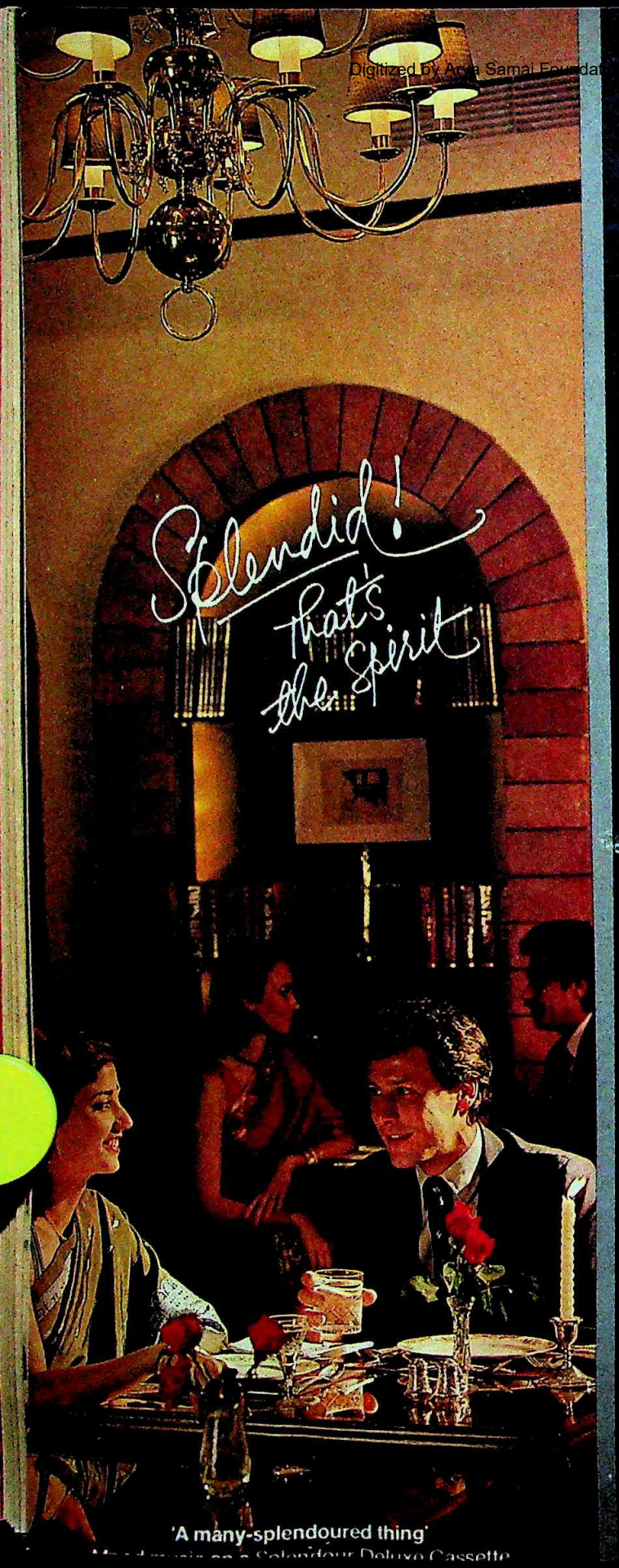

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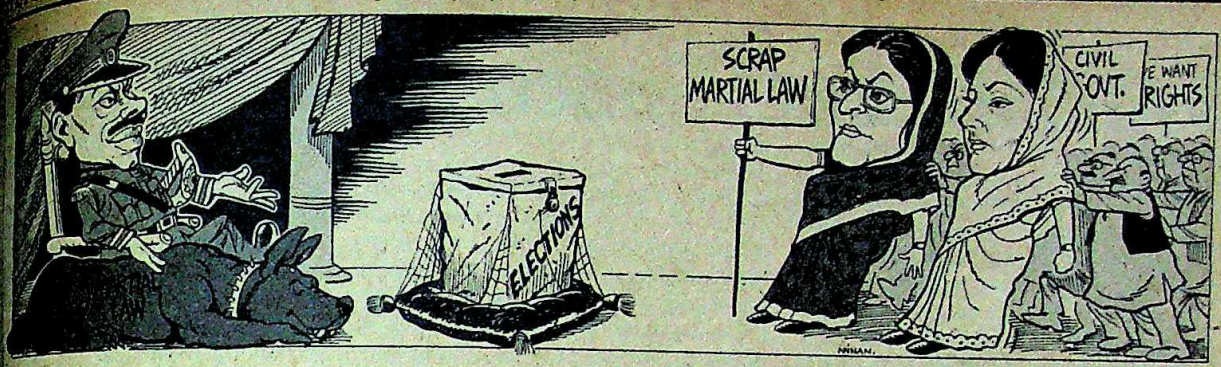

BANGLADESH

Depressing Dilemma

THE JINXED parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, postponed twice over since President H.M. Ershad toppled a civilian government on March 24, 1982, and took control under martial law, are headed for yet another abortive start. Last month, the country's election commission announced April 6 as the date for the general election to the 300-member parliament and Ershad followed it up by partially restoring fundamental rights. But the opposition parties have given a thumbs down signal to the overture until martial law is withdrawn.

Over the last fortnight, the atmosphere in Dhaka changed from one of hope into despondency as it became clear that the martial law authorities in fact wanted the opposition to play the game according to the rules set by themselves. After a brief lull in the movements following Ershad's announcement, the streets were bristling again with angry processions. And, to top it all, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, daughter of the slain President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and president of the Awami League, ordered a fresh round of "non-cooperation movement" in the country beginning this fortnight.

Both the 15-party alliance led by Hasina and the seven-party combination headed by Begum Khaleda Zia, chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), have declared that they would not participate in the polls unless Ershad conceded their common five-point demand, the topmost of which is the abolition of martial law. In an interview with the BBC, Khaleda said: "Ershad says he has freed his cabinet of people who have links with political parties. But he maintains his own link with the Jana Dal, which is his own party. We can say that by making these announcements he is bluffing and misguiding the people."

However, Ershad has conceded some of the demands of the opposition already, the firm announcement of the poll date being one of them. He also announced earlier that even though he intended to go back to the constitution suspended in 1982, which provided for a presidential election before elections to the parliament, he would make a departure from it to accommodate the opposition viewpoint and hold the parliamentary elections first. He kept his word at that. In addition:

- the part-military and part-Jana Dal cabinet was dissolved on January 15 to be replaced by a mixed cabinet of armymen and completely non-party civilians the special martial law courts were abolished and the posts of district and sub-zonal martial law authorities were scrapped;
- fundamental rights were restored (with some restrictions) and the writ of the High Court division of the Supreme Court re-established.

"Tell me if there could be any stronger token of his intention to civilianise the administration that the President could give," asks a spokesman of the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi angrily. But the Opposition sees a trap in the President's announcement because, even after the new parliament gets sworn in, Ershad will continue to preside over it because that is what the suspended constitution, given effect by the late Zia-ur Rahman, Khaleda's husband, lays down.

However, it may not be easy for the two women to stall it in case Ershad means to go ahead with it this time. Hasina recently told a meeting of Chhatra League, the students' wing of her party: "If we don't allow the election, there is no way that they can take place. There cannot be polls if people do not participate in it." But both Khaleda and Hasina are under pressure from powerful groups within their parties who want the civilian process to begin somehow at any cost. During the past year, many of Hasina's compatriots, the most notable among them being Korban Ali, a former minister under her father, have walked away to join Ershad's Jana Dal, more out of sheer frustration than any love for the President.

The pro-election sentiments are even more pronounced in the BNP where a party caucus, led by Shah Azizur Rahman, senior vice-chairman of the party and former prime minister under Zia-ur Rahman, recently met and declared its intention to participate in the elections. Shah Azizur Rahman had with him three of his former cabinet colleagues in the ministry. It is common knowledge in the party that the chairperson and the senior vice-chairman are not on speaking terms. Even some of Khaleda's recent public rallies were attacked by the other group.

Faced with these internal problems, both Hasina and Khaleda are now in a deep political dilemma. Even though the election tempo builds up in Bangladesh, a rigid stand by these two leaders on the issue may lead to the initiative passing entirely into the hands of Ershad and his Jana Dal. Sources close to Hasina maintain that it will amount to "going against the prevailing mood" of the country, leading to an alienation that may be difficult to bridge later. But to agree to Ershad's proposal also means investing the martial law regime with a degree of legitimacy where the main plank of the Opposition, and the Awami League in particular, is an unmitigated struggle against the political ambition of the military.

—SUMIT MITRA

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SEWA

Working For Women

FOR THE poor women of Ahmedabad, moving out of their familiar little kitchens, however drab, to the perils of the market-place is no gesture of liberation. It is forced by sheer economic necessity. But once there, they flounder helplessly in what is aggressively a man's world. Thus, Saroj, who was allotted a place in a residential colony in the city, was quickly edged out to a filthy spot next to a garbage dump by an aggressive male trader. No one spoke for her. Jivi has been selling old clothes in the old city for 15 years, her place well away from the road and in no one's way. But she got booked for traffic obstruction when she refused to pay the beat policeman his "gratification" fee. The numerous trips to the court and the fines she had to pay depleted her meagre profit margin.

The small tragedies of Saroj and Jivi might be too commonplace to make news. But increasingly, the harassed women of Ahmedabad and Gujarat have to their surprise discovered a champion in SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association. This feisty organisation has so successfully battled against injustice to women that a SEWA identity card bravely flourished before a market-place bully's face has become a talisman against harassment. Kamala Dadage, 27, who was once merely the battered wife of a textile labourer but is now a group leader with SEWA, organising beedi workers, says: "Self-employed women are not going to be docile any more. We have to shout to be heard." These cries are being heard outside the country as well. Two months ago, an announcement from Stockholm said SEWA's head Ela Bhatt had been chosen for the Right to Livelihood Prize to be given this December. The crowning award came when she was conferred the Padma Shri last month.

Set up in 1900 by a group of intellectuals in Sweden, the Right to Livelihood Prize honours and supports work in the most vital areas of human endeavour where dedicated people are at work to find practical and replicable solutions to real problems. But this award, which carries a sum of $ 15,000 (Rs. 1.8 lakh) is not the first for Bhatt and SEWA: in 1977, the soft-spoken, khadi-clad Bhatt was selected for the prestigious Magsaysay Award. And quite deservedly, too: for the past few years, the 15,000-member organisation, which is aided by OXFAM, the Ford Foundation, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the Government of India has been engaged in trail-blazing work among the women of Gujarat. Now its reach extends beyond the state in Bhopal, Lucknow, Mithila, Bhagalpur, Singbhum, Munger and Delhi.

When it began, SEWA was a part of the Textile Labour Association (TLA). But in 1981, serious differences between TLA and Bhatt who had joined it in 1967 forced a split. Bhatt was asked to "leave the premises and take SEWA with her". Starting over again was hard but it had its rewards. With a new organisational framework, SEWA became independent. The change took effect when SEWA became more adventurous and aggressive in its fight for a better deal for women. Women handcart-pullers, potters, vegetable vendors, beedi and agarbatti workers, scrap pickers and bamboo workers all found a faithful friend in SEWA.

"If men are around, women will not participate freely and due to social conditioning, withdraw. Then our whole point would be lost."

ELA BHATT

The case of the vegetable vendors of Manek Chowk in downtown Ahmedabad is typical. The *toplawalis*, as these women are called, have traditionally been selling vegetables in front of the market, at a lower price than the stall-owners in the [illegible]. This did not make them popular with the stall-owners, but in addition they had to contend with police harassment as well. If they didn't pay up, they faced the prospect of having their vegetables crushed under police boots, and being insulted by the men in uniform. The helpless women turned to SEWA in desperation. But its appeals to the police and the municipal corporation had no effect: the women were banned from sitting where for years they had carried out their modest trade.

Furious at the city fathers' lack of sympathy, an enraged Bhatt walked into Manek Chowk with a brigade of *toplawalis* and told them to spread their wares out before, defying police orders. For a couple of days, the policemen seemed daunted by Bhatt's presence on the scene but soon resumed their harassment. Bhatt then called upon well-known Bombay lawyer Indira Jaisingh to help. She filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the ban, and won the case for SEWA early this year. The court directed the municipal corporation and the police to formulate a scheme in consultation with

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SEWA to accommodate the women vendors.

If this case taught SEWA that tougher strategies than mere persuasiveness were necessary, the case of the quilt workers showed them the kind of ruthless opposition they would have to contend with. Hundreds of poor women in the city are engaged in making quilt covers from scrap material discarded by the textile mills. As many as 60 pieces of scrap are laboriously stitched together by these women to make just one cover. For this, the quilt-makers pay them a paltry 50 paise. When the women tried to protest and asked for a higher price, 40 of them were sacked. SEWA stepped in to help, and it has secure orders for quilt covers from villages around Ahmedabad in an attempt to ensure employment to the poor women. But the wealthy quilt merchants scarised the women and tried to drive them out of the scene.

Undaunted, SEWA took them on squarely on their own home ground—it opened a shop right in the middle of a chain of shops owned by the quilt merchants of Dariapur in Ahmedabad. Not surprisingly, it is doing very well. So is Sahara, the quilt-makers' cooperative organised by SEWA, although at the moment the closure of textile mills has made it difficult to obtain raw material.

Quite apart from the financial gains made by the women, these ventures have given them a healthy sense of self-confidence and dignity. Says Bilquish Bano, 43, assistant manager of the quilt shop who was just a scrap sorter a few years ago: "SEWA helped me get a new life." Other women find that their new status has earned them respect. "My position within the family has changed after I joined SEWA," says Chandu Papubhai. "Before, if the food was not well cooked or the house was dirty, my husband and other menfolk would insult me and beat me. But now they see how much respect I have outside and talk to me as an equal."

THE ORGANISATION has also helped women artisans with fresh ideas and innovations which have made their work more popular and profitable. For instance, women engaged in making brooms and baskets from bamboo in Ahmedabad found their profits stagnating. SEWA hired craftsmen from Tripura to train its members, and they soon began turning out anything from fancy lampshades to bamboo chairs. A similar training programme helped women block printers refine their skills.

They were taught aggressive marketing techniques to even out the odds in a market where screen printing is killing the ancient art of hand printing. The results are evident in the handsome profits Aabudana, the block printers' cooperative is making.

But the organisation's most impressive achievement is the SEWA Cooperative Bank which has an amazingly high recovery rate of loans: 98 per cent. Begun in 1974 to help members save and acquire loans, it proceeded to do both in a most efficient fashion. The secret was that the bank doggedly pursued the cases of all loanees, maintaining a dossier on their background, limitations and job situations. This helped the bank officials to understand why repayment was delayed and what could be done to set it right. For instance, if a member took a loan to buy an *amber charkha*, she was also given instructions on how to organise herself professionally and maintain accounts.

Thus despite the fact that most loans were given without guarantees because the beneficiaries were poor, the bank made a profit of Rs 2.8 lakh in 1983-84. It now has a working capital of Rs 71.89 lakh and deposits of over Rs 68.3 lakh.

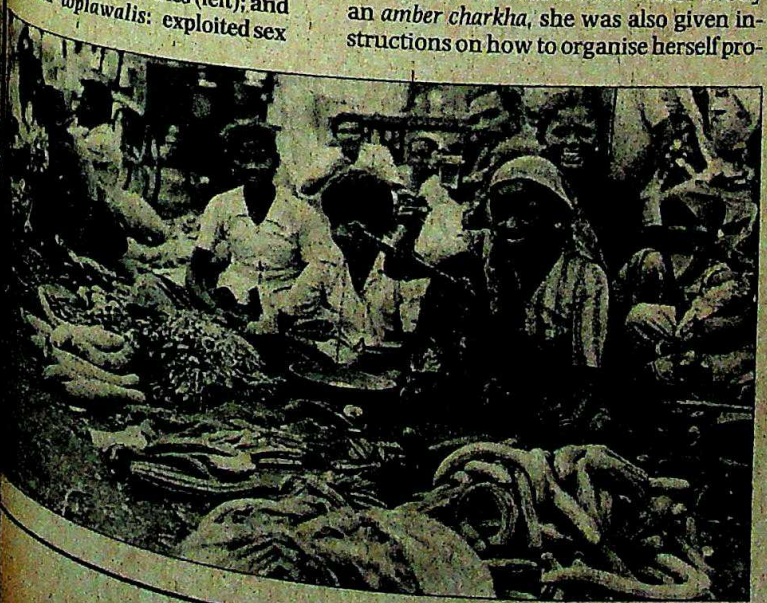
The bank was set up in 1973, when 4,000 women contributed a share capital of Rs 10 each to establish the bank, and the relief of having a bank of their own was soon apparent. "It has enabled members to come out of the clutches of private money-lenders," says Usha Jumani, managing director of the bank and a dedicated SEWA worker. "As they are no more indebted to traders and middlemen, their bargaining power has improved."

After 1977, SEWA began moving out into the rural areas where it was more needed. Its effort to organise women labourers in unions and get them to agitate for minimum wages broke down when big farmers and landlords terrorised the peasants. SEWA was forced to backtrack and teach women alternate skills. Thus 20 villages around Ahmedabad were chosen for the programme which taught women carpentry, blacksmithy, weaving, tailoring, spinning, dairying and the like. Six women's dairy cooperatives were begun, but two subsequently had to close down and the rest are faring badly. The experiment taught SEWA the sobering lesson that vested interests are stronger at the moment than the illiterate women who tried to run their own cooperatives.

Failure is not new for SEWA, but then, neither is success. It has had a measure of both, but with patience and determination, flagging spirits and enthusiasm have been made to revive miraculously. "We may not have succeeded as much as we want to, but our consolation is that we are slowly creating an awareness among women. Change takes time," says a philosophical Anila Dholakia, chief of the rural wing of the orgainsation.

Dholakia is right. The interest and awareness created by SEWA has led even men to apply for membership. And Bhatt agrees that if social change is to be effected, men will also have to be admitted to the organisation. But she has a valid apprehension. "If men are around, women will not participate freely and due to social conditioning, withdraw. Then our whole point would be lost," she says. But the very fact that even men find SEWA such an attractive proposition proves that the organisation has succeeded in making its presence felt effectively in its fight for a better deal for the poor.

—RAMESH MENON



Women selling old clothes (left); and traditional *toplawalis*: exploited sex

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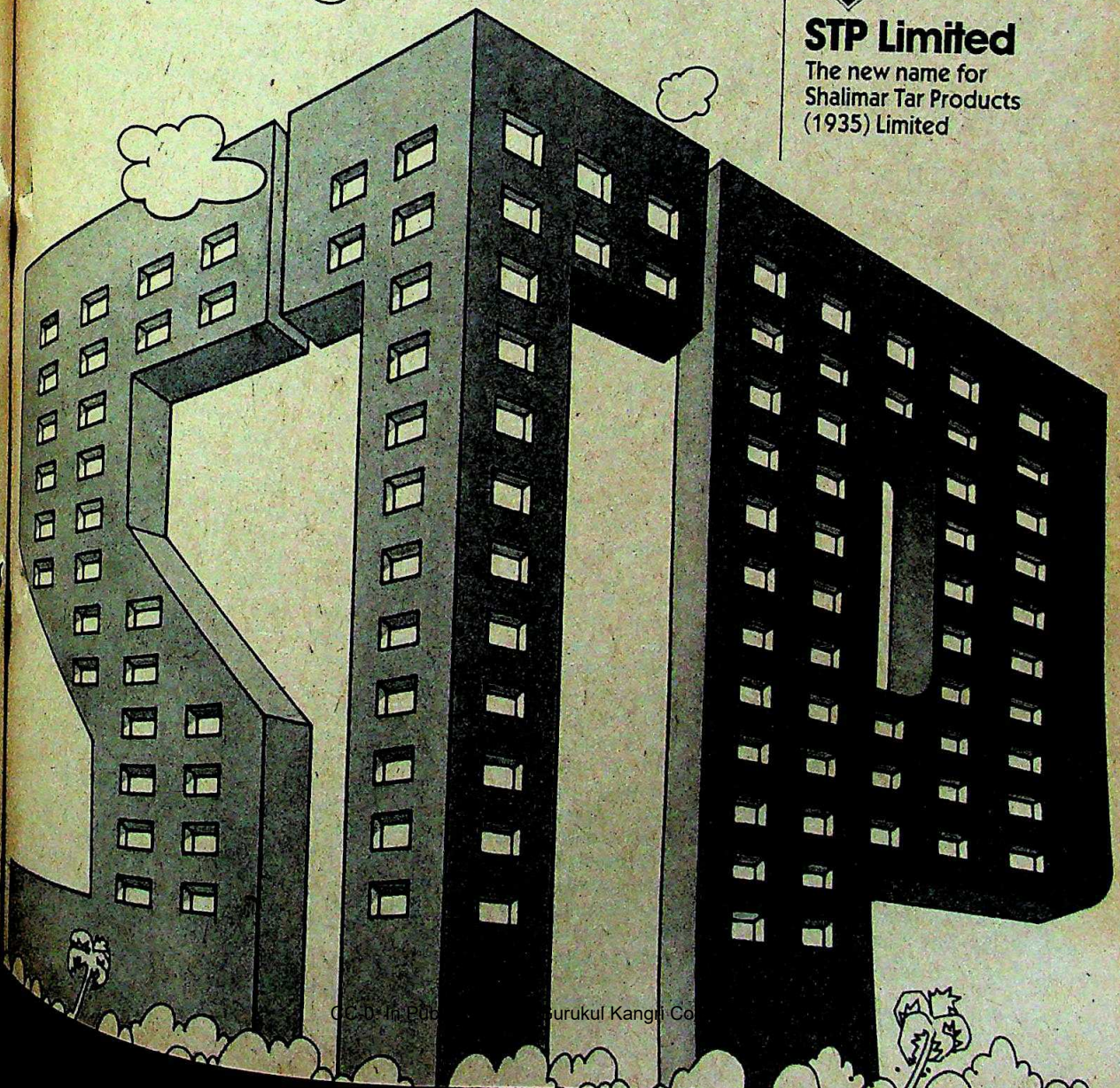
STP Limited
The new name for Shalimar Tar Products (1935) Limited



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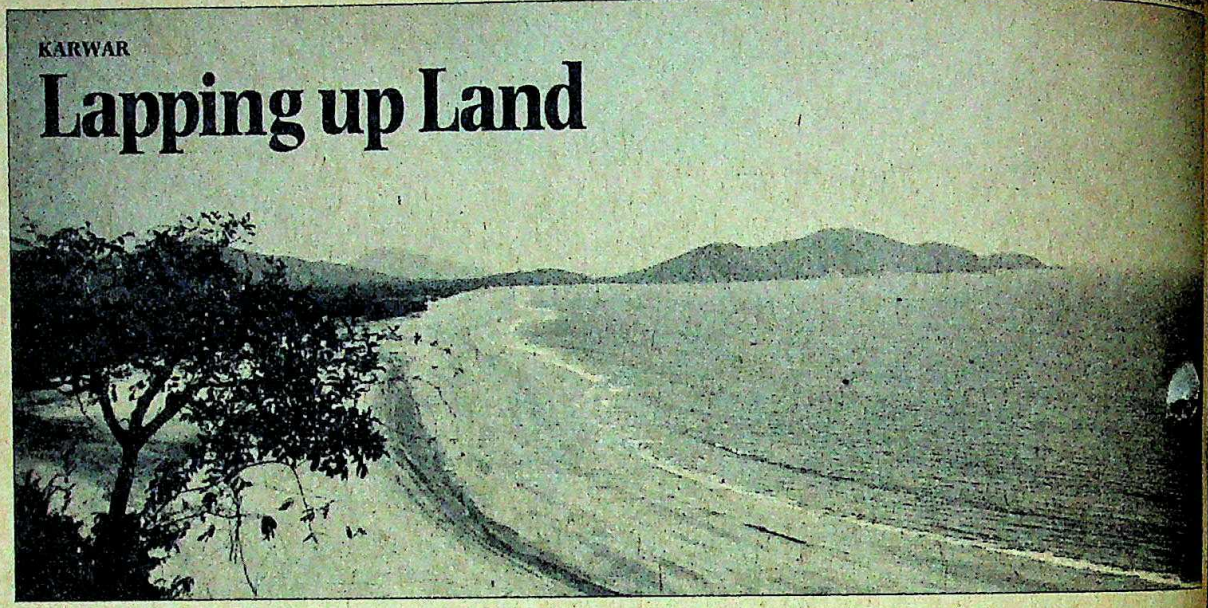
RAJ CHENGAPPA

KARWAR

Lapping up Land

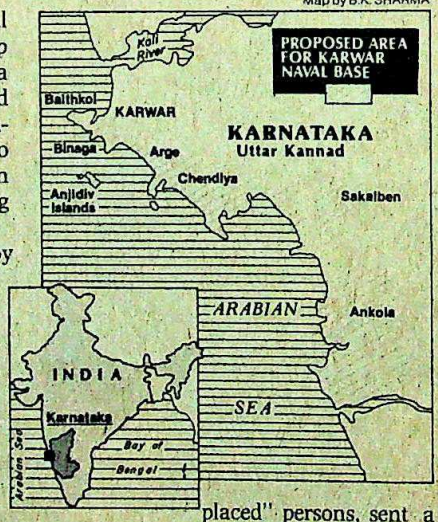


IT'S A poet's paradise. The looming hill ranges of the Western Ghats drop sheer into the placid Arabian Sea forming breathtaking crescent-shaped beaches that once seemed to poet Rabindranath Tagore as if the hills seem to "throw out its arms to the shoreless open sea—the very image of an eagle striving to embrace the universe".

But the Indian Navy is moved by considerations other than beauty. It views the serene shores that form natural harbours in the North Kanara district of Karnataka as the most strategic maritime mooring in the Indian Ocean. The navy is acquiring 35 km of shoreline and 57,000 acres of land in Karwar and Ankola talukas to build a naval base so big that if it wanted, "the entire naval fleet could be anchored in it". In the next six years it will spend Rs 2,000 crore to make the Karwar naval base, as it is called, the "biggest in Asia" giving India a presence in the Indian Ocean that it never had before.

But what stands like the rock of Gibraltar between the Indian Navy and its ambitious plans are the 30,000 people who, when the base comes up, will literally be "thrown into the sea". These people have lived for years in 37 villages dotting the aquamarine shoreline and will be displaced from their traditional homes and vocations "in the country's interests". With neither the navy nor the state Government offering any suitable rehabilitation plan, the villagers of Karwar and Ankola have decided it's time they took matters into their own hands. They have formed an association of "would-be displaced" persons, sent a tersely-worded telegram to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi stating they were "alarmed, agitated and grief-stricken"—and in December, 6,000 of them positioned themselves in front of the taluk board office for a month-long hunger strike, giving up only after Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde rushed down from Bangalore and personally assured them that he would safeguard their interests.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



They plan to resume their hunger strike later this month and have fielded a candidate for the assembly elections in March. Even the village children have joined the struggle and last fortnight a district-level debate for high school and college students on the naval base was organised in Ankola. Those who spoke against the setting up of the base won by handsome margins.

The villagers have a clear stand: the navy is welcome to have its base but by using only 5 km of shoreline and 9,000 acres of land. But the navy kept jacking up its demand for land and as the plans for the base became more ambitious the villagers became increasingly desperate. In 1981 when the base was first mooted it wanted only 1,574 acres of land in Ar... Now it wants 57,220 acres, almost ... times its original need. Said S.K. Pai, advocate in Karwar: "The navy is trying to grab all available land like the octopus stretching its tentacles at all possible preys at once." "We may have to shed our blood," added association secretary Ram Gopal Naik ominously.

Of the 57,000-odd acres, almost 44,000—or two-thirds of the land to be acquired—come under forests, mostly of the scrub kind. Private lands held mainly by small holders total around 13,000 acres. While the navy has promised not to damage the forests in any way, 5,3... fishermen would be asked to shift and another 8,550 families owning paddy fields or coconut gardens would have to look for newer pastures. With their ... ture, almost 16,000 agricultural labourers would be rendered jobless.

What has further irked both the people and the state Government is the navy's secretive attitude about the entire project. When state government officials asked naval officers why they needed so much land they were curtly told: "This is none of your business. It's a top defence secret." Hordes of surveyors strutted over their land demarcating the area. Naval helicopters hovered around

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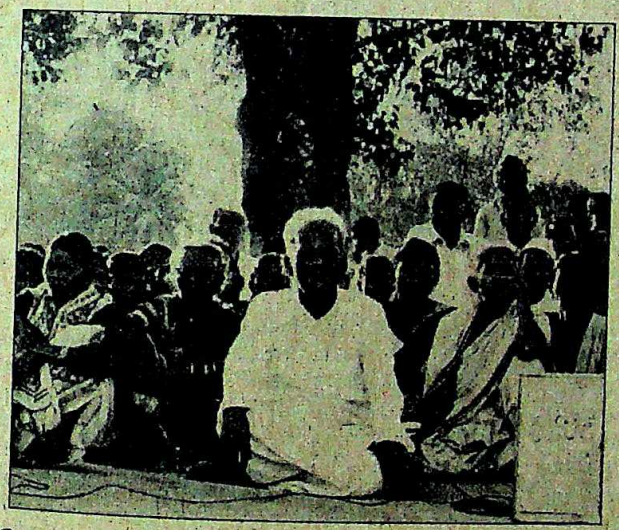
the top brass in the navy and the Union defence secretary making numerous on-the-spot studies. Things almost came to a head when the villagers learnt that the late prime minister Mrs Indira Gandhi was to have laid the foundation stone for the naval base in the Binaga cove called "Blue Lagoon" on November 8. But with her assassination it has been postponed.

As the plans for the ambitious base are moving steadily ahead, the people are growing panicky. Neither the state Government nor the navy has so far come up with any resettlement plans. R. Suresh, the deputy commissioner of North Kanara district, said: "The Government is extremely sensitive about this issue. When we asked the navy, they said rehabilitation is our baby. We told them OK but we need more money. Much more." The navy insists that it will meet only the cost of land acquisition and compensation which would amount to Rs 30 crore. But the state Government says that it must chip in money for the rehabilitation project that it estimates would amount to Rs 100 crore.

BUT THE navy will get its base. It has powerful reasons for pushing the project through. For long the navy has remained the Cinderella of the three armed forces, with defence planners concentrating more on the country's northern frontiers. But with the Indian Ocean becoming an extremely sensitive zone—especially after the US established the Diego Garcia base—India now feels the need to defend the 2.2 million square miles of the ocean which it considers its own. Karwar is an ideal place because it is out of reach of Pakistani F-16 s and its natural harbours are one of the best facilities for setting up such a base. The navy has three other major bases: at Bombay, Cochin and Vishakhapatnam, all overcrowded and in need of modernisation.

Karwar has for long been ignored because it had no advocates in free India. Though as far back as 1860 British naval engineer Sir Arthur Cotton recommended that there is "scarcely a harbour in the world that has a more remarkable collection of advantages than Karwar... and it would seem madness to neglect it". In fact Karwar was so badly neglected that when the navy decided to survey its facilities they found that not even a map of the area was available.

The Karwar coastline has many inbuilt advantages. The cluster of islands around it protect it from the south-west monsoon making it an ideal all-weather port. Water levels around the harbour average a remarkable seven fathoms, a little more than the six required by most warships. Dredging of sand is reduced to a minimum. There are no strong currents or heavy swells that catch sailors by surprise nor are there any shoals, sandbanks and reefs that could make navigating dangerous. The towering hillsides offer a perfect camouflage for naval activity. Apart from that the nearest rail head is at Hubli, about 150 km away. There is plenty of water for drinking. Electricity is in abundance with the giant Kalinadi hydro electric project only 80 km away. And all the major sea lanes of communication to India are close to Karwar. According to a naval expert: "Mobility, surprise, dispersal and offensive power are the keynotes for any naval base and Karwar fits the bill ideally."



Villagers uniting to protest: inadequate compensation and rehabilitation plans

Initially the navy had planned to use it as a base for its submarines and hence it requested the state for only a small chunk of land. But with the Defence Ministry opting for a more powerful navy, the base underwent a major modification. The emphasis was to plan for the next 30 years using Karwar as the key naval base. The navy now plans to have submarine pens, dry docks, missile silos and a fleet air arm. An estimated 10,000 sailors or something around a fourth of India's naval personnel are to be stationed at Karwar making it necessary for the navy to acquire so much land. Said the expert: "With Karwar we will be able to establish our maritime superiority in the Indian Ocean."

But the navy did not reckon with the stiff resistance being put up by the villagers. The fishermen in the area have long since understood the value of the Karwar coastline. Said Pittamber Tandel, 48, of Arge, who owns a fishing trawler: "Here we can fish all year round because the sea is not rough. Putting us elsewhere is not just a matter of building us a house. Can the Government find a coastline like this for us?" In Binaga, Chindiya Tandel, 31, said: "Apart from fishing we don't even know how to cycle. If the Government does not take care of us properly we would be beggars soon."

As it is the fishermen are angry with the Government for allowing a caustic soda factory to be set up. The factory sends its effluents into the sea via a 3-km-long pipe. But the pipe is breached at many places and the effluents spill into the harbour itself. Fishermen complain that the fish stock has been depleting after that. The factory is owned by the powerful Thapar group and many eyebrows have been raised over the fact that although the navy has imposed a rule that all "commanding-view cliffs" around the base would be under its control and no development would be allowed within a 4 km radius, strangely enough the factory is exempted while the fishermen have been asked to move on.

The agriculturists in the area too are upset. Said Ram Gopal Naik: "You can compensate for land lost and trees cut but can you really compensate for the human being who is uprooted? None of the rehabilitation measures has any human component in it." The people have had firsthand experience of those measures when the state Government shifted 4,000 people to Ramnagar to make room for the Kalinadi hydro-electric project 100 km away. Once a thickly forested area, Ramnagar is now a ghost town with the lands having become barren and the residents living in abject misery. Said Pal: "The Government treats rehabilitation projects as though it is doling out charity."

The mood of the "would-be displaced" people is militant and the Indian Navy has found to its dismay that it has an unusual battle on its hands long before it can even get cracking on its naval base. It must come up with solutions quickly if it does not want to be a fish out of water in Karwar.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Karwar

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CALCUTTA HIGH COURT

Out of Order

"Publicity is the very soul of justice. It is the keenest spur to exertion, and surest of all guards against improbity. It keeps the judge himself while trying under trial..."

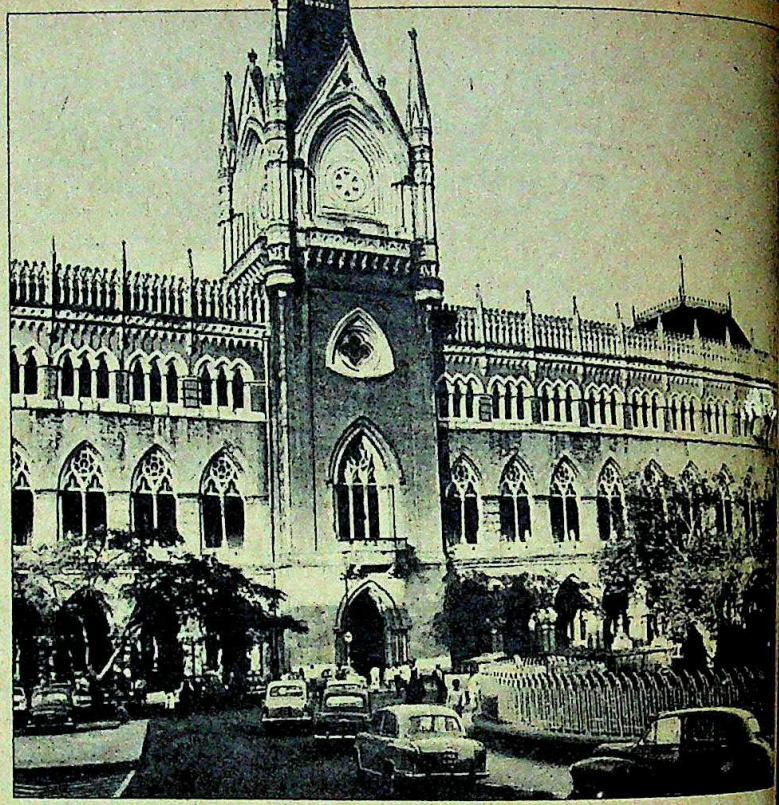
JEREMY BENTHAM

PHYSICIAN heal thyself. The old maxim quite aptly describes the state of the Calcutta High Court today. Once the supreme arbiter in the country, the high court has fallen from grace in more ways than one. Just how steep the descent has been was reflected in a couple of shattering judgements by the Supreme Court in recent months. According to the judgements, the high court has long been indulging in a practice that "has done incalculable harm" and could "have the unpleasant effect of undermining public confidence in the courts".

The Supreme Court's observations were prompted by its discovery of the frequency with which the high court granted interim orders that are effective till the passing of the final judgements. Apparently the high court often passed such orders on oral application, that is, for the mere asking. Not only did the judges sometimes not bother to find out whether there was any legal justification for passing such orders, they also chose to pass them in the privacy of their chambers rather than in open court.

Jolted by this discovery, Supreme Court Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy was forced to declare that such a procedure "is likely to lead to vicious and pernicious results". Stressing that the maintenance of records was essential to a court of law, he observed that passing orders without documenting why they were passed "is a practice reminiscent of the feudal days when the French nobility could procure a *lettre de cachet* under the sovereign's seal authorising a subject's imprisonment without trial and without mention of any reason... a practice that strikes at the very root of the system of open and even-handed justice".

The first discovery that led to the broadsides against Calcutta High Court was due to a Kafkaesque case involving the issuing of a liquor permit in far-off Andaman islands. A Calcutta High Court judge issued an interim order staying the liquor permit awarded by public auction from becoming effective on the basis of an oral application moved in his chamber by well-known advocates representing someone called S. Samuel, a person who subsequently denied that he had anything to do with the case. The advocates had evidently been taken for a ride and had to admit that the man who had posed as Samuel was nowhere to be found.



Calcutta High Court: fall from grace

The remarkable fact in this case, Justice Reddy pointed out in a judgement last November, is that the judge did not make "the slightest attempt to indicate even briefly the facts told to him, the question of law, if any, raised before him and the reasons that prompted him to make the order he did... in fact the order made no provision to protect anyone from resulting mischief".

The second volley against the high court was triggered off by a central excise case involving Dunlop India Limited. The company had claimed an excise exemption of Rs 6.05 crore although the Excise Department had maintained it was not entitled to the exemption. The high court passed an interim order allowing the company to collect its goods after furnishing a bank guarantee for Rs 2.93 crore. The Supreme Court while vacating the order stated that "we do not have the slightest doubt that the orders of the learned/single judge as well as the division bench are wholly unsubstantial and should never have been made".

The Supreme Court bench, shared by Justices E.S. Venkataramiah, O. Chinnappa Reddy and A.P. Sen, took this opportunity to castigate the high court for its propensity to grant interim orders at the drop of a hat. It listed the havoc caused by such orders:

- ► collection of public revenue has been seriously jeopardised and budgets of governments and local authorities seriously affected;
- ► dealers in foodgrains and essential commodities have been allowed to take back the stocks seized from them as they permit them to continue with the practice which they were told to stop;
- ► collection of monthly rentals payable by excise contractors have been stayed with the result that at the end of the year the contractor has paid nothing;
- ► buses and lorries are being run under court orders though they were earlier denied permits or their permits had been cancelled.

The list is practically endless. Last [illegible] night, the Supreme Court had to set aside the high court's orders staying the Union Government from withholding goods of a firm accused of import and misutilisation of animal tallow. Pointing out that the high court should never have passed such a stay, Justices P.N. Bhagwati and A.

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S. Mukhopadhyay: lone crusader

Even the Supreme Court declared that action defeated the Union Government's abeyance order.

In West Bengal, the consequences of the Calcutta High Court's generosity in granting interim orders appear to have "crippled" the government administration, senior bureaucrats confide. The Special Inspector General of Police A.P. Mukherjee said: "We are finding it impossible to bring about probity and discipline within the force due to the high court, and this is bound to find reflection in the law and order situation." Corrupt police officers, even if detected, cannot be transferred, let alone dismissed.

The Contempt of Court Act is being used as an instrument of oppression and intimidation," contends the Calcutta Collector of Customs, Sukumar Mukhopadhyay, who has earned the reputation of being a lone crusader against the Calcutta High Court. Having decided to go the whole hog in exposing what he considers to be the "blatantly illegal orders" of the high court, Mukhopadhyay has become resigned to living with contempt cases, of which there are 77 against him and his department.

The most startling of all Mukhopadhyay's allegations is that COFEPOSA detainees from all over the country are coming on the Calcutta High Court because of its reputation of being liberal in granting injunctions. He has prepared a list of all "alleged smugglers" who have succeeded in procuring stay orders on the government's proceedings against them.

Fortunately, the Supreme Court's observations seem to have paid off and recently the number of interim orders on Calcutta has fallen appreciably. Judges have given up the practice of granting stays in the privacy of their residences or chambers except in exceptionally urgent cases. But it will take years for Calcutta High Court to live down the two landmark judgements of the Supreme Court.

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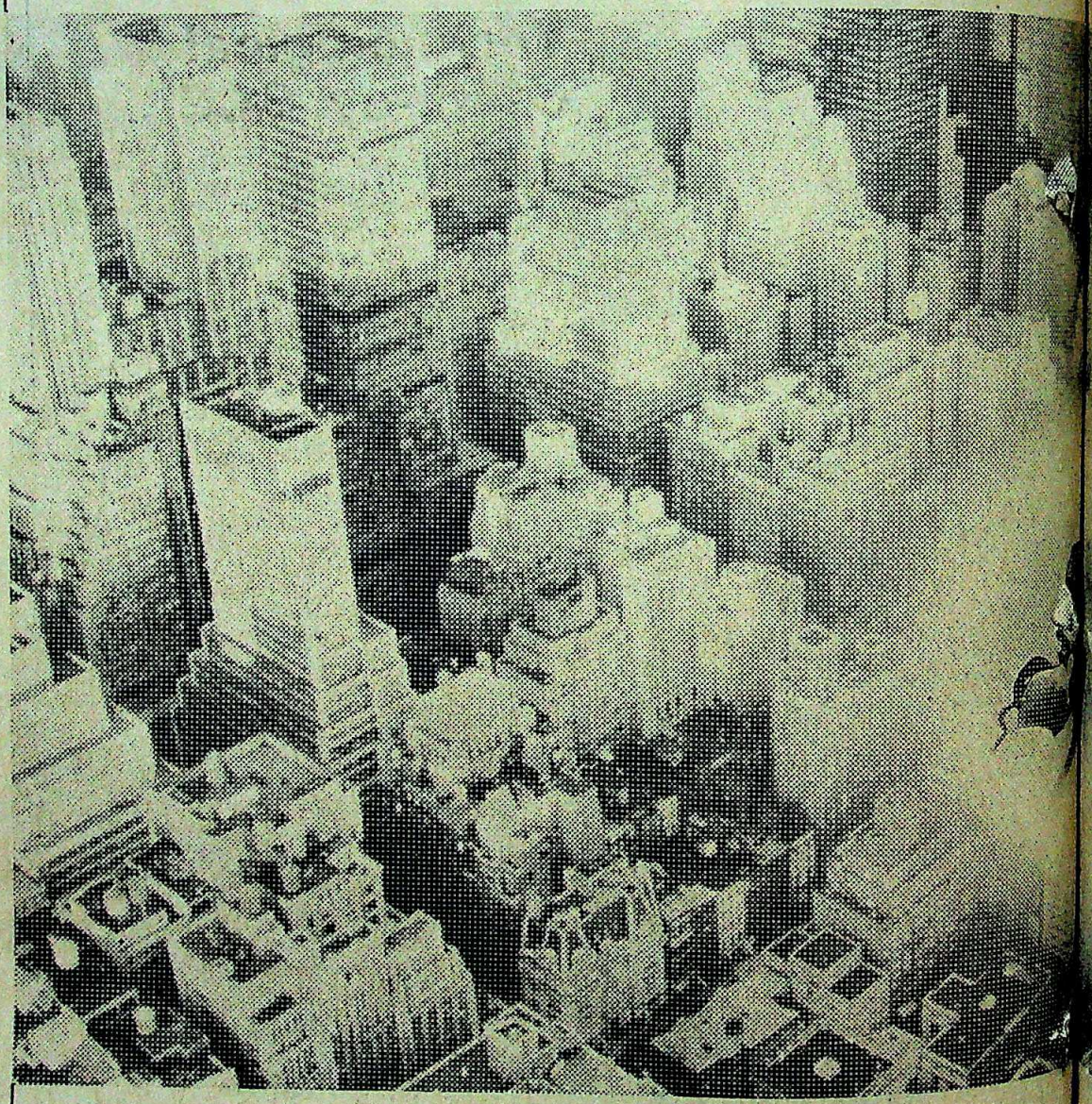
"Hello! Is that the bustling city? I am speaking from a remote village whose name is unknown to a map."



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CRICKET

Season of Discontent

THE POST-match scene at Kanpur's Green Park cricket stadium said it all. There was David Gower, the beak-nosed English captain waving a glass of champagne. Mike Gatting, Allan Lamb, Richard Ellison—each of his men trooping out of the modest pavilion had plenty of the bubbly drink to guzzle—and to spray ecstatically over one another. Gower, till the other day hailed as the most consistent captain England had ever had in terms of suffering defeat, was hoisted on his team-men's shoulders, holding aloft the Anthony D'Mellow trophy, the reward for his team's exertions through a winter of shifting fortunes.

A few paces to the left stood Gavaskar with his men, joining the round of clapping by gently tapping the cup of tea he nursed in his right hand. On Indian faces, the trauma of defeat was writ too clearly for anyone to miss. Said Ravi Shastri in resignation: "What do we say now? This is one series we should have won." And there was a touch of irony as Gavaskar added: "We have saved English cricket, haven't we?" The Kanpur pitch lay in the background, unscathed from five days of battering, showing a frustrating frigidity to both pace and spin.

Forgetting a whole string of its own follies spread over three months, the Indian camp was now letting out all its pent-up ire on the pitch and its creator, Anand Shukla. After Gavaskar's public plea for a spinning wicket, a worried Gower had complained to accompanying English newsmen that he anticipated a Bunsen burner for a pitch at Kanpur. What Shukla created, instead, could give Faisalabad a fright. In fact, so sure was the Indian camp of hitting a turning track that this was considered reason enough for not dropping Kirmani, who had been sluggish behind the stumps. The idea, a selector explained, was to avoid exposing a relatively green wicket-keeper to a spinning wicket.

The Indian camp's desperate quest for a doctored wicket was, in fact, the most telling commentary on the lack of confidence prevailing even before the final Test began. The comprehensive defeat following the gift of a Test match in Delhi shattered a side which had hardly been able to recover poise after the 3-0 drubbing at the hands of the West Indies men in the 1983 series. But now, with their cup of sorrow full to the brim, it was time for introspection. Sometimes grudgingly, and often with bitter candour, players, selectors, officials and experts all speak out now and mention the following as the factors behind the debacle:

► A waning team spirit, particularly after the Gavaskar-Kapil controversy.

► Total lack of a strategy for the series.

► Indifferent fielding, particularly close-in positions.

► Inability of key batsmen to get at crucial times at the necessary pace.

► A weak attack. Kapil's inadequ... Sivaramakrishnan's fade-out and ... stri's decline into a mere stock bowler.

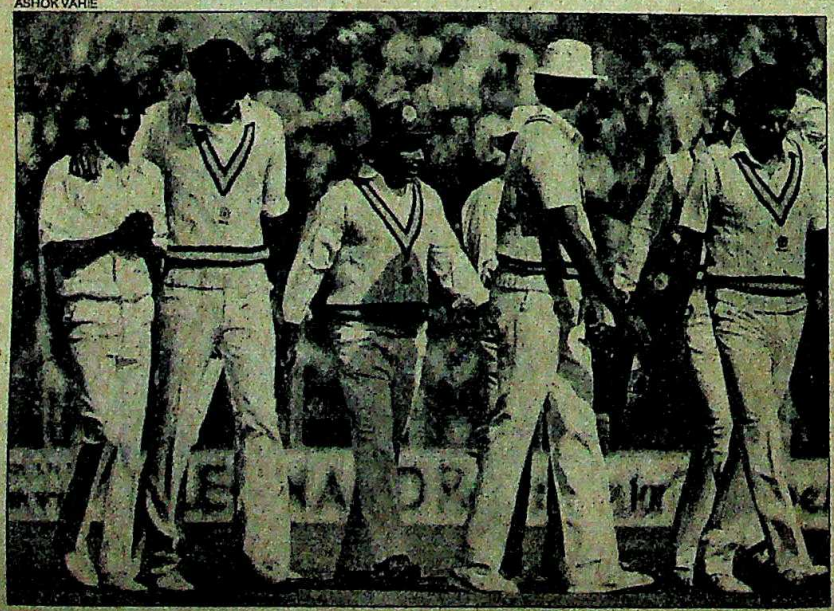
In a way, the first encompasses ... rest. All along the series, there was ... tinct, unabashed disinclination to ... close-in positions for fear of injury w... could keep one out of the Benson ... Hedges bash later this month in Au... lia. The series was, in fact, a sickeni... ectacle of spilled catches with the ... fielders notching up a record of nine ... first innings at Madras as the English ... notched up 654 for 8 and put the ... beyond doubt. At Kanpur too, Gower ... let off twice as his team stood at 294 ... with 60 runs still to go to avoid the fo... on. Time and again as English bats... took wild swipes at the spinners, the ... in fielders took evasive action rather ... wait for a mishit or edge, in contrast ... unhelmeted Eknath Solkar or Abid ... the early '70s. But those were days ... cricketers had just begun getting ... donna status and big money.

The same lack of team spirit was ... ble in the reluctance of the cl... fielders to make frequent appeals ... settle the batsmen, now an acce... tactic in cricket. In the English tea... the third man fielder would thro... hands to the heavens the moment th... hit the pad. Barring a few honourable ... ceptions, outcricket lacked verve ... short, if a batsman got a good score ... bowler bowled a good spell he was ... umed to have done his bit. There w... thing like total team effort, a fact ... in the reluctance of most batsme... Kanpur to play in spikes to brea... pitch. Yet, in spite of the humi... none of the senior players had the ... to still admit to this. Reacting an... the suggestion, Kapil burst out "Wh... you mean by team spirit? For the ... you are winning there is team spir... are not, there is none." Even M... Amarnath dismissed the defeat as ... those things asserting that the... neither a rift between Kapil and Go... nor anything amiss with the Indian ... team. But glossing over reality d... win matches.

Nor, for that matter, does it get ... Test cricket, as Sunil Gavaskar ... tify after the leanest series ... career—140 runs in 8 innings. ... he had often complained of be...

Indian players leaving the field: time for introspection

ASHOK VAHIE



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A. PRABHAKAR RAO

Azharuddin: record run

HARUDDIN

Rising Star

CRICKET buffs have a talent for endowing their heroes with imaginative tags such as Tiger and Little Master or Typhoon Tyson and Sunderbar Hindlekar. So when fans in Hyderabad conjured up a name for the new batting sensation, they chose Mohammad Azhar for what seemed to them a good reason. He could see the early, even as it slipped out of the bowler's fingers and played it with immense confidence for hours as if he was glued to the wicket. "I believe in playing from session to session—start to finish, lunch to tea and tea to close and steadily go for my runs," said the capable batsman who got his third successive Test century in as many successive Tests on February 1 to become the first one ever to do so.

To score a hundred on earning a Test cap is a tension-filled task which only 51—eight Indian— players around the world have done so far. When Azharuddin scored the second hundred at the Chidambaram stadium in Madras, he joined a select band with similar impressive debuts—Bill Ponsford, Frank Walters and Alvin Kallicharran. The third Test hundred came over two days at the Green Park stadium in Kanpur, created a world record achieved by no one, including the first day's play at Kanpur. Azharuddin in 16 minutes flat on the morning scored the fastest fifty, belying fears that he might not make it. "I found it difficult to sleep when Azharuddin did not complete his century at the draw of stumps, though Azharuddin himself said he had slept well," said Vice President R. Venkatraman in Hyderabad on receiving the thrilling news. Through all the jubilation, the hero of the moment and his family have remained quietly exhilarated by the achievement "I thanked Allah and immediately thought of my grandfather even as those in the field came forward to shake hands in the first few moments," said Azharuddin coolly. And in his home in Himayatnagar in Hyderabad, Azharuddin's parents, three brothers and two sisters, all younger, glued to their TV, cheered wildly and embraced each other as Azharuddin took a two off Foster to make the century. Later the proud father, Mohammad Azizuddin, an accounts officer with the state electricity board, declared: "I am happy he has done it."

Initiated into cricket in 1973, Azharuddin was in the All Saints High School team playing in the Hyderabad cricket league from the 1977 season. Recalling his early performance, Hyderabad Cricket Association Secretary P.R. Man Singh said: "He showed the flair to go for the runs and so quickly found his way into the Deccan Blues team. His level-headed approach to the game helped him improve his play." Later playing for Nizam College he represented Osmania University in inter-varsity tournaments and Hyderabad in the Ranji Trophy competitions since 1981-82. "My maternal uncle Mir Zainulabiddin who captained the Osmania University inspired me to take to cricket while my grandfather Mir Vajehuddin who brought me up took care of me and paid for the cricket gear. Sadly for me he died in November last without knowing of my selection for the Test series," Azharuddin said.

In his short cricket career Azharuddin has scored 26 centuries and two double centuries. Playing consistently well in the 1982-83 and 1983-84 seasons, he scored 2,648 runs in 49 innings and 2,499 in 60 innings, and scored centuries in both innings of the Ranji Trophy match against Andhra at Machilipatnam in the 1984-85 season. He has been to only two coaching camps —one conducted by Lala Amarnath in Hyderabad in 1977 and the other by Keki Tarapore in Bangalore in 1980. The first time he saw a cricket Test was when he was picked for the series against England in Calcutta.

Thrust out of his anonymity, Azharuddin received a hero's welcome when he returned to Hyderabad for a brief stay before the Australian tour. Crowds roaring "Azhar Zindabad" lined the 7-km route that he drove down in a jeep preceded by mounted police guards. Overnight the cricketer had become the most popular man in the city.

The incredible feat has brought othere rewards. His employers, the State Bank of India has promoted him to the officer rank and brother K.M. Joseph, rector of his old school has presented him with Rs 10,000 in cash. Azharuddin said: "My ambition is to play the game in the spirit of the game—to stay as long as I can in the middle to score as much as I can." Asharuddin, whom Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi describes as "the player of the decade", will go places.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

With parents: immense confidence

A. PRABHAKAR RAO

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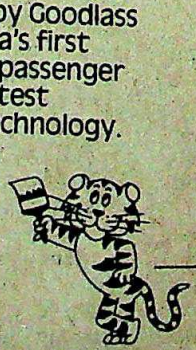

Technologically too, always a shade better

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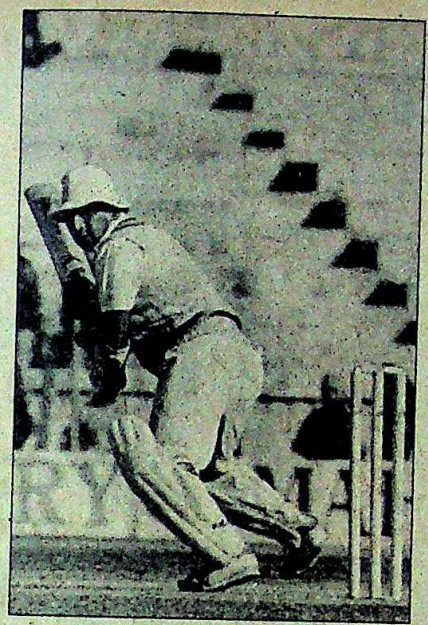
and jaded and had stated that if the selectors restored him as captain, it would be a retrograde step. But when they took the step in September last year, Gavaskar accepted the mantle. He however, justifiably contends that he could not have declined the appointment, although he admits that the tensions of the game worked decisively on his nerves after the Delhi Test. "When I got the 65 in Delhi I thought I was getting the form back," he said, "but what happened afterwards made it impossible for me to concentrate."

Captaincy is a demanding business and not meant for one who has been struggling against form, age, groupism and hostility from a powerful section of the press. That Gavaskar has learnt his lessons now was evident last fortnight in his letter to the national selection committee on the eve of the team's departure to Australia. Gavaskar said he was unavailable for the captaincy after the tour down under. But he does want to keep his place in the team and, with the worries of captaincy off his head may still be able to sort things out with himself. His intention to fight for a place in the side is clear from his firm refutation of the charge that he has no motivation left after having achieved all those world records. Said he: "Playing for India is motivation enough." A few good scores in Australia could be his key to survival.

Yet, Gavaskar was only one of the heroes who failed India. There was the other superstar Kapil Dev, the spearhead of the Indian attack who ended up with a mere 10 wickets in the series. In fact he had just seven before the last five overs in the England second innings at Kanpur, when he gobbled up the tail. Missing all through the series were his classic run up to the final stride, the leap and side-on delivery. A pale shadow of his past, Kapil was reduced to a mere bundler, failing to generate the kind of pace or swing that has placed him in sight of the world record for the highest tally of Test wickets. Apart from the internecine strife and his temporary sack, Kapil was certainly bothered by his recently repaired knee. "The doctor says it is perfectly fine now and I should enjoy myself," he said, "but I feel slightly reluctant to strain it fully."

With Kapil ineffective, Siva losing form midway through the series and Shastri accurate but not penetrative, the Indian attack had no ability left to bowl out twice in a match even a side of such mediocre batting abilities as England. Coupled with the dozens of dropped catches and benign pitches, this came to Gower as an unexpected windfall and contributed to his post-series arrogance: "Don't ask me about the Indian cricket team. I can understand your concern about it but please understand that it is not mine," adding facetiously: "My only problem in this whole tour of India were the telephone operators."



Gavaskar: a lean series

Among the batsmen, besides Gavaskar, Vengsarkar too failed to live up to his promise, notching up a century only in his last innings of the series. Said he, ruefully: "I really should have got at least one more hundred. This attack was nothing compared to the West Indians".

Shastri in comparison showed vast improvement as a batsman but somehow failed to push the scoring rate at Calcutta when in sight of his century. He pleads that there were no instructions to push the score and that the ball was swinging about in the humid conditions. While Anshuman Gaekwad fell by the wayside, Srikkanth flowered rather late. Gavaskar summed it up by saying: "The pity is we never got a good opening stand nor a good opening spell of bowling." Therein lay the key to disaster.

Yet another star to disappoint was Kirmani who, in spite of getting plenty of runs, consistently dropped catches behind the stumps. He seems to be bothered by a torn heel tendon and age, as in case of Gavaskar, is not on his side. Indian selectors should thus be keenly watching the performance of young Sadanand Viswanath, Kirmani's Karnataka understudy, in Australia.

Another man who will need watching, is Mohammed Azharuddin, the 22-year-old bank officer (*see box*) from Hyderabad. With his three hundreds and a fifty, and even more than that a visible sense of aggression and purpose on the crease he has hit the Indian cricket scene much in the fashion of a Gundappa Viswanath or Gavaskar. British cricket commentator Christopher Martin-Jenkins was moved to say: "The Australians do not know what a surprise they have coming for them."

But in the one-day contest in Australia individual brilliance will hardly be sufficient to bring about results, a fact made clear in the course of the 1-4 drubbing that the World Cup champions suffered at the hands of England. While the whole team will have to bowl and field better, Gavaskar will need to show more positive and aggressive planning if there is to be no repeat of the kind of capitulation at Cuttack last month, or the mid-innings stupor in Chandigarh that cost India the match by a mere seven runs. Gavaskar himself said: "My greatest disappointment of the series were the one-dayers. We really should have done better." The knowledge that in Australia he will be leading India for the last time in his career should spur him just that bit more.

In fact, the tournament in Australia will indicate the shape of things to come for Indian cricket. While Azharuddin faces a test merely to confirm his known abilities, Sadanand Viswanath and seam bowler Chetan Sharma will have to do useful work to establish themselves. An intriguing choice for the contest is Sivaramakrishnan, since legspinners are considered an irrelevancy for one-day cricket. Ravi Shastri, who is hailed as future captaincy material, also to needs to dispel the lingering doubts about his bowling ability. "I think I need to do more work on my bowling," he said, making it clear that his ambition is to become a good all-rounder and not merely a batsman.

A heartening sign is that most of the new claimants to slots in the national team are barely out of their teens and, as Mohinder Amarnath said, can easily take a two to three year banishment in their stride. Among themselves, they represent the brave new world of Indian cricket and with the old heroes fading fast, will have to quickly assert their presence on the international cricket scene. If they fail to do that, the future will be as dismal as the recent past.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Kanpur

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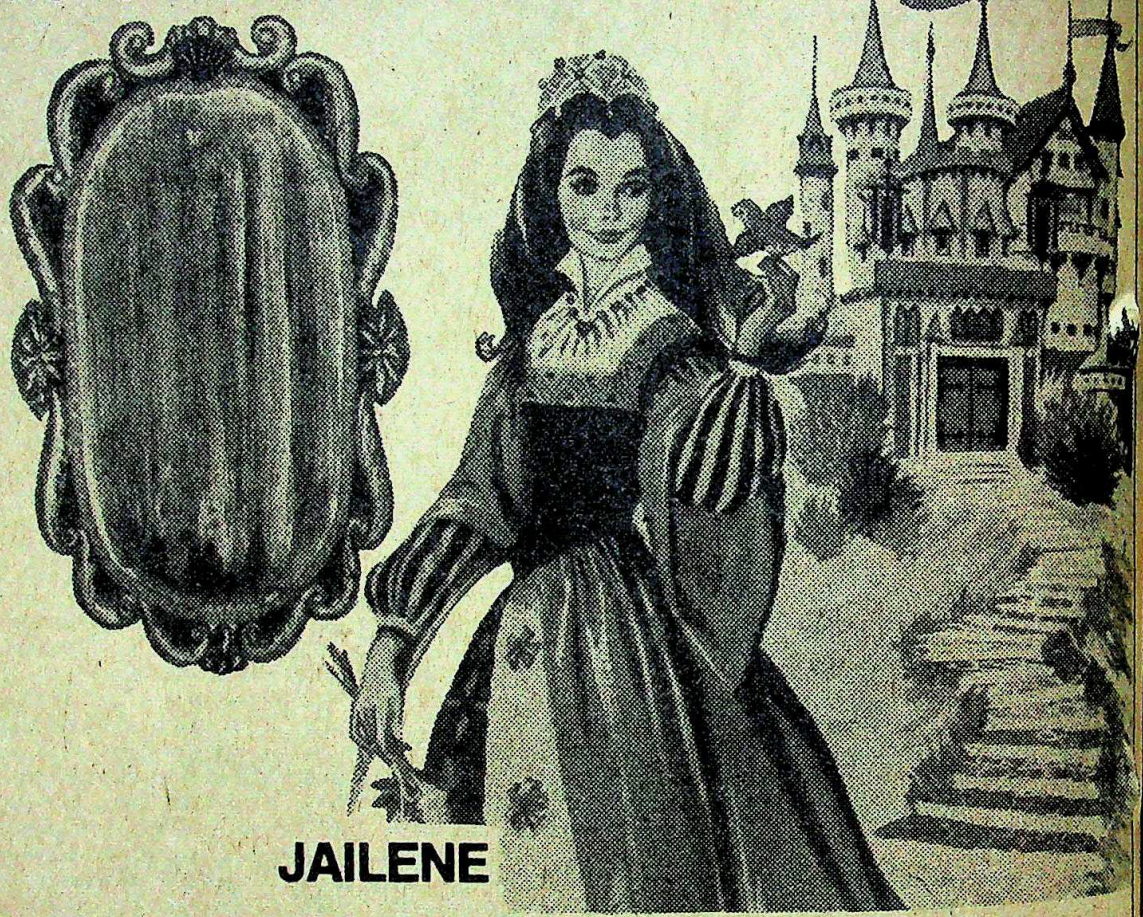

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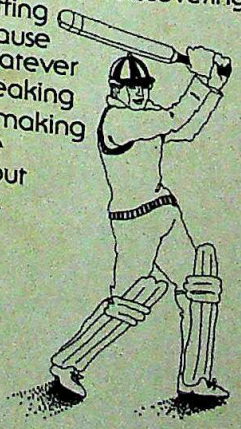

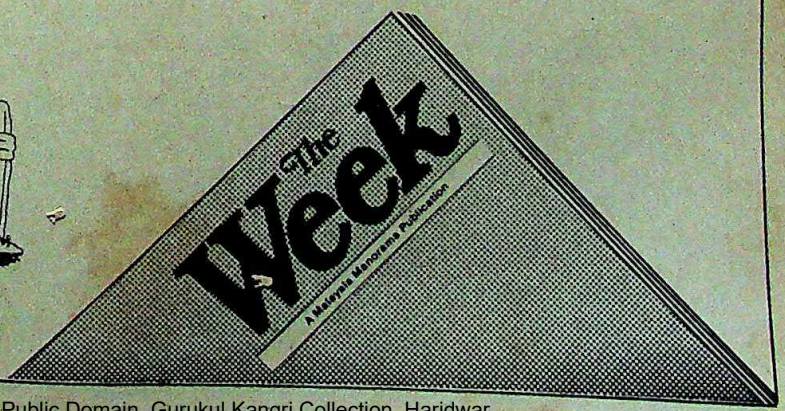

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VISVA-BHARATI

Winds of Change

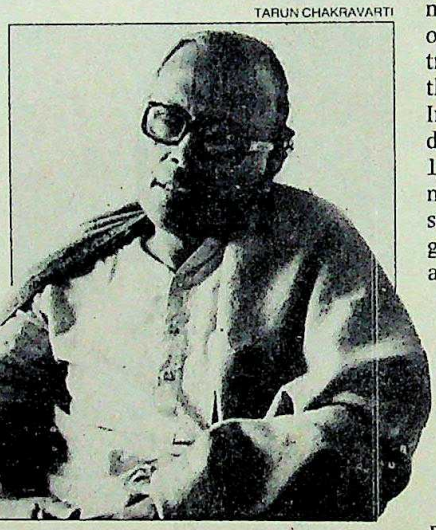
VISVA-BHARATI, the university founded by Tagore on the red soil of Santiniketan, 161 km from Calcutta, was designed by the poet to be a university with a difference. *Yatra visvam bhabatyekanidam* (where the world makes its home in a single nest)—reads the beautiful motto of the university. But its non-formal, residential and cosmopolitan character was soon lost after it became a central university in 1951. Foreign students, and students from outside West Bengal, shunned it and the depleting ranks of residents found to their dismay that they were getting swamped by children of the newly-affluent peasantry from the two rice-rich neighbouring districts of Birbhum and Burdwan. It was a losing battle against mediocrity and neo-literacy.

But the scenario promises to change dramatically. Last December, Nemai Sadhan Bose, a 53-year-old and sharp-witted historian with strong Congress(I) credentials took over as the vice-chancellor. And, from the first day, Bose made it clear that unlike a typical historian he would only gaze straight ahead into the future with plans to bring the university "in tandem with the modern age". This is saying a lot, because till now the authorities were undecided on the basic issue: whether Visva-Bharati should strive to become an experimental university based on Tagore's ideals of non-formal education, or should it play safe and, in the process, become yet another nondescript clearing house for degrees.

Last year, Mrs Gandhi, an ex-student of the university and its *acharya* (chancellor) for 16 years, took personal interest in getting the Visva-Bharati Act drastically amended, as a result of which the all-powerful executive council (Karma Samiti) became entirely non-elective (and ex-officio) in character. That was the first step towards selecting a dynamic vice-chancellor. And Bose was Mrs Gandhi's personal nominee. The proposal to nominate Bose was one of the last files cleared by Mrs Gandhi. When the Government changed, her wish was honoured and Bose was formally and unanimously chosen by a panel of three experts which included Justice (retired) M.H. Beg, chairman of the Minorities Commission.

Since his appointment, however, there are winds of change blowing across the campus (students—3,270: teachers—426). The most notable among the indications of change is the renewed effort to restore the residential character of the university, and to

TARUN CHAKRAVARTI



Vice-Chancellor Bose: looking ahead

modernise its facilities which, as Bose says, "cannot continue virtually at the level of the hermitages described in the *puranas*." In the final three months of the current financial year, the university is spending the residual Rs 1.5 crore from its Sixth Plan allocation—or Rs 1.4 lakh a day—on new hostel buildings, on the air-conditioning of the museum and the archives, microfilming facilities, advanced recording systems for the music college, and computers.

As the Seventh Plan period begins this year, the main thrust of the university will be towards setting up a few new institutes which, as Bose says, "can make the university relevant again". The most significant among them is the plan to install at Kala Bhavan, the college of fine arts and crafts, a new Institute of Visual Communication. K.G. Subramaniam, the well-known painter and professor in the department of fine arts, who is working on the project, is confident that the new institute—which will also include courses in television and video-filming—will give a fillip to the entire communication business in eastern India.

The other shining Seventh Plan proposal of the university is to set up a Centre for National Integration, named after Mrs Indira Gandhi, to carry out research into areas of ethnic, linguistic and religious tension. It is being planned as a centre to study the "socio-cultural interfaces" not only in India but in South and South-East Asia.

These are ambitious schemes, but the very toying with these ideas shows an anxiety to put an end to the present moribund state of the university. And one of the main reasons that have contributed to the present state of affairs is the shrinking of the residential facilities. In 1951, well over 75 per cent of the students were residents. But last year, only 1,249 of the 3,270 students were inmates of the hostels, the rest being day-scholars—many of them being first-generation literate. This problem had another side-effect: the share of students from outside West Bengal and those from abroad had been considerably depleted.

The Seventh Plan target is to raise the resident/day-scholar ratio to at least 1:1, and this may require spending around Rs 80 lakh in buildings alone. As an executive council member explained: "To enable Visva-Bharati to create any kind of impact, the Plan allocation needs to be raised at least 100 per cent, which calls for better relations with the Centre. Earlier Amlan Datta lacked it. But Bose's equation with the Congress(I) may help this time."

Bose himself left no one in doubt as to where his preferences lay. He met Rajiv Gandhi twice in the past five weeks. Finally, he proposed the name of Rajiv as the new chancellor at a meeting of the executive council last fortnight. All the 17 of the 21 members, who were present, supported him.

The university, since its beginning in 1921, has produced many outstanding personalities, such as Nandalal Bose, the celebrated art teacher, Ram Kinkar, the sculptor, and Binod Behari Mukherjee, the painter—not to speak of Satyajit Ray and Indira Gandhi. But Bengalis also associate Visva-Bharati with a measure of arty affectation—best seen in the election graffiti for the December polls at Santiniketan which implores the people to vote for 'Rajiv-da'. The point is, the university itself has voted for 'Rajiv-da' and is keenly expectant to see the results.

—SUMIT MITRA in Santiniketan

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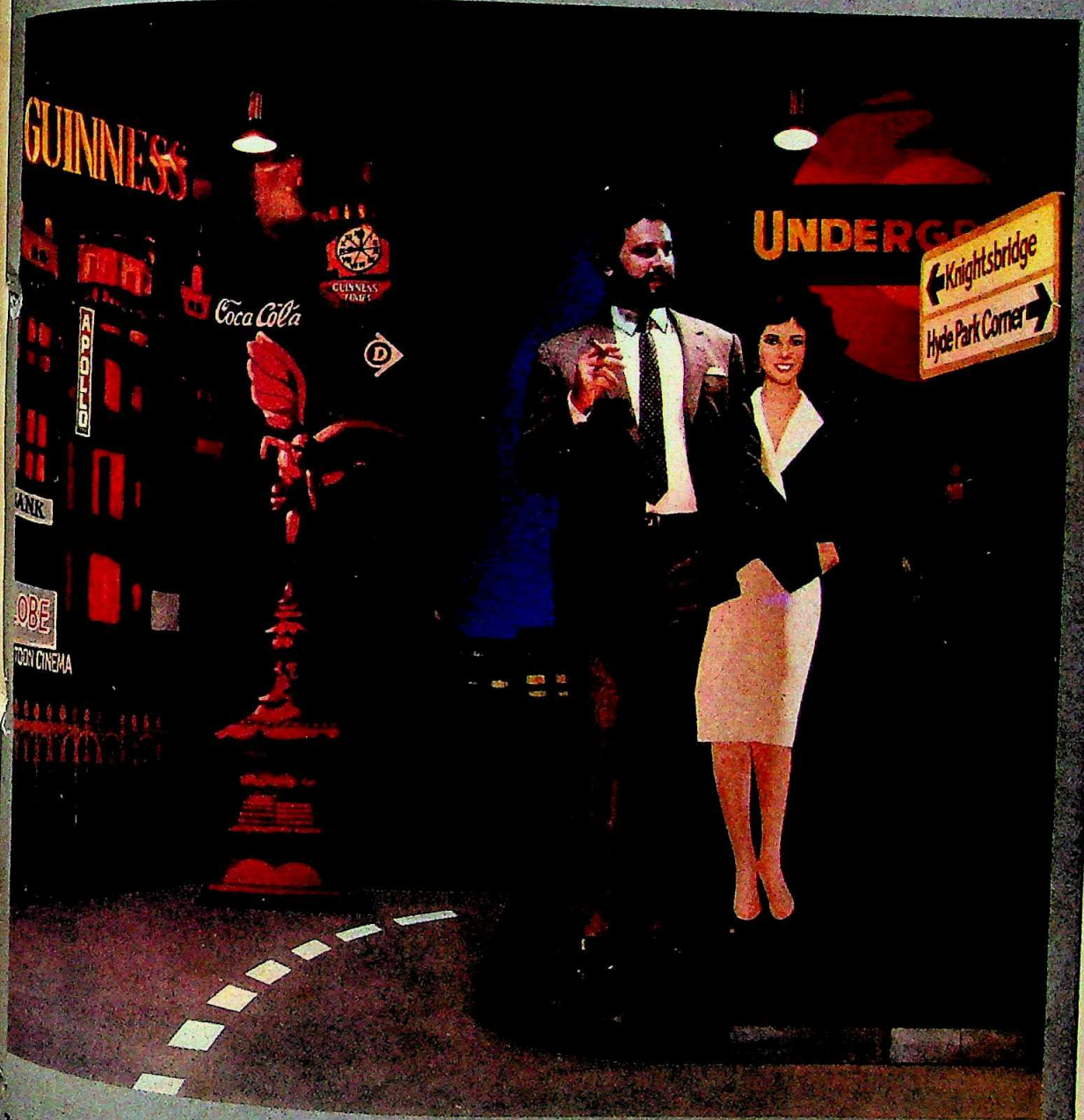

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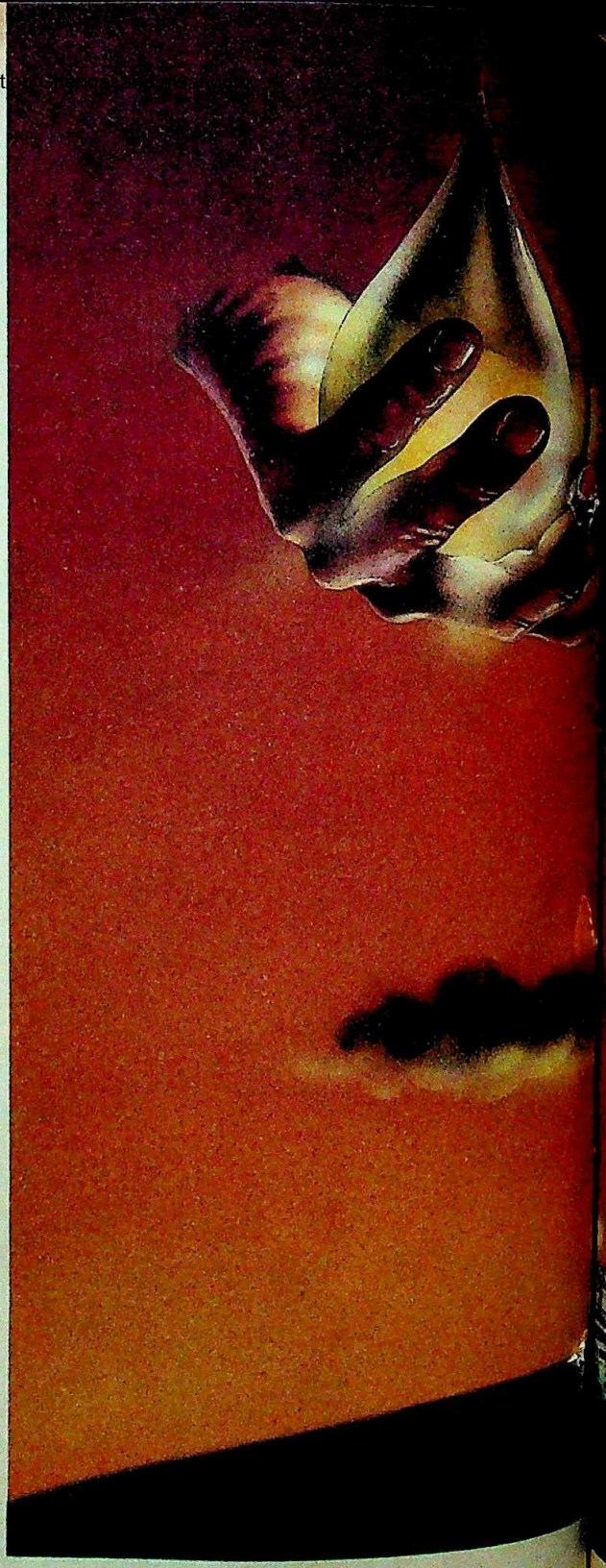

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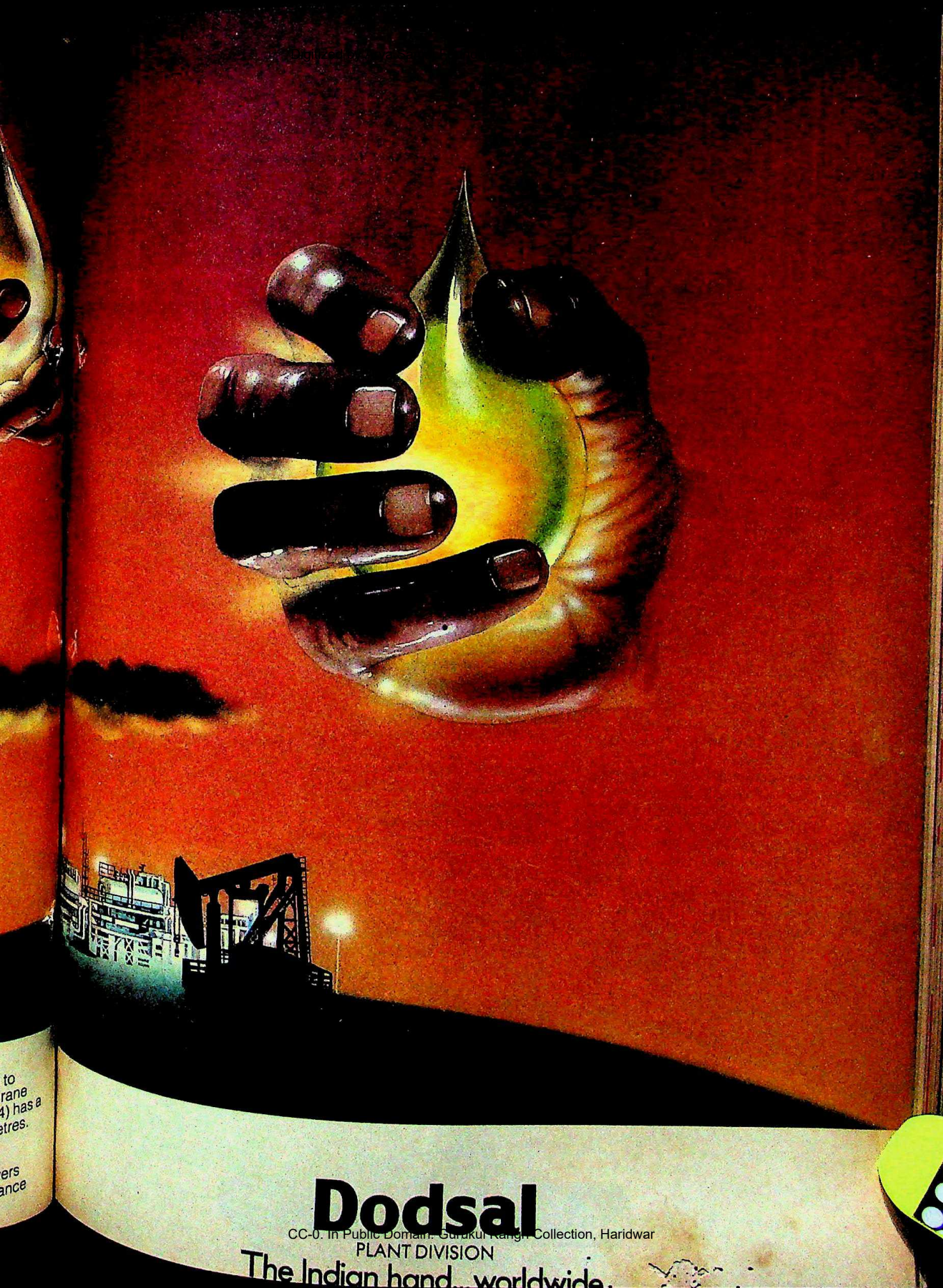

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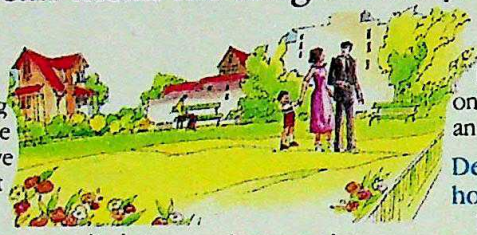

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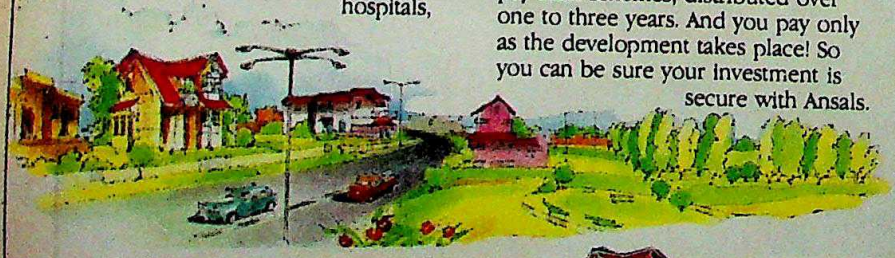

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PAINTED MYTHS OF CREATION: ART AND RITUAL OF AN INDIAN TRIBE
BY JYOTINDA JAIN
Lalit Kala Akademi
Pages: 100; Price: Rs 90

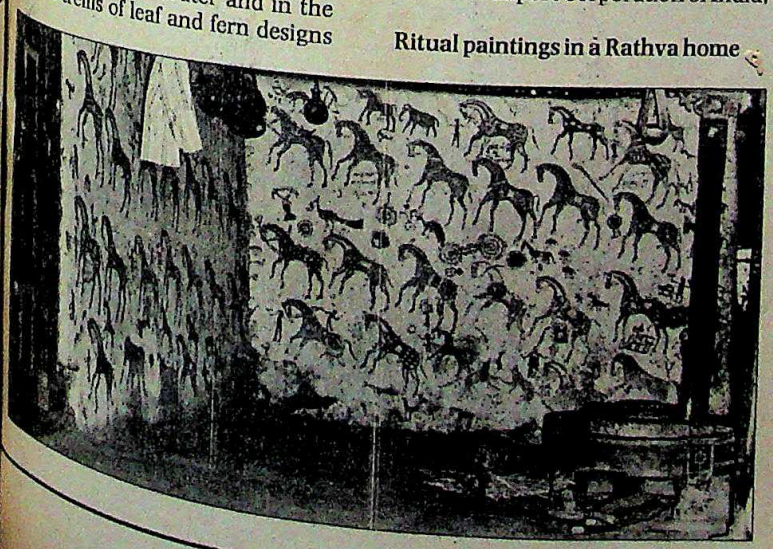
JUST AS the art of bookmaking and bookwriting has come a long way, so also has the initiation into subjects that today's authors are beginning to tackle for wider audiences. Almost a decade ago Yves Vequaud's book took Mithila's Madhubani wall paintings to the world. Now there are two handsome and serious books bringing more writings on walls to the fore.

Walls, preceded by nature's rock surface and tree barks, are possibly the oldest man-made canvas for expressing creativity. Considering that these arose in the context of personal shelter, it is not difficult to imagine how their ornamentation shows some of the earliest myths and goals in an unbroken tradition.

In the foothills of the Sahyadri mountains of Thane live the Warli tribals In the caves that take the memory back to where the first man lived. Yashodara Dalmia writes of them with lyrics that matches their white paintings in rice paste. Although the hand of the Warli artist may look naive and basic, a closer examination of the details —the sitting postures, the animation of narratives, life under water and in the trees, the trellis of leaf and fern designs all explain the complexities of the Warli mind.

In the absence of a bibliography and much material on the subject, she obviously writes from conversations with the tribals. Her story combines well the 'mythic vision of the Warlis' and how their legends, gods and beliefs add to their insular life-style. The danger in such a preliminary approach to research is the simplistic conclusions one may be forced to draw. For example, the head of the village is the sarpanch whose main work is "to settle quarrels arising because of the women wanting to leave their husbands", she concludes. While the three and a quarter page introduction to the book suffers from this weakness, it guarantees itself being read as opposed to the many pages of tedious research. Dalmia's text is highly readable and instructive—particularly the legends that illustrate the plates.

Over a decade ago, the publishers of the book, Khorshed and Kekoo Gandhi of the Chemould Gallery, Bombay, taking their tip from the Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India, became the great protagonists of the Warli paintings. It was the urban popularisation of this art form, just as his book is their product. Priced at a reasonable Rs 90, it will make a perfect gift while also initiating laymen to a better class of ethnabilia.



Ritual paintings in a Rathva home

What may otherwise have appeared as a cyclostyled thesis has worked out to be an interesting mix between academics and coffee table book. *Painted Myths of Creation*'s credentials are very impressive; and introduction on the first of the Loka Kala Series by artist K.K. Hebbar, chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi, followed by a foreword by the knowledgeable. Pupul Jayakar, which is followed by an elaborate preface by the literary Kapila Vatsyayan.

Jain begins by explaining the method in his madness—if such detailed field-work and hair-splitting of information shouldn't be so called. But reason shows from the start when he writes "there is a widely prevalent misconception that all regional cultural phenomena are vernacularised offshoots of the sanskritic 'great tradition'...". The indiscriminate use of the words 'fertility', 'mother', 'symbolic', 'tantric', 'magical', etc to define almost anything unintelligible in local cults is due to the scarcity of relevant and well-researched local background material. This is the gap the book under review very nobly fills.

The ritual wall paintings of the Rathva tribe of central-eastern Gujarat are a living tradition where Jain deals "with a shifting reality which is continuously undergoing change". His research shows how much he has had to pursue the many truths that add up to make his conclusions. He leads us to look beyond the ornamental factor in these paintings to the more meaningful body of private discoveries like the possible unearthing of the lost cult of Indra or the fact that the length of the *talas* (beats) of the Rathva tribal music do not exist in contemporary classical music, a fact disclosed in the appendix by David Roach).

Most of the text is of value to serious students. While this will limit the readership, the book will sit solidly on posterity's shelves, a complete archive when the Space Age will take its toll and no one may recall how the mud walls were painted and by what technique, what were the themes behind the iconography and how the images were consecrated and propitiated.

—AMAN NATH

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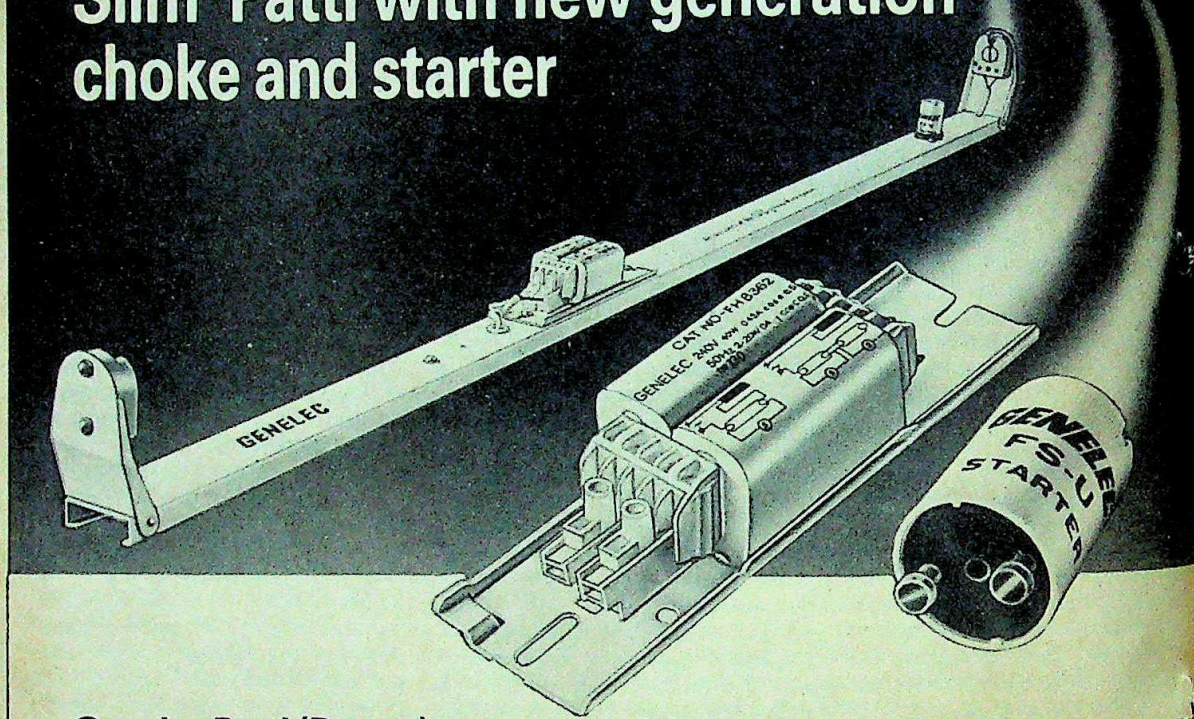
New from GENELEC

'Slim' Patti with new generation choke and starter



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THEATRE

The Play is the Message

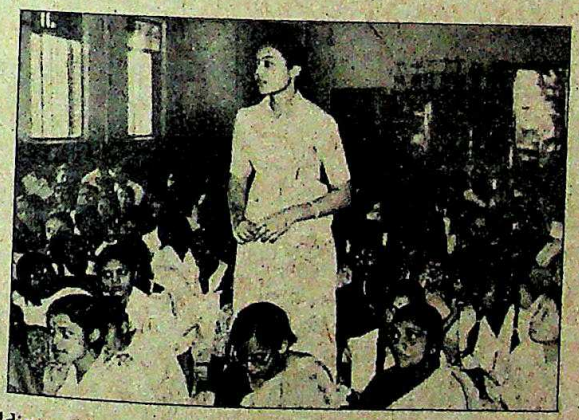
THIS is a play without any frills. It has no plot, no sets, no costumes. The amateur actresses who put it on happily switch parts, depending on who is available for a performance. The playwright is a mother of two who had never published a line earlier. Yet, since it was first produced in mid-1983 *Mulgi Zhali Ho* (A Girl is Born) has been performed at least 200 times in various schools, factories, colleges and clubs in Maharashtra and demand for it continues unabated. It has been translated into Hindi from the original Marathi and will soon be a movie with Vasantdada Patil's daughter Vijaya in the lead role.

Last month, *Mulgi* went on the road. Most of its performances so far have been in Bombay, but now under the banner of the Stree Mukti Yatra, it took its message into the sugar-cane country of western and southern Maharashtra. The play tries to bring out the feminist viewpoint in a humorous way and depicts characteristic vignettes from a woman's life: the mother-in-law blaming the daughter-in-law for giving birth to a daughter as she too was once blamed, until the chorus gives her a lesson on chromosomes; the mother curbing her daughter's ambition to study further, telling her she must know her place; a would-be groom's family inspecting the prospective bride as if she was an object piece of merchandise. Only adding to the charm are the catchy folk tunes that accompany them.

And the rural audiences seemed to lap it up. In Baramati there was a several-minute standing ovation after the show. In Sawli near Miraj 1,400 of the 1,500 inhabitants of the town attended the performance and the audience insisted on collecting a rupee from each family. Whether in the city or the country, *Mulgi* seemed to strike a chord common to all women. In a Dalit hostel in Gargotri there were tears in many of the young women's eyes, and in a discussion after the play a woman labourer was moved to publicly confide to the audience about her drunken husband who refused to look after the children while she came to the show.

The surprising acceptance of the yatra is due not just to *Mulgi*, however, but the enthusiasm of the women behind the show. They have come from several organisations, most notably the Stree Mukti Sanghatana and Maitrini. Among them are Chaya Datar, who is studying the tobacco workers of Niphad, Sharada Sathe, a labour lawyer and Jyoti Mhapsekar, Mulgi's author, who is a librarian. They made a few exploratory trips to the countryside to contact volunteers six months earlier. The readership of *Stree*, a Marathi magazine widely read in the area also proved helpful. And *Mulgi* was not the only drawing card. It was accompanied by sale of feminist literature, a poster exhibition and group discussions.

S.N. KULKARNI/Femina



A scene from *Mulgi* (above) and a young participant from the audience

The yatra hoped to create a new awareness among the women of Maharashtra about the oppression of their sex and the way they have been conditioned to accept their lot unquestioningly. In discussions, it is pointed out how this discrimination, subtle though it may be, begins from birth. When a boy is born *pedas* are distributed; when a girl is born, the inferior *burfi* is distributed. Fasts by women are always for the welfare of the menfolk. To bring the point home a volunteer asks rural girls why their mothers earn only Rs 4 a day while their fathers make Rs 6. "Everywhere we went," says Datar, "there was tremendous enthusiasm, even if they were not willing to accept all the concerpts."

But there was some initial hostility too. In Gargotri and Gadhinglas a local daily sensationalised and distorted an interview with Datar to imply that the yatra members were advocating free sex. But the many male college students who came to hoot and jeer were disappointed when they found the yatra members were dedicated middle class housewives and professionals who used their precious time to propagate the cause.

Queries by local girls during the yatra related mostly to dowry and eve-teasing. In separate discussions with groups of college boys the most frequent comment was: "Girls dress very fashionably and lure us." Yatra members pointed out that in fact the local girls dressed very soberly in ankle-length ghaghras and high-necked blouses and the men had a stereotyped image of women from the movies. Quite a few boys retorted: "What will happen to Indian culture if the girls get above their station?" But in general the men were fairly sympathetic.

One of the poignant vignettes in *Mulgi* has the mother singing to her daughter that once she is married she will wash her hands off her, then letting love get the better of tradition and asking the daughter to come back if she is unhappy. Many felt this brought home the rallying call of the yatra which is "Stree mukti kunachi? Tumchi, amchi, saravanchi!" (Whom does woman's liberation concern? You, me and everyone else.) *Mulgi* has made a significant step in getting the message across.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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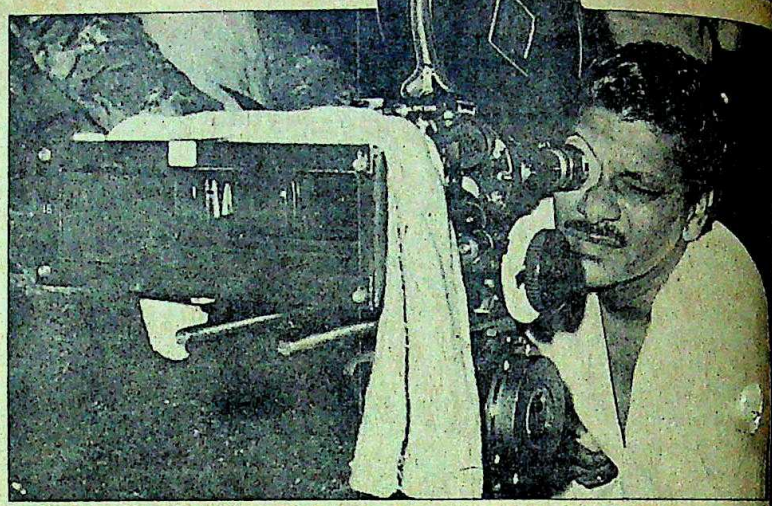
3-D FILMS

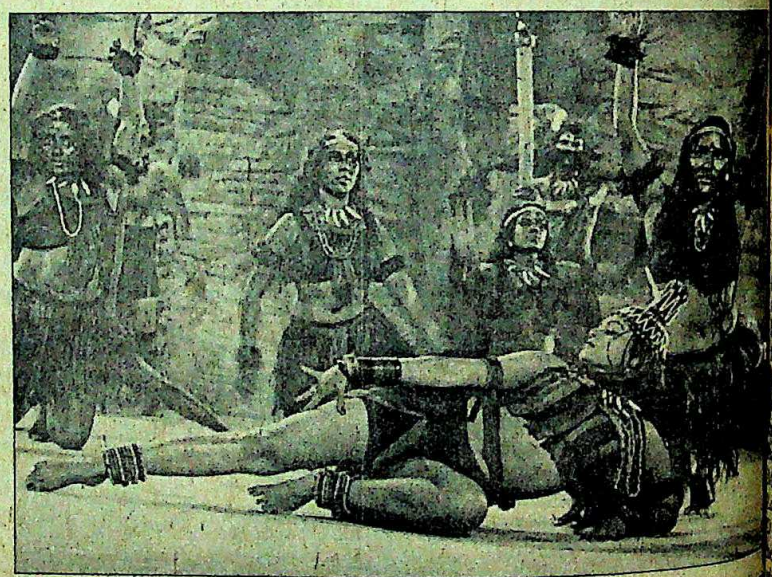
The Gold Rush

THERE'S a new superstar in the south: Arrivision, the 3-D camera system. Not since colour revolutionised the cinema scene in the '70s has there been so much excitement in the dream factories of Madras. The third dimension—whose significance producers are only just realising—is worth at least several crores. For the first time the dream merchants are running not after top heroes or heroines, but after Arrivision. As the top Malayalam star Prem Nazir put it: "The 3-D boom in the south is like the California gold rush. Every 3-D producer is saying that if Appachen can make 10 crore out of nothing, I will make at least a crore."

Appachen is really the man who turned everything in Madras' conventional film world upside down with a little film that turned big: *My Dear Kuttichathen*. Originally made in Malayalam, *Kuttichathen* was later dubbed into Tamil, Telugu and into Hindi, as *Chhota Chetan*. It went on to become the mega-success of the decade and perhaps of all time. Appachen, its producer and the bringer of 3-D into India is expected to rake in a cool Rs 10 crore and more by the end of the year.

Few outside the film industry realise the magnitude of what is happening. In the last four years, there have been only 16 such films made in the world—mostly Hollywood—but in the last two months alone, a dozen 3-D films have been announced in Madras and three have already reached completion stage. Dejected producers have found a glittering new weapon to beat the video; which in the past few years has quietly stolen many avid cinema-goers. The only snag in the boom is the shortage of 3-D cameras. Arrivision is the new hero and Arrivision is hard to get. Romu Sippy, the first to make a Hindi 3-D film, *Shiva Ka Insaaf*, used Arrivision and the results are reported to be mind-boggling and according to experts, better than Stereovision that Appachen used for *Kuttichathen*. Said *Kuttichathen* cameraman Ashok Kumar: "The 3-D off-screen effects in the Arrivision system are more sharp than Stereovision and above all the Arrivision system is more sophisticated and yet simpler to use than Stereovision." For *Shiva*, Sippy imported three





(From top) Kranti Kumar, a scene from *Shoo Mantra Kali* and a scene from *Sagar*: dazzling effects

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...rrivision 3-D cameras at a staggering ...of Rs 20 lakh each.

After Shiva was completed, Sippy sent ...of them to Madras. These cameras ...now become the hottest property of ...south. Ramesh Prasad, son of the ...legendary L.V. Prasad, is their local guar... there. Said he: "As long as the 3-D ...lasts, the Arrivision 3-D cameras ...the real heroes. The two cameras that ...Sippy has entrusted me with are ...booked till the end of 1986." They are ...being rented out at an astronomical sum ...of Rs 10,000 per camera per eight-hour ...shift and still the producers are queuing ...up. Gone are the days of the fastidious ...and heroines, producers have no ...for them. Said Dandayuthapani, ...producer of the Tamil 3-D film *Annai* ...and son of the late Chinnappa ...: "3-D is currently the biggest ...who gives you no hassles and ...and assures you of a super hit." In ...Dandayuthapani dropped his regular ...Rajanikant from his 3-D venture and ...him with Vijaykanth—the poor ...Rajanikant—because Rajanikant ...could not adjust his dates with those of ...Arrivision camera.

The producers who have access to the ...cameras at the moment are in a ...rush to beat each other to the ...-face. Each film project is shrouded ...in the deepest secrecy. Ashok Kumar is ...working in a Telugu 3-D block... *Shoo Mantra Kali* supposed to be a ...of fantasy and magic and inspired by ...-dozen English films including ...*Stone, King Kong* and *The Blue* ...The highlights include sizzling 3-... sequences by Silky Smitha. Said ...: "The gimmicks will keep the audience ...to their seats."

Sagar is another 3-D film being made ...Telugu. Its claim to fame is that it is "In... first underwater 3-D film shot in ...". The story is about a young boy af... with cancer wondering whether ...go to heaven or hell. Said producer ...Kumar: "In heaven we will show ...effects like flowers and classical ...while in hell we get an opportun... to frighten the audience with skele... skulls, flames and other terrifying ...". His trump card, however, is the ...American 3-D documentary called *Sea* ...which he has incorporated into ...and which he promises will give the ...a real "3-D treat". The third 3-D ...in the race in Devar Films' *Annai* ...which is being made simulta... in Tamil and Kannada. It will ...nearly 45 special effects.

...there is more hot news on the 3-D

APPACHEN

Midas Touch

FROM the dizzy heights where he sits now, the world can only look good to Appachen, the 57-year-old creator of *My Dear Kuttichathen*. This one 3-dimensional film alone has catapulted the relatively unknown Appachen right past the Manmohan Desais and Prakash Mehras of the Bombay film world. The top distributors today want only Appachen and almost everyone in the film industry is heralding him as one of the greatest producers of all time.

Appachen

Appachen — whose real name is M.C. Punnose—and his films are rapidly moving on to create Indian motion picture history. *Kuttichathen* was originally made in Malayalam at a cost of Rs 35 lakh. The inspiration behind the film, really, was Appachen's eldest son Jijo who saw a number of 3-D films in Hollywood and wanted to make one at home. Appachen was very reluctant to take the risk initially, he thought he would lose everything he had. But Jijo had faith in the film and Appachen had faith in Jijo. Before taking the plunge, however, Jijo spent a year in Los Angeles studying the Stereovision system. Both father and son decided that it was better than Arrivision despite the fact that Stereovision hires out its equipment only with its own technicians. Appachen brought to India three cameras and three technicians and spent a year shooting his film. Said he: "I am sure these new 3-D quickies shot in Arrivision won't give the same off-the-screen impact."

But how did this man from Alleppey edge past almost every established film maker in Bombay to make one of the top money-spinners of all time? Said Prem Nazir, a close associate of Appachen: "I have been seeing this man for the last 35 years. Not only does he know the pulse of the audience but also all aspects of popular cinema." He started as production controller to his elder brother Kunchacko, the owner of the first film studio in Kerala—Udaya Studios at Alleppey. Together they made 82 films, from 1948 to 1975, before they split. In 1976, Appachen decided to branch out on his own and started his own production company—Navodaya.

Everything he touched turned to gold. Appachen's greatest strength always has been his innovative ability. He became the first producer in Kerala to make a cinemascope film *Thacholi Ambu*. It resulted in a cinemascope boom. In 1980, he produced *Manjil Virinju Pookal*, a sentimental love story with newcomers made at a cost of Rs 7 lakh. It went on to gross over Rs 1 crore in Kerala.

Two years ago, still setting trends, Appachen made *Padayottam*, south India's first 70 mm film. It was his only flop in the last eight years. Last year he made a low budget film *Ente Mamati Kuttiamma* starring a five-year-old girl—baby Shalini. The film became a super hit and baby Shalini is today the highest paid child artiste in India.

But they say behind every successful man there is a woman. In Appachen's case it's his wife Baby who looks after all his production details. The rest of the family also gives him complete support. Jijo, looks after most technical aspects of film production. The younger son, Jose, 25, is a chartered accountant whose worries are increasing with the film's success. "It is going to create tax problems for me," laughs Appachen.

Now that he's made his millions, what does he plan to do? Well, for a start, Appachen is planning to create an amusement park akin to Disneyland at his 75-acre Navodaya Studios at Trikakara, about 15 km from Cochin. Moreover, if the 3-D sensation continues, Appachen plans to do a sequel to *Kuttichathen*. When asked the secret of his success, his wife Baby said: "We are originally farmers from Kuttanad, the one-time rice bowl of Kerala where the rice cultivation is under water. There is always an element of risk involved in this cultivation which may be washed away if the bunds get damaged. The risk element is in our blood." Appachen has always had the courage to take those risks and they have also always paid off.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Cochin

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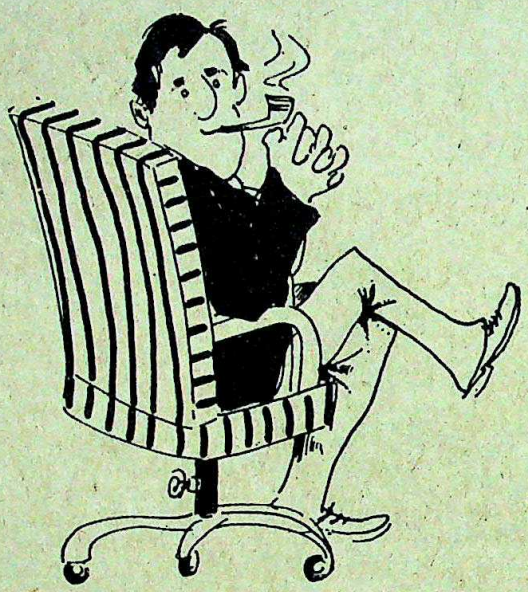
Let me deliberate



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grapevine. *Pournami Rathri* is a Malayalam film being produced by S. Kumar, the producer of half-a-dozen "show all" medical films. This one, supposed to be a rehash of *Tarzan the Apeman* stars Vijayendra, the flop Hindi hero as Tarzan and Pavitra—who has acted in a couple of semi-erotic south films—as our Bo Derek. It promises a couple of "hot" 3-D scenes and the distributors are supposed to have lapped up the film even before it is complete. All these 3-dimensional wonders under production have been billed at an astounding Rs 1 crore and above.

The road to those crores, however, is strewn with problems. For a start, a well made 3-D film requires a well-equipped cinema theatre to get maximum mileage out of the gimmicks. Said Appachan: "We faced a lot of problems screening *Kuttichathen*. In most of the theatres in India the projection and sound systems are in a very bad condition which effects the 3-D films."

Some of those headaches are going to be suffered by the censor as well. With sex and violence leaping straight off the screen, censors will have to completely rethink censorship guidelines. In *Shout Mantra Kali*, for instance, the 3-D effects will show Smitha practically in the audience's laps. Said R. Mahadevan, regional officer, Central Board of Film Certification, Madras: "We will judge each 3-D film in its entirety from the point of view of its overall impact."

Another trade-off of the 3-D upsurge is a new cottage industry of polarised glasses. The producers are charging an extra Re 1 for the special glasses required to view their films. Appachan has reportedly made Rs 1 crore on just the glasses for *Kuttichathen*. Under normal circumstances, the same pair of polarised glasses can be used for over 50 shows and the cost per set is only Rs 3. Said S. Kumar: "In an age where the video monster has eaten up the film industry, 3-D is the only way out. Any way you look at it, there is big money in it and above all for the time being video cassettes of 3-D films cannot be made."

Nothing succeeds like success and Hollywood—not to be left out while the going is good—has also begun sending its block-busters eastwards. Expected in the near future are films like *Magnificent Bodyguards*, *Ten Shogun Women* and the ultimate 3-D film, *Jaws 3-D*. With this kind of glut in the cinemas—and given the transience of new fads—it may not be long before the boom goes bust.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Madras

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ASTROPHYSICS

The Mysterious Force

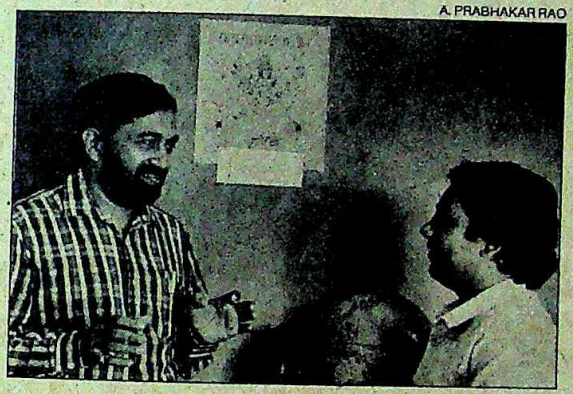
WHY HAS the earth's magnetic field periodically flipped, taking the magnetic north pole to the geographic south pole and back again every now and then? Why has sea level changed over the eons? What has caused the formation of continents and the re-sculpting of seabeds from time to time? Why have certain forms of life from primitive organisms to giant dinosaurs, gone extinct at the time they did?

Questions such as these, some only of academic interest, others holding the key to more complete knowledge of the earth's evolution in its four billion-odd years of existence, have long tantalised scientists. Some scientists—two of them Indian—now believe that they are within reach of theories which will unlock some of the secrets of the past. And they have hypothesised that events such as these which have long been believed to be random occurrences, are in fact governed by some extra-terrestrial force emanating from the Milky Way, the galaxy of which the earth and its solar system are a part.

The idea of a yet-to-be-identified force which works in still-to-be-explained ways isn't as fanciful as it sounds. The existence of an extra-terrestrial pacemaker dictating the pulse of certain events on earth was first put forward some 18 months ago by two Hyderabad scientists, Janardan G. Negi, 49, a deputy director at the National Geophysical Research Institute and his doctoral student, R. K. Tiwari, 32. And last month, it was corroborated by independent research published in two science journals, London-based *Nature* and the Washington-based *Science* by two teams, one of astrophysicists in New York and the other of palaeontologists in Chicago. The implications of the hypotheses and findings are potentially revolutionary to geology, palaeontology and astrophysics.

The Hyderabad team of scientists based itself on studies of very long term astrophysical activity of the earth's crust and its interior and found that they appeared to coincide with the movement of the sun around the centre of the Milky Way. Plotting the periodicity of changes in the sea level on earth—which has varied as much as about 550 meters in the past 500 million years—Negi and Tiwari found it to match remarkably well with the oscillation of the sun around the Milky Way. Was it possible, then, that just as the movement of the earth around the sun causes the seasons or the orbiting of the moon about the earth creates the tides, that the planar oscillation of the sun around the centre of the Milky Way, which occurs once every 280 million years, was also causing certain events on earth?

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



Negi and Tiwari: cosmic theory

The scientists found that the periodic reversal of the earth's magnetic field also correlated highly with the galactic motions of the solar system. The hypothesis was truly astounding: rocks brought up from ocean beds and from volcanic eruptions show that the earth's magnetic field has completed such cycles with intervals in between that have ranged from roughly about 10,000 to more than 10 million years.

In findings published in the August 1983 issue of *Geophysical Research Letters*, a technical publication of the American Geophysical Union, Negi and Tiwari plotted data going back 570 million years and found that the earth's magnetic field had flipped at intervals of 285, 114, 64, 47 and 34 million years. Explaining how they were able to discover these statistically significant periodicities, Tiwari says: "We decided to look at magnetic reversals as they are excellent time markers," leaving their mark indelibly on ancient rocks.

These numbers proved to be of great significance when astrophysicists Michael R. Rampino and Richard B. Stothers of the Goddard Institute of Space Studies, New York, independently came up with very similar numbers in looking at other geophysical phenomena. Studying the data, the New York team found that changes in sea levels, in seabeds and in certain rock formations occurred over two dominant time spans of 32 and 260 million years. This corresponded to the periodicity of 34 and 285 million years discovered by the Hyderabad scientists. Said Negi: "The variation in the figures by a few million years is not wild, but acceptable in theoretical macrophysics." In fact, Negi and Tiwari found that long term sea level changes occurred around 380, 280, 143, 71, 44 and 32 million years ago—numbers which coincide remarkably well with their findings on the earth's magnetic field.

Further corroboration came from two palaeontologists at the University of Chicago who looked at marine fossils going back 250 million years. David M. Raup and John J. Sepkoski discovered that life forms have vanished at surprisingly regular intervals of 26 million years. The Chicago scientists didn't search further back because fossil records older than that become too sparse. Raup did look at the phenomenon of magnetic flips in the earth's field and came up with similar time spans as the Hyderabad team, and suggested that they were caused by the same force.

Exactly what this force is remains a mystery. Rampino and Stothers theorise that it comes from collisions or close encounters between the solar system and clouds of inter-stellar gas or dust as the sun and its planets move cyclically around the Milky Way. Other theories have been advanced, such as the existence of a companion star to the sun which causes periodic destruction on earth when it comes close to the sun every 30 million years or so. But they remain unproven.

The only consolation is that whether it is mass extinctions or geophysical changes, mankind is in no immediate danger. The last changes occurred 11 million years ago, so the next round isn't due for at least 15 million years. Whatever this extra-terrestrial force may be, Negi and Tiwari depict it with a drawing of Shiva performing his cosmic dance, an uncanny coming together of Hindu philosophy and modern science.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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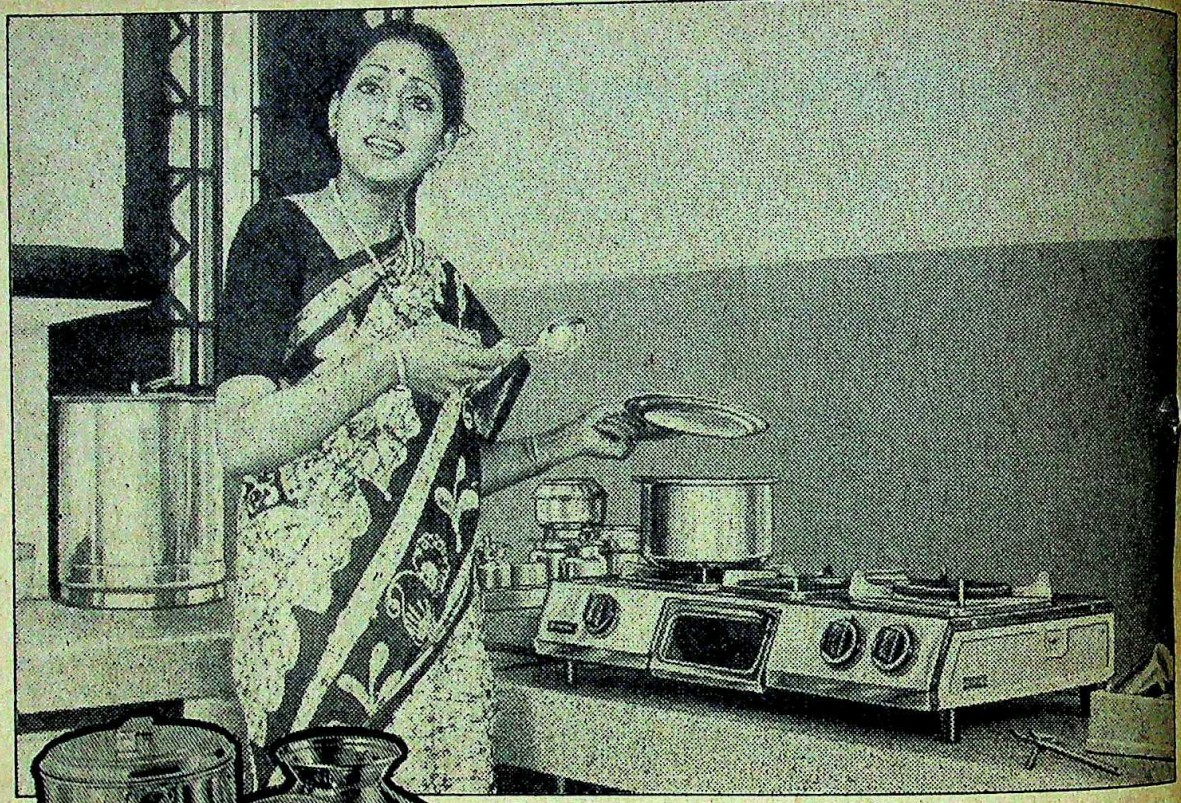

Vessels made out of Salem Stainless Steel are available at all leading vessel stores.

"After running a household of two fussy children and a choosy husband for six years, I know a thing or two.

Shopping, for instance.

I look around. I ask around.

Till I'm fully convinced the things I buy for my family are the best I can get. At the right price.

And I rarely go wrong.

Whether it's a pant length for my husband sewing machine for myself or playthings for my children. Or expensive things like TV, fridge or cooking range.

And vessels, of course.

Whenever I go shopping for them, I'm particular about what I get – vessels made out of Salem Stainless. Vessels that don't pit corrode or stain. Vessels that brighten up my kitchen, keeping their shine even after years of use.

And strong enough to last a lifetime.

As I tell my friends, don't just ask for Salem Stainless. Insist on it!

STEEL AUTHORITY OF INDIA LIMITED
A Government of India Enterprise
Salem Steel Plant
Salem 636 013, Tamilnadu

Salem Stainless. Takes the guessing out of buying vessels.

Sista's - SSP

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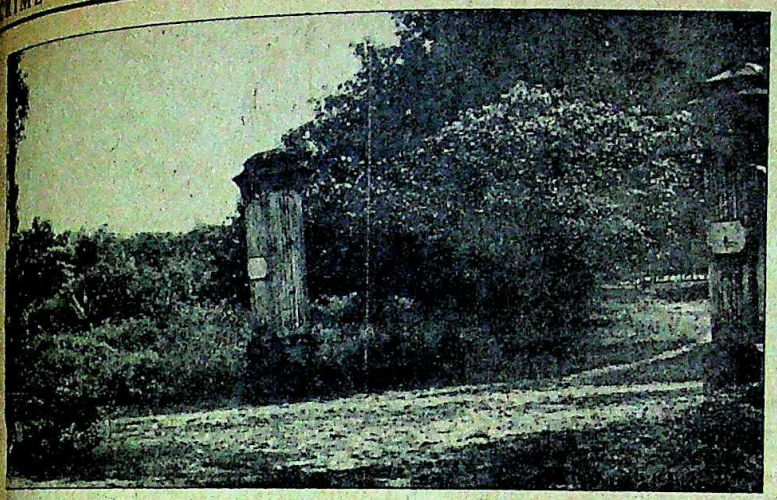

The disputed land holding (left) and Bose: complicated case

HAMILTON ESTATE

Deepening Mystery

IT'S NOT often that a state government finds that the very land on which it thrives is slowly being parceled out by unscrupulous operators exploiting loopholes in the law. Horrified by disclosures that about 20,000 acres of rich cultivable land along a 12-km stretch between Baripada and Betnoti were being skilfully used by a clutch of individuals to their advantage (INDIA TODAY, September 30, 1984), the Orissa Government quickly galvanised its Department of Vigilance to set about uncovering the racket. As officials last fortnight prepared to draw up a charge-sheet against the offenders, it became increasingly clear that the mystery had certainly inexorably been complicated further.

Registered under the Sir Daniel Hamilton (Charitable) Trust, the land holding was operated by a lone trustee, Subodh Kumar Bose, 72, who was arrested six months ago on charges of cheating the state Government and forgery of a document entitling him to the illegal possession of land belonging to the Hamilton estate. He was later released on bail. But, with Hamilton's moves being traced to Scotland, vigilance officials were initially excited when Interpol, the international police organisation, got back to them with information from the Scottish police: one, that Daniel Hamilton had died leaving no heirs; two, that he had had no children; three, that the will and other documents—including declination papers made out by three churches, and the coopting of Bose to manage the holdings being cited by Bose as proof of the genuineness of his trusteeship of the estate were, in fact, authentic and duly registered in the public records office in Scotland. With this, their hopes of a quick indictment of Bose were soon dashed. As Ranjit Mohanty, former chairman of the Bar Council of India, and now counsel for Bose, pointed out, this evidence only serves to strengthen his client's case.

The case begins in the princely state of Mayurbhanj, long before the state of Orissa was formed in 1936, when the then ruler leased 2,000 acres of land to Daniel Meckinn Hamilton, popularly known as the pioneer of the cooperative movement in the country. The land was to be used to start a model agricultural farm and a cooperative training school. But when Hamilton died in 1939, he had managed to multiply the 2,000 acres into 20,000 acres which passed into the hands of other members of the Hamilton family and to three churches—the Church of England, Church of Scotand, and the London Missionaries Society through a will made by Sir Daniel. When the last of the Hamilton men died, the power of attorney over the land holding was supposedly given to Bose and Gopinath Berman, manager of Hamilton's properties in Calcutta. When again the churches and Berman relinquished their rights to the property, Bose, who began his working life as a clerk in the '40s, found himself in the '70s a rich man indeed.

In the right royal manner of a true born landlord, Bose managed to escape the tentacles of the Land Ceiling Act by quickly acquiring a certificate classifying the entire area "privileged ryot land", and, in 1972, registered it in the name of the Sir Hamilton (Charitable) Trust. By the '80s, the land holding had begun earning huge revenues. Aided by shrewd advisors, he sold part of the land and the timber, often to various government departments themselves. This would have continued indefinitely had a government pleader in Baripada not suddenly got wise to the goings-on. When papers pertaining to land compensation of a staggering Rs 8 lakh payable to Bose in lieu of 150 acres being taken over by the state Government came to him, Sushil Chandra Dash's suspicions were thoroughly aroused, and investigations set in motion.

Vigilance officials now argue that the land should automatically have passed into government control after the death of Lady Hamilton in 1946. Mohanty, however, maintains that by law, a charitable trust can never die, even if the trustees die. Whatever the legal ramifications, official sources disclosed that steps were being taken to cancel the privilege ryot certificates that had been granted to Bose, and to takeover the land holding. Taking a cue from the West Bengal Government, which took over land similarly acquired by Hamilton in Gosaba, the Orissa Government is contemplating terminating the lease, they said.

Obviously for the state Government it is also a matter of ruffled feelings over its having been taken for a ride by either the Hamilton clan or by the inheritors. And going by the first of Interpol's disclosures, it is not going to be smooth.

—FARZAND AHMED in Baripada

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GOPAL SHETTY/Midday

Tayabji and Mallya: united

◆ Something's been brewing in **Vijay Mallya's** life—and it's not just liquor. Last week, the country's most eligible bachelor—who heads the United Breweries group with a turnover of Rs 700 crore—wed air hostess **Sakina Tayabji** in a private but grand ceremony in Goa's Fort Aguada. Mallya, also known as the playboy of the eastern world, has always had a reputation for high living, not to mention high flying. He has a passion for fast cars and horses and has sponsored both the Bombay Derby and the Grand Prix. The wedding, of course, was something else. Mallya reportedly booked up the entire hotel in Goa, mailed return air tickets with invitations and gave his guests and his bride a beach party to remember. With a wedding like that, who needs a honeymoon?

◆ "Murder" the environmentalists have been intermittently shouting as the NDMC Horticultural Department's axe has been falling on tree after beautiful tree in the capital. In the hue and cry few have heard the pleas of K.C. Sharma, the beleaguered director of the department, insisting that the trees were top-heavy, diseased and dying. Come April and they would bloom again. "For the last two years, we've been planning to prune them, but the tree lovers scared us off," said Sharma who almost lost his job 18 years ago when he trimmed the Ashoka trees of Lodhi gardens. This year, he finally decided to grin and bare it. Over 500 trees have fallen by the wayside and several more are going to load-shed in the next few months, but the new growth, Sharma promises, will be better and more luscious than ever before. In other words: leave and let leaf.

Trees: cut to cure

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

◆ "I could've danced all night," went the song from *My Fair Lady*. Well, one fair lady did. **Kumari G. Sarala**—Kuchipudi dancer from Hyderabad—danced all night and all day as well. The principal of the Natya Veda Institute of Classical Dances in Hyderabad, Sarala eclipsed the 18-hour world record of dance maestro Gopi Krishna by performing a 24-hour non-stop marathon Kuchipudi dance last fortnight. "I could have gone for another three or four hours easily," said the marathon woman, "but the VIP's were there and so I stopped as originally planned."

A. PRABHAKAR RAO

Sarala: no brake dance

◆ Last fortnight, Bombay went berserk. Into the city's busiest commercial hub, the Fountain, poured hundreds of schoolchildren carrying banners and shouting slogans: "Politicians, shame shame" "Losers never win, winners never lose. Let's keep Bombay clean." The children, accompanied by their school bands, beat their drums and blew their bugles and raised such a shindy that all traffic came to a standstill. From the tall surrounding buildings heads popped out to see what the commotion was all about. The little demonstrators, it turned out, had been invited by the municipal corporation ward officer to protest against the defacing of the city walls by politicians with posters and wall writing. Now, that is what is called good, clean fun.

School kids: up in arms

ROCHA/Free Press Journal

◆ **Tommy Babu** was picked up as a young, handsome and smart independent candidate by the largely Naxalite-dominated Massaurhi assembly constituency of Patna district. Babu, his supporters promised, would provide a clean administration if made chief minister. But, on February 6, when Babu—dressed in a spanking white kurta and pyjama—flanked by two bodyguards and followed by hundreds of supporters, went to file his nomination papers he was in for a rude shock. "Sorry, I cannot accept your nomination," said the returning officer, "as his name is not on the voters' list." The dejected supporters expressed deep anguish and then led Tommy Babu, a young street dog, into the city streets singing: "In our system, clean and honest people like Tommy Babu have no future."

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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RAN BHARGA

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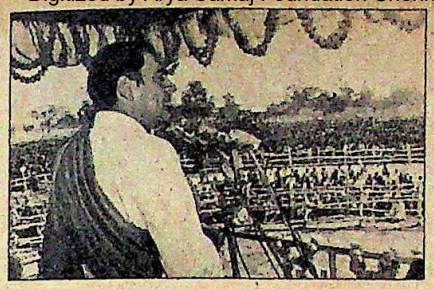
FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT

Buoyant Mood

The Budget season finds the economy buoyant and most economists optimistic about the future, despite a difficult fiscal situation. There seems good reason to believe that the Indian economy is now launched on an accelerating growth curve.

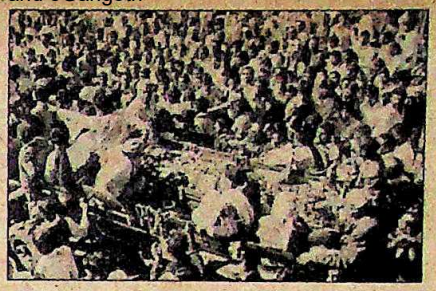
COVER STORY 62



Repeat Performance

Next fortnight's assembly elections in 11 states and one Union territory is virtually a mini-general election. Coming three months after the Lok Sabha poll that gave the Congress(I) a massive mandate, the electoral dice is heavily loaded in the ruling party's favour.

ELECTION SPECIAL 18



Controversial Killing

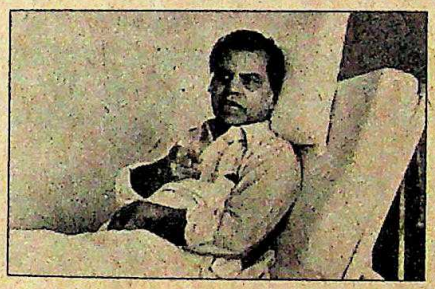
The slaying of Rajasthan MLA Raja Man Singh in a police 'encounter' last fortnight has come as a severe jolt to the Congress(I)'s efforts to woo the state's powerful Jat electorate. The bizarre episode led to the resignation of chief minister Shiv Charan Mathur.

CURRENT EVENTS 44

Dangerous Limbo

The stalemate over the Punjab crisis continued with Home Minister S.B. Chavan unable to make any headway in his negotiations. But INDIA TODAY has obtained handwritten notes by H.S. Longowal which give an insight into the current Akali thinking.

CURRENT EVENTS 50



Awaiting Judgement Day

Abdul Rehman Antulay is battling for survival in more ways than one. The former Maharashtra chief minister has been hospitalised for cardiac problems while disclosures in his court battle seem to have damaged his case and his future political career.

SPECIAL FEATURE 74

Paradise Lost

Sri Lanka's escalating ethnic crisis has gouged permanent scars across the socio-economic face of the island and shattered President Junius Jayewardene's dreams of taking the country down an open, free economy road.

SPECIAL REPORT 84

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THE LONGEST RECORD AND THE SHORTEST NAME IN THE PROTECTION* BUSINESS.

THAT'S US.

*Waterproofing and anti-corrosion protection for factories

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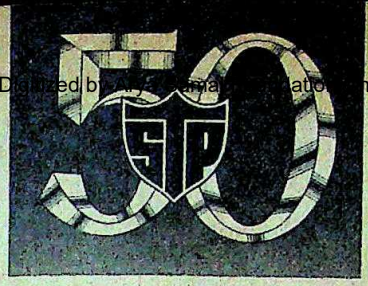

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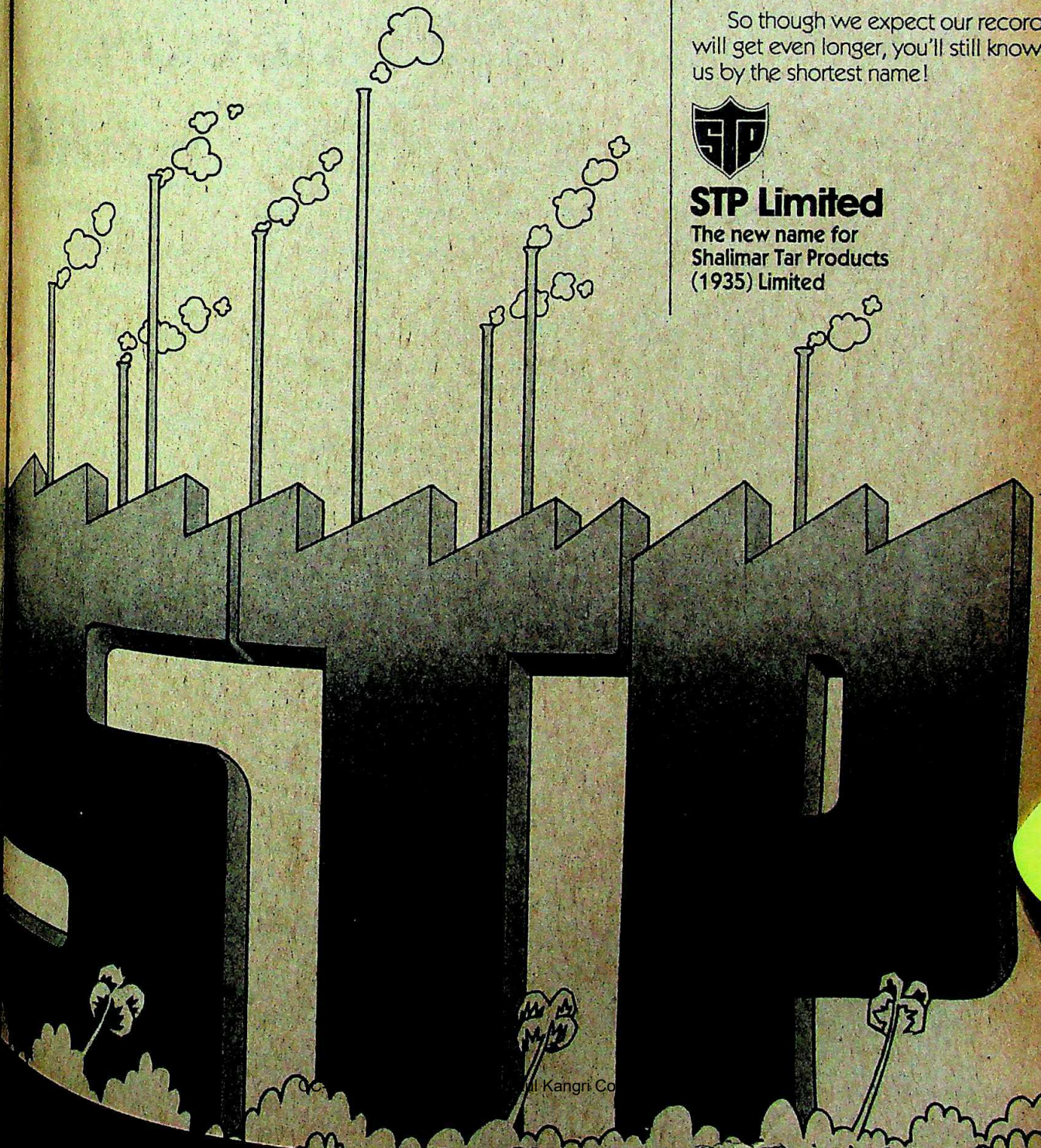
Today our leadership extends to bituminous protection systems as well and our expertise in handling civil construction projects is recognised throughout the country.

Our new name symbolises the spirit of the company that is constantly seeking innovative changes. In new product development, sophisticated protection systems, expert consultancy services and new business opportunities. Two major new diversification projects will soon take us into totally new and challenging fields.

So though we expect our record will get even longer, you'll still know us by the shortest name!

STP Limited

The new name for Shalimar Tar Products (1935) Limited



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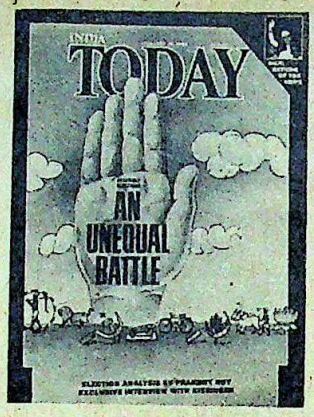

GLIMMER OF HOPE

It is unwise to dub the forthcoming assembly elections "An Unequal Battle", (February 28). The same had been suggested about Mrs Gandhi following the Janata wave in 1977, but by 1980 she had been resurrected. This could happen in 1985 too, if sympathy for the vanquished opposition put them back on the rails. While they may have lost a battle, they have certainly not lost the entire war.

Bangalore RAMANAND SHARMA

RESIDING RIGHTS

It is amazing that the BJP president, Atal Behari Vajpayee has asked the Government to permit presidents of recognised parties to retain their government accommodation ("Life After Defeat", February 28). Has he forgotten the fact that the Janata government denied free accommodation to Mrs Gandhi after her '77 defeat? When a person who ruled the country for 11 years (till 1977) was refused this concession, mere presidents of parties have no right to ask for this favour.

Sangareddy T. SUDARSHAN

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In the books section (February 28) your reviewer attributes the authorship of my book *The Warlis: Tribal Paintings and Legends* to Yashodhara Dalmia who has in fact written only the introduction to it. I quote—"Dalmia's text is highly readable and instructive particularly the legends that illustrate the plates". Yashodhara Dalmia had nothing whatever to do with the legends, I did the translation and retelling, as both editor and author of the book.

Bombay LAKSHMI LAL

The error is regretted. —*Editor*

SELLING SECRETS

In the cover story "The Spy S tion" (February 15) your view that Alexander was in no way involved treachery and therefore need not paid the 'heavy price' cuts across the principle of executive responsibility accountability of the bureaucracy surprising that his private secretary involved in the espionage for the last years and Alexander was not aware He has miserably failed in his accou bility to the country and deserves a harsher punishment.

Bombay A.Y.

■ In "The Spy Sensation" you said that the French Deputy Mi Naval and Air Attache Colonel Bolley was present at the Army Day eption at the residence of the Se hyaksh on January 15. He was neither vited nor present at the reception.

New Delhi MAJOR S.P. T

public relations officer,

■ In the cover story you headlined Coomar Narain box as "Unlikely Sp How could you say that considering, before the ink could dry, Narain confe that he has been in the espionage b ness for the last 25 years.

Bombay R.A. KA

POVERTY PROBLEM

Your Comment "The Other Half" bruary 15) gives an impression modernity, technocracy and effici bear no relationship to the uplift of poor. How can we raise the standard living of the poor unless we are able produce plenty of goods at cheap pri Modern technology and manage alone can help us. What schemes such the Minimum Needs Programme, hav achieve is merely redistribution of me—the money collected from the as taxes is distributed to the poor. I a that these programmes are necessary they are not permanent solutions. rural people must someday stand on own feet. The only way to achieve th to increase productivity of the worker both rural and urban. We must rea ber that a society cannot consume than it can produce. So to increase sumption we must increase producti

Bangalore S.S. D

■ Kudos to your Comment. You done a grand job in voicing the proble of the other half in no uncertain

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...ask of taking India into the 21st cen-
...ry carries no conviction unless we real-
...the basic problems of rural India. We
...not afford to neglect problems like
...indebtedness, malnutrition, unem-
...ment and poverty in rural India.

R.D. BUIT

...Rajiv Gandhi has already proved
...his government will be clean, effi-
...and deliver the goods expected by
...people. It will be good if he now con-
...his attention and devotes his
...to the betterment of rural India
...launching programmes to better living
...tions, education and medical facili-
...It is the masses, "the poor other half"
...have given the massive mandate to
...and he is indebted to them.

PREMLATHA KRISHNAMOORTHY

...While your Comment was an excel-
...summary on the state of the "other
...half", your opening paragraph, on which
...theme of the article was based, con-
...an inaccurate presumption. It said
...the present Government's call for
...and efficiency ignores the poor.
...of the poor requires money
...cannot be generated by the pover-
...masses. Therefore, it appears
...the Government, by focussing on the
...income-generating half, is at-
...to consolidate its position in
...create and maintain the surplus
...to sustain any programme of
...it would have, perhaps, been more
...if you had instead based your
...on the necessity to minimise
...and improve the implementa-
...of the existing programmes.

JAYANT A. SHUKLA

GOOD SIGNS

"People's expectations are scary" (Fe-
...15) was an excellent interview
...the prime minister. It is a good sign
...Rajiv Gandhi is scared of the nation's
...expectations of him. This only
...that he is fully aware of the respon-
...put upon him and the party by
...voters. His intention to bring about a
...change in the approach to the
...system is noteworthy. He does
...want the system to churn out "li-
...but "uneducated" people. He has
...the crux of the problem.

S.E. MEERZA

TRYING TASK

All the best to Rajiv Gandhi in his
...for people to propel India into the
21st century ("New Ministers: Style and Substance", February 15). It seems to me, however, that he has an uphill task ahead if his settling for Bir Sain as minister of state for environment is any indication. Is the environment so unimportant that Bir Sain who thinks the dinosaur is an endangered species should be made minister because of the Harijan lobby?

Providence, USA — DHUN M. WADIA

DREARY FARE

The article "Doordarshan: The Sitcom Success" (February 15) stated that there was a bureaucratic objection that *Mashoor Mahal* was not educational enough. But what this "not educational enough" means is not clear. Does education hover round the sphere of bookish information only? It is true that bookish knowledge makes a person intellectually sound but can he manage to hold his own little niche in these feverish days by being intellectually aware only?

Calcutta — MOM MUKHERJEE

■ You have been unreasonably kind to the serial *Hum Log*. It is true that initially it did interest the viewers, but now if people are discussing it at parties and dinner-tables it is only to complain about the weak storyline being stretched beyond the limit of endurance. Put in a short and compact form it might have sustained the viewers' interest. In contrast, serials like *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* and *Idhar Udhar* are enjoyable and with a little more polish they could easily be taken as good replacements for the foreign humour serials. But as for *Star Trek* it should have been allowed to continue in the interest of the science-fiction addicts since we have no serial that can replace it.

Mhow — SUSMITA BHATTACHARYA

■ I was greatly surprised to read that the "popular foreign serials are being rudely elbowed out by the locally produced ones". Nothing could be farther from the truth. More than anything else, it is the policy of the Government that is mainly responsible for the virtual eclipse of the foreign programmes which are way above in quality, content and appeal. Barring *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, the fare dished out to the starved audiences is terribly unappetising. *Hum Log* is so morbid and the dreary *Anveshan* very soporific. Even *Idhar Udhar* had a flat beginning. To have wholesale import of foreign serials is a moot point but it is very essential to have a healthy blend.

Delhi — SANDEEP KHANNA

TRADING DEGREES

"Degrees of Fraud" (February 15) sketches the true picture of the state of affairs in the Bihar University. Teachers, students, examinations and degrees all take a backbench in front of money. The teachers want their salaries and the students their degrees anyhow. It is ironical: the B.A. exam for 1984 began in September and still goes on. It is really a hotbed of corruption.

Samastipur — RAVINDRA KUMAR MISHRA

JETTISONING JUNK

Your report on the proposed induction of Pepsi-Cola into the Indian soft drinks market ("Cola Pep", February 15) made interesting reading. What struck me was the proferred deal—that the benevolent Pepsico will undertake to export 'non-traditional agro-based produce' from India in return for being allowed to peddle its fizz drink in this country. Incidentally, the 'non-traditional agro-based produce' singled out so far is 'canned fruit drinks'. That Pepsico will be licenced to trade junk for fruit has at least been mentioned in your article even if not emphasised. Will we never learn? Are we any better today than the gullible Africans of yore who happily yielded their ivory and gold for glass beads and cheap trinkets dangled before them by clever European merchants? Or is it that in our grossly undernourished country we are experiencing an unmanageable surplus of edible fruits?

Delhi — MANU TAYAL

IRREVERENT RACE

By publishing an article like "Passing on the Mantle" (February 15) you are assuming an ungodly rat race among the Sisters of Charity. I do hope that these revered souls do not pay any heed to the article, and carry on their work serving Jesus Christ among the poorest of the poor without caring for holding any office.

Calcutta — SUBIR K. LAHIRI

PREVALENT POLLUTION

The article titled "Waters of Woe" (February 15) is a very grave indicator of what dangers stalk our people. Turning a blind eye to such large-scale water pollution would only end up in disaster of the Bhopal kind and it is time somebody instilled some sense of responsibility into the minds of those in power.

Madras — V.M. RAJASEKHAR

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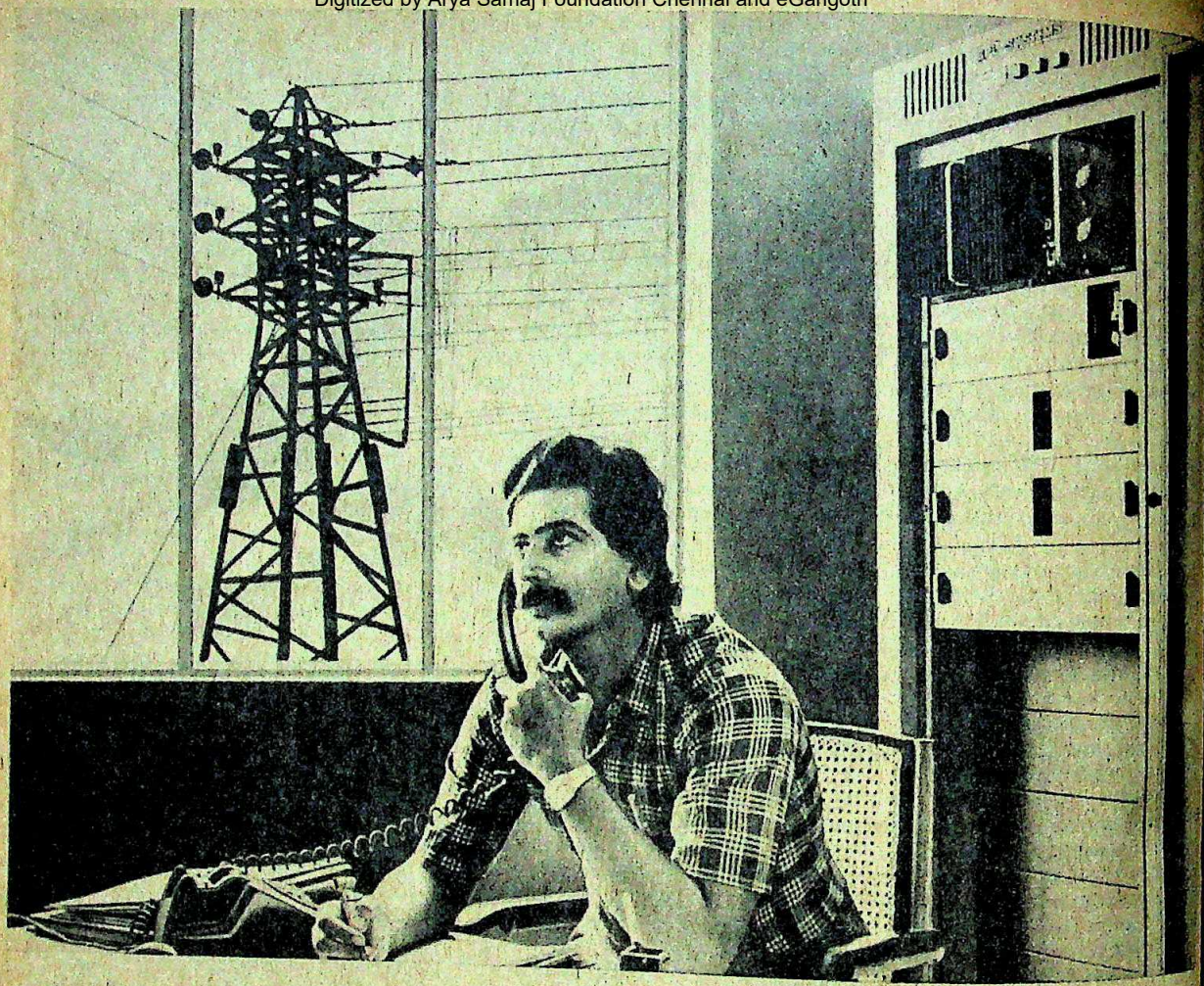

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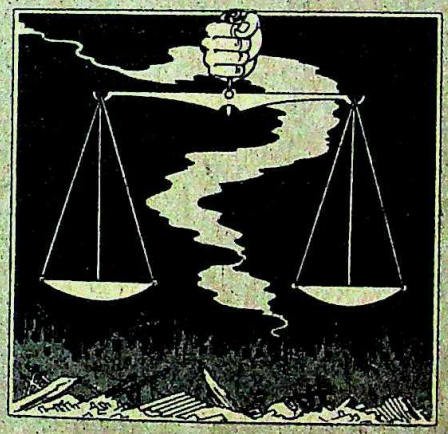
The Rule of Law

CONTRASTS are often instrumental in teaching the right lessons. The death of Man Singh, MLA from Deeg, and two political associates has been followed promptly by the appointing of a judicial inquiry into the confused circumstances surrounding his killing at the hands of the police. This is as it should be: people were killed; a civilised society wants to know why and by whom. The contrast sits sadly with the handling of the killing of several hundred people, mostly Sikh, in the aftermath of the assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi. A police inquiry has been set up to look into the conduct of the police forces in Delhi during those few days of bloodshed, to be sure, but the Government has so far declined to appoint an appropriate authority to try and ascertain who was responsible for the carnage.



The Government believes, and the prime minister has said as much, that a judicial inquiry would work to the detriment of the Sikhs. Government spokesmen, including the prime minister, go no further but the unspoken fear is that a judicial inquiry, by definition a public washing of dirty linen, would once again excite passions best left quiescent. And the Sikhs would be shown up in bad light because it would establish that members of their community celebrated the assassination of the prime minister.

It is, indeed, a conundrum and the Government obviously believes that the cure would be worse than the disease. But hoping that the problem will go away on its own, or will recede when a solution is found to the larger Punjab imbroglio clearly no answer. For one, there hasn't been anything like this in India's experience since Partition and the scale and the circumstances in which the killings occurred demands that justice should be seen to be done.

For another, trying to sweep the episode under the carpet betrays an ignorance of or insensitivity to the depth and extent of the horror and trauma caused by the killings. The post-Partition carnage embittered Hindus and Muslims so deeply that Muslims have ever since been on notice to prove their fidelity to this country. More damaging has been the periodic eruption of communal riots which have taken many thousands of lives since they increased in frequency in the early 1960s.

Now, something similar is happening with the Sikhs. The emotional gap that exists between the Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab is not getting narrower, and there is a very real danger that a whole generation is growing up in Punjab and in those areas of Delhi and elsewhere where the November killings occurred fed on a diet of anger and even hate. As a series of private reports—most recently that of the Citizen's Commission led by Justice S.M.Sikri and made up of veteran administrators—amply demonstrate, the sense of injury among innocent Sikhs will simply not evaporate.

The truth of the matter is that the story of those traumatic days is fertile with instances which will generate more rather than less resentment. First, it is true that some misguided Sikhs rejoiced over the killing of Mrs Gandhi and that there were precious few who found the courage to stand up and condemn it in the first few days just as few opinion leaders or Sikh politicians had earlier condemned Bhindranwale and his desecration of the Sikh places of worship. But it is not true that all Sikhs deserved to be tarred with the same brush. The average person, whether Sikh, Hindu or Muslim, wants to have nothing to do with violence and tension. There are some eyewitness accounts of retribution being spontaneous and swift—however illegal—with some who displayed their glee at the news of Mrs Gandhi's assassination, but it is also true that most of those who suffered, the menfolk who were killed or those whose homes were looted and burnt, were innocent.

Second, there is a growing body of evidence that testifies to the thoroughness with which the killings, looting and arson was conducted. Some, and only some of it was a spontaneous reaction to Mrs Gandhi's assassination. Much of it was orchestrated by individuals whether criminally or politically motivated, to either loot or teach the Sikhs a lesson. And it bears repeating that victim after victim has named names, and that some of those identified belong to the Congress(I), a fact that no giant margins of election victories can erase.

Ultimately, however, it is necessary to remember that murder is murder, whether in the assassination of a prime minister or in the discovery of an unidentified body in a sack as happened the other day in Delhi—or as the end result of a mob on the rampage. And no one who upholds the rule of law can ignore this fact or the basic tenet of a civilised society that one who breaks its laws must suffer for it. At the moment, there is the prospect that scores of killers, looters and arsonists will get away scot-free, and that is intolerable.

Justice must be done and must be seen to be done, but it doesn't have to be done to the beat of loud drums. If the Government is unwilling to risk arousing passions in a public inquiry into the circumstances in which so many people were killed in the four days after Mrs Gandhi's assassination, it can do so quietly. Exceptional conditions demand exceptional measures, and there is no reason why an inquiry cannot be held in circumstances which would keep a check on the public display of the evidence, on the manner in which its proceedings are covered in the media or portrayed before the public. And if such an inquiry should come up with the indictment of some Sikhs for having rejoiced in the hour of gloom, it would be a salutary lesson just as it would be lesson for all law-breakers if those guilty of calculatedly killing the innocent are arraigned before the bar of justice.

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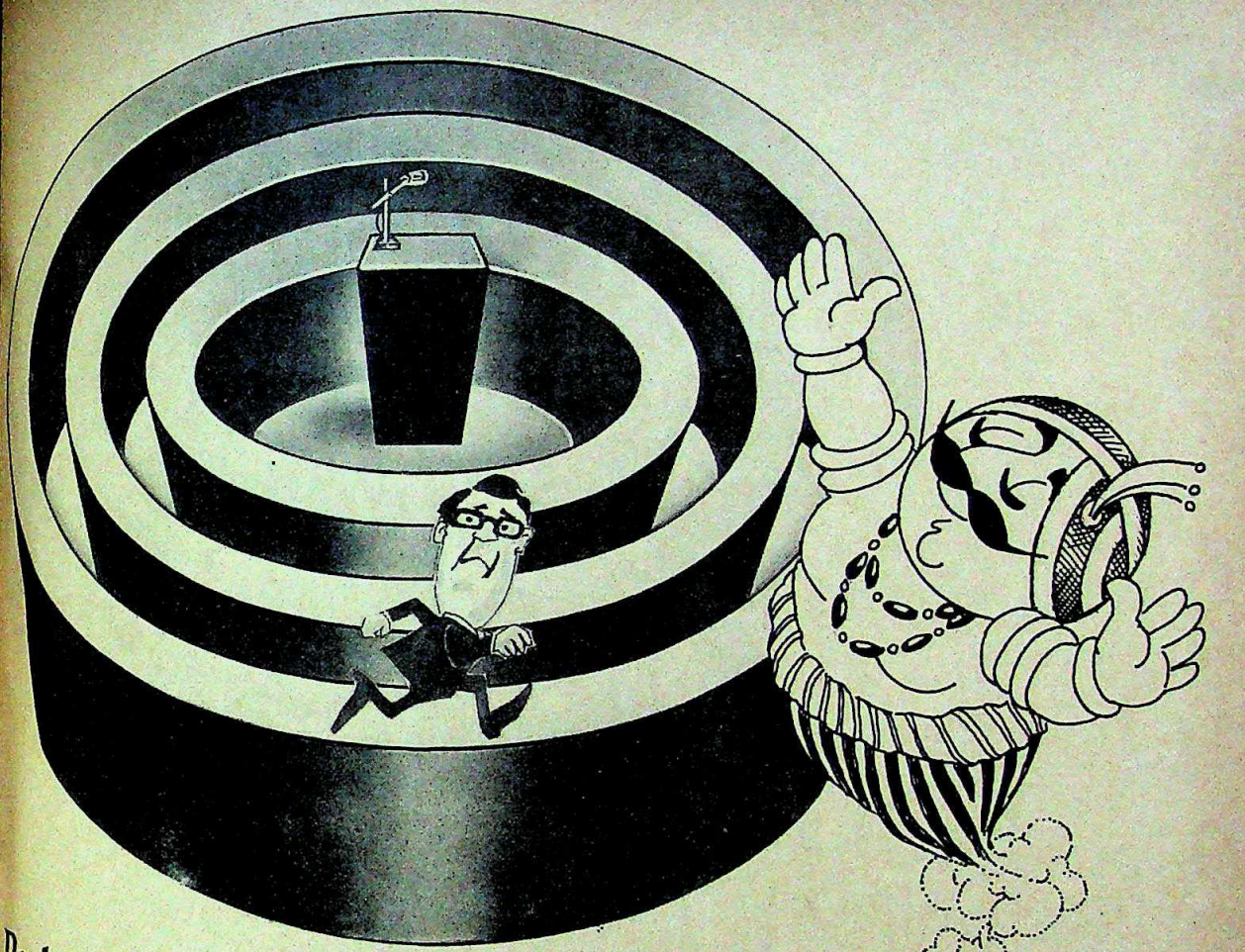

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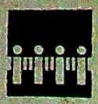

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The Times of India

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■ KAPIL DEV in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

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■ MEENAKSHI SESHADRI in *Star and Style*

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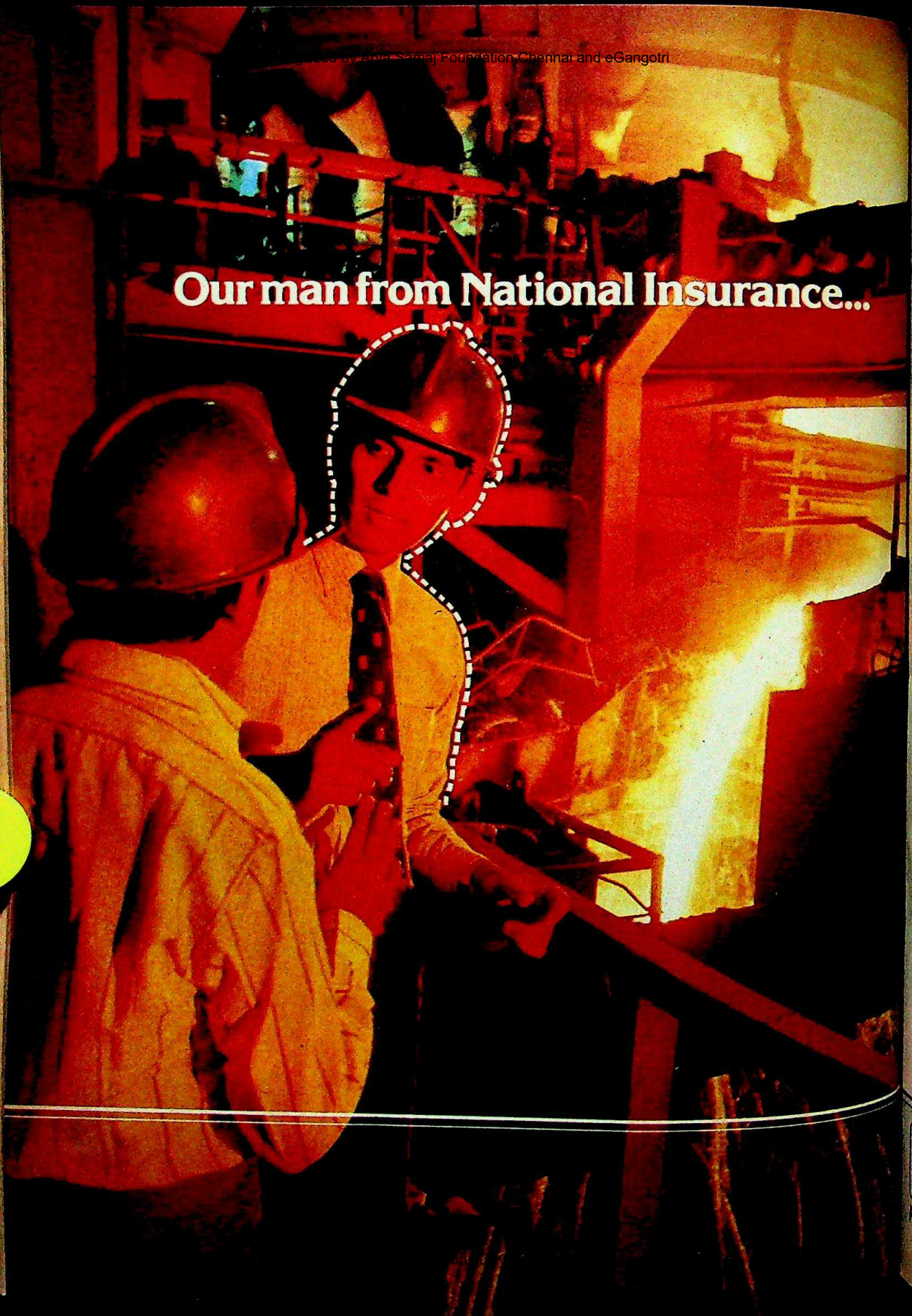

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TOILET CASE

■ There is never a dull moment when West Bengal Public Works Minister Jatin Chakravorty is around. Some time ago, he hit the headlines when he banned Usha Uthup from warbling in an auditorium. His latest escapade is less spectacular but as controversial: a toilet.

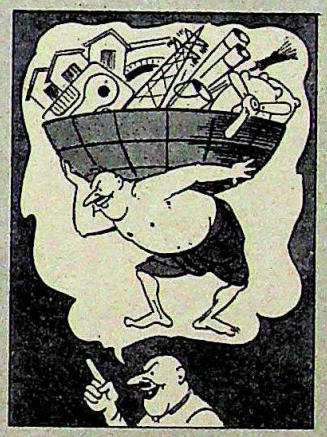
Now, this is no ordinary toilet. Placed on the first floor of the secretariat, its fittings sparkle, the sandstone-coloured tiles do not intrude upon the gentle thoughts that people indulge in during ablutions, and the soft lights make people believe they are in heaven. For only the very select, however, for the paradise is meant only for departmental secretaries.

Coincidentally or otherwise, the toilet is situated right next to the finance minister's office, who disapproves of Chakravorty's style of functioning. Construction took place about the time a furious chief minister was hauling Chakravorty over the coals on account of the poor condition of the state's roads. But it is unlikely the rebukes will cause Chakravorty to turn a new leaf. After all, a man who could paint the tip of Calcutta's Shaheed Minar a ghastly bright red, in the teeth of opposition from people like Satyajit Ray, is no ordinary mortal.

SELF STYLE

■ Another extraordinary mortal is Ramdas Nayak of the BJP, guide, friend and philosopher to the assembly constituency of Kherwadi in Bombay. Nayak has hit the stands with a fast-selling pamphlet listing his achievements as MLA for Kherwadi from 1978 to 1980.

Nayak claims he got a total of Rs 5.25 crore sanctioned for his constituency, which went into the building of latrine-blocks, an assortment of water pipelines, wider roads, a dozen bridges, over 2,500 rooms for hutment dwellers, the renovation of temples and masjids, nearly 2,000 power connections, 1,940 ceiling fans for government employees and, the *tour de force*, "cancellation of second show in drive-in-theatre by amending the Maharashtra Cinema (Regulation) Act, 1953".



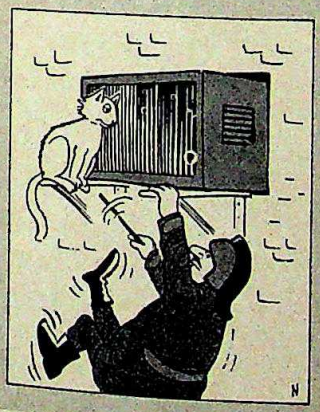
In between, Nayak found time to help "thousands of people procure cement on ration cards", and wake up the chief minister at 1.45 a.m. on Christmas day, 1978—to secure the release of 102 people "mercilessly beaten" by police officers.

Not for nothing does Nayak claim that "there is no gap between the voter and myself". All this and the literary touch too—"Elected as President of the prestigious National Library".

CAUGHT NAPPING

■ The mills of government in West Bengal, run with an exquisite mixture of lethargy and confusion, grind languidly at the best of times. Last month, they ground to a halt, because of the owl and the pussycat.

The owl was sleeping soundly, perched on a beam across the main entrance to the protected area of Writers' Building. All through the day clerks and investigative newshounds stared at it and gossiped and quoted ominous lines from Shakespeare, putting a temporary halt to affairs of state.



The pussy was also sleeping, on a ledge under the air-conditioner which blew cold into a minister's room. When it awoke, it discovered it couldn't get down and wrote the minister a complaining letter. A fire tender arrived, and an impressive telescopic hoist shot up. When the fireman called for a stick and brandished it, the cat calmly jumped down and sped off leaving him stranded outside a minister's ledge looking not too concerned about it.

Nobody did any work in Writers' Building that day. Some unkind passers-by were heard to remark that it was business as usual.

HERD INSTINCT

■ Hannibal used elephants to cross the Alps and attack Rome. Porus used them to try and frighten away Alexander. Neither succeeded but that was not the fault of the elephants. They are very persistent as students of the R.V. Engineering College on Mysore Road in Bangalore found out rather suddenly a couple of months ago.

At about 3 one morning hostel residents were woken up by loud trumpeting from the courtyard. They rushed to their windows. What did they see but 11 male elephants, eight cow elephants and two calves raising merry hell. The police and the forest officials arrived quickly but after that it was anyone's day as battle royal raged to drive the animals back into the Bannerghata forests.

It was not a simple job. The 100 forest officials who sallied out to the fray, beating drums, bursting crackers and shooting in the air, found to their chagrin that the elephants had got used to the noise. Finally, thankfully, the herd retreated into the trees, and the Tarzans went back to bind their wounds and await the next assault.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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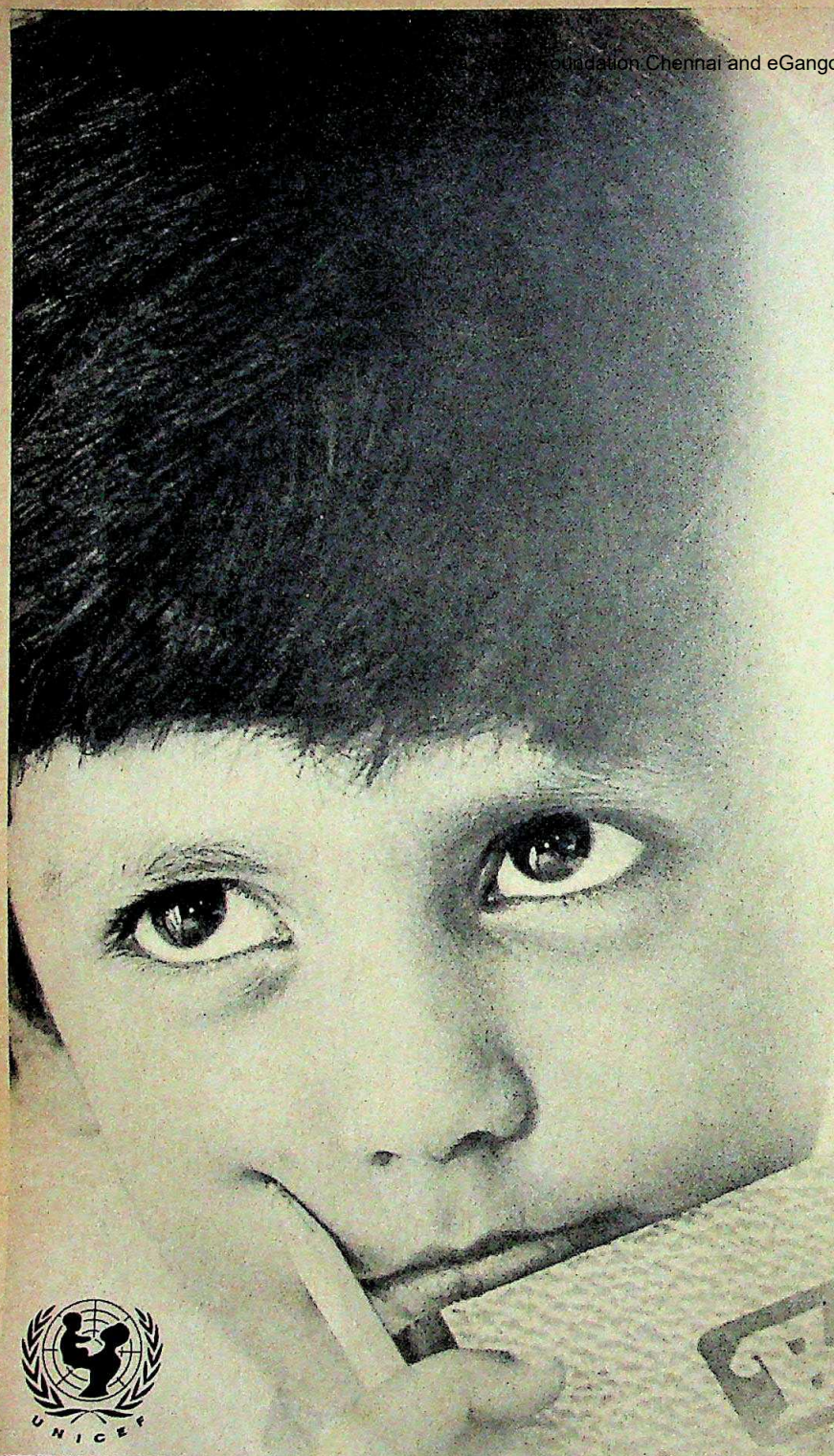

Thousands of children go blind every year due to preventable reasons. One of the major causes of childhood blindness is due to accidents.

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Some times, the simple games that children play can cause injury to the eye and lead to blindness. *Gulli-danda*, bows and arrows and lower branches of trees are a constant threat to children's eyes. So are sharp household objects like knitting needles and kitchen knives. Equally dangerous are fireworks.

When despite precautions, injury does take place, consult your doctor or the nearest government health centre, at the earliest. Remember to wash your hands with soap before examining the eyes yourself. Also, when washing them, always use clean water and a clean cloth for wiping.

For a free booklet on the prevention of blindness in children, write to the following address indicating the language of your choice: Voluntary Health Association of India, C-14, Community Centre, Safdarjang Development Area, New Delhi 110 016.

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BETTER LIGHT BETTER SIGHT

SYLVANIA LAXMAN

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Life piled on life will be of no avail if the gray spirit yearning in desire does not 'follow knowledge like a sinking star beyond the bound of human thought' Perfection is not the prerogative of mortals but to try to drink knowledge to the lees and not to miss significant knowledge in the underwood of details must be the endeavour of every managerial aspirant. Knowledge must be unified and not disparate; if not, it degenerates into acquisition of isolated facts and we may lament 'where is the knowledge we have lost in information?' Effective use of knowledge combined with a capacity for guidance and direction is the very essence of leadership and managers are leaders.

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ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Repeat Performance

NEXT week India will once again go to the polls for the second time in three months in what amounts to a virtual mini-general election. With 2,534 assembly seats in 11 states and one union territory up for grabs, it could hardly be anything less. Which is why the assembly elections, though bereft of the urgency and vocal antagonism of the December polls, is nonetheless crucial for the main contestants. For the rejuvenated Congress(I) a drop in votes would imply a major hiccough in its runaway popularity. For the Opposition the polls represent a final test of their credibility and indeed their future.

The pre-poll scene was, if anything, symbolic of the confidence or lack of it, in the respective camps. Like his mother before him, Raj Gandhi firmly established himself as the ruling party's star campaigner, crisscrossing all the states that comprise the 280 million electorate for the polls.

But it was clearly going to be a one-sided victory once again for the Congress(I) with only Andhra Pradesh and Sikkim appearing to be in a comfortable position to return an opposition party to power. But less predictable has been the discernible and vital changes in the national election scenario. INDIA TODAY *correspondents in various states report on the pre-poll situation in all its variety.*

UTTAR PRADESH

One-way Battle

THE CHOWK, in old Lucknow, today symbolises a lot more than the colourful past of the kingdom of Avadh. The city's social centre of yesteryear is now the favourite pulpit for vote-seekers of all parties. Thousands of posters, banners, buntings and flags bedeck the small area and sum up the assembly election scene in Uttar Pradesh.

Predictably, a large majority of the posters belong to the Congress(I). And practically all of these have been there since the days of the Lok Sabha election two months ago. As the Congress(I) workers explain, they hardly needed to put in any extra effort and change anything. After all, the strategy, slogans, promises and offerings are all the same as they were in December. So is the electorate. For the Congressmen in Uttar Pradesh, thus, it is a case of resuming from where they had left off in December.

There are very few takers for the half-hearted offerings of the opposition leaders who hold meetings off and on. Their message is no longer an alternative to the Congress(I). In a belated sense of realism what they promise now is an effective opposition to control the massive majority that has already been handed out to the Congress(I) at the Centre. At his many public meetings, BJP President Atal Behari Vajpayee has been trying to put this across saying: "You have already created this large luxury train of 401 bogeys. What you have forgotten to do is to make provision for effective brakes in case, some day, it threatens to run us all over."

If only that kind of realism had permeated deep enough it may still have been possible for the Opposition to make a contest out of this walkover. But it is not so. Said senior BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi: "I have toured the whole state and found the Congress(I) an absolutely divided house. The same is true of the DMKP. Our party only stands to gain." And following the same myopic calculations, the BJP, which has not won more than 92 seats in the 425-member house at the best of times, had put up 375 candidates in these, the most dismal of times.

> **In what is considered the power base of the country, all factors—including the Opposition—seem to have come together in a conspiracy to help the ruling party.**

But boundless optimism is one trait the politician does not lack, for despite the writing on the wall, the election has seen a fairly heavy rush for even the opposition parties' tickets. The DMKP, for example, had a list over 5,000 to choose from. And even though small when compared to the Congress(I)'s 80,000-plus,it must have been flattering to Charan Singh whom the Congressmen now often ridicule in campaign speeches as "*Shahenshah-e-alam, Dilli se Palam.*" (The king of the world whose domain stretches from Delhi to Palam). Even Rashtriya Sanjay Manch has put up a self-ingratiating 150 candidates. The consequence is the collection of as many as 1,146 candidates of the various major opposition parties challenging the Congress(I). And this is one figure that does not lie, for it speaks of the confusion, lack of vision and political pragmatism among the opposition ranks.

But that does not mean there is absolutely no challenge, for some of it comes from within.In its quest for a cleaner image the party decided to deny tickets to half of the sitting legislators, emboldened by the Lok Sabha election. Overnight, of 153 of the 306 sitting legislators were denied tickets it amounted to letting loose an army of disgruntled men. Add to this the other rejects, who touch the 80,000 mark, and it brings the party leaders in the state face to face with a virtual insurgency. As Chief Minister N.D. Tiwari confessed: "There is no point denying that we are having a problem from these people. We divide this challenge in two parts. The first is from rejected ticket-seekers who are not campaiging for the party. The second is from rebel candidates."

Reluctant campaigners include prominent men like former assembly speaker Dharam Singh, and former minister Kashi Nath Mishra, Saidul Hassan, Raj Singh Khanna and Abdul Rehman Nastar. Says Shyamlal Bajpayee, who has been denied a ticket from his constituency of Haidergarh in Barabanki district: "Now it is difficult for me to go and campaign for the party as the voters ridicule me for being a reject." He adds, bitterly: "This arrogance and overconfidence will not help the party in the long run. Today we have a situation where votes are floating about in sewerage drains. We just have to bend down and scoop them up by the bucket. But times may change. Remember 1977?"

But as of now no one seems to be

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S. PREMI

Rajiv addressing an election rally: growing confidence

very much about the harm the purge could do in the long run and, making light of the rebel activity, no one in the party seriously foresees any reverses. "Rajiv Gandhi has generated tremendous enthusiasm", said Irrigation Minister Vir Bahadur Singh, adding, "why should anyone vote for the Opposition now?" And without hesitating for a moment he predicts over 350 seats for his party.

The same spirit of overconfidence also prevails in the party headquarters which has settled for a relatively low-key campaign. Contrary to the originally agreed amount of Rs 50,000, only Rs 10,000 has been given to each candidate. The candidate has also been denied the customary gift of a jeep for the election period. As for rebel activity, the party high command's approach is to put it down with a show of firmness and the leaders are not exactly bashful of doing this publicly. An example, last fortnight, was Rajiv's almost open snub to Ashok Vajpayee at an election meeting in Allahabad. He said: "*Ashok jo tum kar rahe ho woh theek nahin hai. Apna rawaiya badaliye.*" (Ashok you are not doing the right thing. Change your attitude). Ashok Vajpayee was barely able to regain composure when Rajiv stepped into the car and drove away. Said Arun Munna, a state minister: "Whatever has been decided by the party leadership is final and those who work against it must face action."

This show of confidence stems from the party leadership's conclusion that the election result is a *fait accompli*. While efforts are still being made to assuage the feelings of rebels in certain crucial constituencies, in many more they are being dismissed as eminently ignorable clutter. As Vir Bahadur Singh puts it: "What can they do except causing a little nuisance here and there?" Besides, the party also benefits from dissensions within the opposition parties. Former chief minister Ram Naresh Yadav has led a factional walkout from the DMKP and has put up his own candidates. Even the BJP has had the rebel problem. In Allahabad city it has already conceded two seats by default with the mysterious withdrawal of its candidates.

In such a background, Congress(I) leaders expect their first challenge only after the elections—when they face the task of choosing the new chief minister. A strong power struggle has been on in Lucknow for some time with Vir Bahadur Singh making a bid for the chair. Also, waiting in the wings is Lokpati Tripathi, son of the Congress(I) Working President Kamlapati Tripathi. This did come to the fore in the course of the ticket distribution with both Tiwari and his irrigation minister lobbying for their candidates. As to who succeeded in pushing how many of his men through, estimates in Lucknow may vary from 25 to 250, depending on the predilections of the political observers. But more realistically, when the crunch comes, who has how many supporters in the Assembly will hardly make a difference. The Congress(I)'s style is to "evolve" a consensus in favour of the man the high command chooses.

Thus, in what is considered the power base of the country, all factors—including the Opposition—seem to come together in a conspiracy to help the ruling party. And it is these that make it such a non-election, a bout which begins with one of the contestants lying with his shoulder-blades inextricably embedded in the mat.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Lucknow

KARNATAKA

The Last Stand

AS THE ill-fitted lamps on either side of the open hatch atop the *Jaya Vahini* cast shadows on his wan face, the deepening darkness almost seemed symbolic of the times to come for Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde. And as the strenuous campaign for the ensuing assembly elections to 224 seats in the state neared its end this fortnight, Hegde seemed to be slowly fading out of the political climes of Karnataka. Gone was the fire from his speeches that, only two months before, had impelled his massive audiences to thunderous applause. In its place was a tone of quiet acceptance, a tiredness tinged with relief. But neither his calm nor his wit had deserted him.

Lowering his head from the hatch, Hegde told INDIA TODAY with a twinkle in his eye: "I feel like some kind of a sadhu who keeps popping out to say a few pithy words to the multitude and then retreats to a shell again to meditate." As the van sped towards another meeting and wife Shakuntala dozed on his shoulder, Hegde turned reflective. "This time, the people's mood is mysterious," he said. "They are holding their cards close to their chests. There seems to be no spontaneous outburst of feeling." Gently rousing his wife he added with a smile: "But Shaku feels that this is a good sign for me. In the Lok Sabha elections the people came to my meetings in large numbers and there was so much goodwill for me. She feels that they came only to tell me they liked me but wanted to vote for the Congress(I) at

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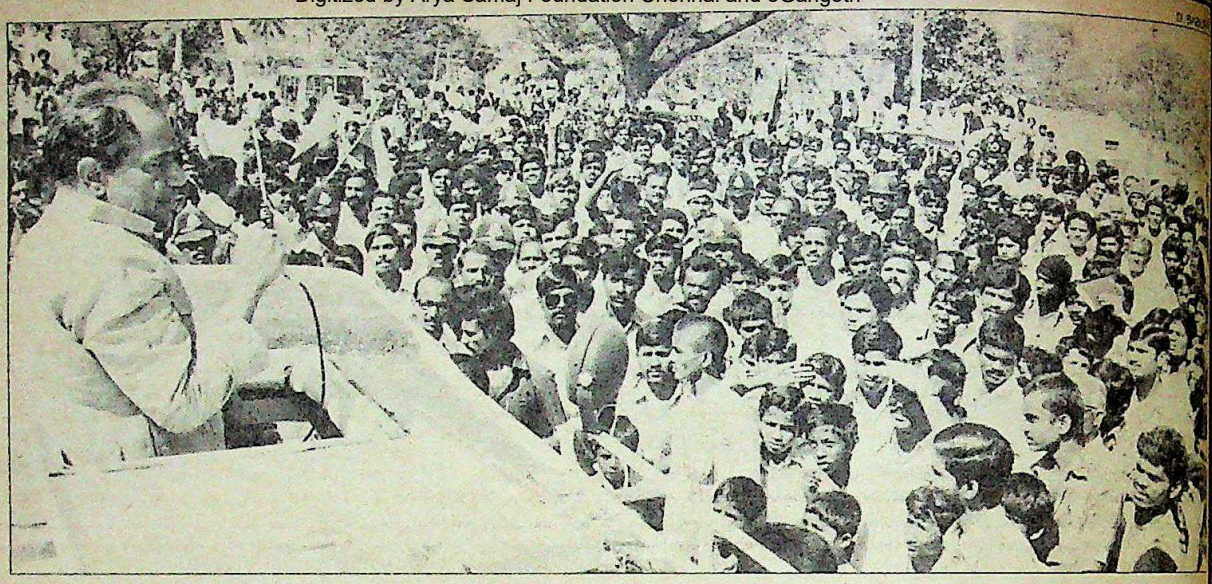

Hegde at an election rally: quiet acceptance

the Centre. This time they have already made up their minds to vote for me and therefore there was no need to come for my meetings. Should I go by a woman's instincts?"

Obviously, Hegde has not lost hope and his subdued campaign is part of the strategy to evoke sympathy among the voters. He tells them everywhere that he had kept his word—that if he lost the majority in the Lok Sabha elections he would resign. He then speaks softly about his government's performance: how he brought drinking water to villages, exempted tenants who claimed land under the land reforms act from paying compensation to the owners, started schools and colleges, helped pregnant women and widows with grants of money and restored the pride of the Kannadigas which had fallen during Congress(I) rule under Gundu Rao.

Once warmed up, he puts on a forgiving expression and tells the people, like he did in the small town of Bagepalli in Kolar last fortnight: "OK. So you had sympathy for Mrs Gandhi and voted for her son Rajiv although he is a raw boy of only 40 years. But if you vote for him again he will not come as chief minister. You know all the other faces who would come." Someone yelled "Gundu Rao". Hegde chuckled: "No, no. He has been banished. They will either bring Moily who tried to bribe an MLA with two lakh rupees to defect, or even Bangarappa who can never take his eyes off the chief minister's chair. Now choose between these fellows and a clean government like ours which has done good work."

Working on a campaign plagued by the usual delays and cancellations, Hegde was invariably four hours late for his meetings. Yet people waited to greet him and listened to what he had to say, suggesting that their much-beleaguered chief minister still held considerable sway over their emotions. In fact, if there is anything that might help Hegde scrape through, it is the sympathy factor. In most villages, people admitted that he was a likable leader and that during his reign the *chakoo-churi* (dagger and knife) culture that Gundu Rao had ushered in was gone. Doddanarayan Reddy, a farmer from Chaintamani, said: "We are reaping the fruits of Hegde's Government right now. Why should we throw him out?"

Hegde has not lost and his subdued campaign is part of the strategy to evoke sympathy among the voters.

Another plus factor for Hegde is the absence of a credible state leader in the Congress(I) ranks—a fact he keeps reminding the voter about at every opportunity. Moreover, the Congress(I)'s selection of greenhorns has invited the wrath of older members who are now working against the party. T.C. Narayanappa, a former block Congress president, said: "This is not the same Congress that I knew. Overnight we have become Janata sympathisers." Cutting away from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in this election may have eroded the Janata's support in at least two dozen constituencies, but it has, at the same time, helped it win over a sizeable section of the Muslim community which is disgruntled with the Congress(I) over the matter of selection.

But the backward classes and Scheduled Castes are still solidly behind the Congress(I). Said Hegde regretfully: "We should have given more tickets to them and won them over. But I was not able to convince my party on this count." The Janata is identified with the dominant communities, the Lingayats and Vokkaligas. Its campaign has been marred, too, by infighting leading to the expulsion of more than 25 rebel candidates, now working against them. Adding to his embarrassment is the resignation of horticulture minister Vyjanath Patil who was unhappy with the selection of candidates in his home district, Gulbarga.

In sharp contrast, the Congress(I) was functioning like a well-oiled machine. Apparently infected with the computer culture of their high command, local party workers were busy in their asbestos-roofed Karnataka Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (KPCC-I) office in Bangalore, churning out figures of the chances in various constituencies. Taking them as 'good', 'moderate', and 'poor', they estimated that they had a good chance of winning in at least 1[illegible] constituencies. With two central observers stationed in Bangalore to coordinate the campaign, five others were sent into the districts to report on the campaign's progress.

Following a well-conceived plan of action, party workers were told to idea-

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"centres of influence" in each constituency and win them over. In Bidar, for instance, when they found that their Muslim candidate was weak and unlikely to garner Hindu support, they mobilised Veerashetty Kushnoor, a former MLA from the constituency, into campaigning for him. The main campaigner was, of course, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who touched more than 10 districts in the state. When he stressed the need for a Congress(I) government in Karnataka in order to maintain harmonious relations with the Centre for quick progress, Hegde was quick to respond and accuse Rajiv of following in his mother's footsteps by crushing the Opposition and pushing the country to unitarism.

Their confidence settling in to complacency, Congress(I) workers were, in fact, behaving as though they had already won the elections. Commented Margaret Alva, union minister of state for parliamentary affairs, in charge of the campaign in Bangalore, brashly: "We don't topple opposition governments any more. We defeat them." However, the Congress(I) campaign is hampered by insufficient funds with the high command having allotted only Rs 30,000 and 1,100 posters per candidate. There are problems of internal dissension too. Says Harnahalli Ramaswamy, KPCC(I) member: "We are not afraid of the Janata Party but of the dissatisfaction of Congress(I) workers which may affect at least a quarter of the constituencies."

Unwilling to risk comparisons with Hegde, the Congress(I) high command decided to keep Gundu Rao out of the campaign. But it did not fight shy of mobilising its bevy of stars. Vyjayanthimala was roped into the effort without ado while Amitabh Bachchan was given a call to show his face. Not to be outdone, the Janata too enlisted the support of popular film stars, brothers Anant and Shankar Nag, and put up actor Chandru as its candidate in Gauribidnur.

However, even if the Congress(I) wins, it will have trouble aplenty choosing a chief minister to cement the disparate elements in the party. So far it has chosen to play down this issue, but a strong lobby is clearly emerging for Union Minister of State for Finance Janardhan Poojari, whose image in the state remains tarnished. Meanwhile, Hegde remains as cool as ever about his poll prospects. He hopes to win 120 seats in the Assembly, but in the face of possible defeat he remains just as unfazed. "I'll take a long holiday," Hegde remarks quite calmly.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

ANDHRA PRADESH

Keen Contest

TWO YEARS after it was unceremoniously dumped by the electorate, the Congress(I) is bidding strongly for a come-back. That the party means business was made clear enough when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself launched the party's campaign in Hyderabad in mid-February and spent five more days last fortnight at 30-odd meetings in various parts of the state. Criticising the priorities of the Telugu Desam Government and dismissing Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's charges that the Centre was starving the state of funds, the prime minister set the tempo of the campaign which was then turned over to a battery of senior Congress(I) leaders including Union minister T. Anjaiah, former chief ministers J. Vengala Rao, K. Brahmananda Reddy and K. Vijaybhaskara Reddy.

For the first time, the party has also released a manifesto for the state which includes, among other things, the two populist schemes of NTR, with some changes. The Congress(I) offers to make rice available at Rs 1.90 a kilo—10 paise cheaper than that promoted by the Telugu Desam, and extend the mid day meal programme to all primary schoolgoers instead of restricting it to those belonging to the weaker sections. The manifesto states that the "present election to the Assembly provides a unique opportunity to the Telugu people to join the mainstream of national life. They can demonstrate to the world that they are second to none in defending the unity and integrity of the country".

While the major effort of the Congress(I) is to counter the regional pull of NTR and his populist schemes, the lack of a strong crowd-puller is a distinct disadvantage. Consequently, its campaign centres on attacks on NTR's incapacity to keep his party together and the non-performance of his government. Said AICC(I) General Secretary A.K. Antony: "NTR is not a democratic leader, for only one of three MLA's elected on his party ticket in 1983 are with him. A third of the MLA's were dropped by him and the remaining third has gone with Bhaskara Rao." But he is evasive about the disunity in his own party ranks. The induction of nearly 150 new faces as party candidates is bound to create heartburning, though Antony is quick to explain that "the disappointment over the selections was quickly forgotten and the major task was to build up the party workers' morale to campaign for the new look contingent". The party, however, is not taking any chances and its travelling team of leaders will come together for a three-day finale when they tour the major towns in the state, starting March 1, and speak from the same platform in at least a show of makeshift unity.

A. PRABHAKAR RAO

Cutouts of NTR and of Rajiv shaking hands with actor Krishna

For the Telugu Desam, NTR continues to be the star performer. Continuing an unrelenting tirade against the Centre, accusing it of neglecting the state, he informs enraptured crowds that the Centre gave only Rs 54 crore when the state asked for Rs 900 crore for drought relief.

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> "While the major effort of the Congress(I) is to counter the regional pull of NTR and his populist schemes, the lack of a strong crowd-puller is a distinct disadvantage."

adding: "We are not beggars to ask for charity or alms. We are entitled for legitimate and due shares from the Centre." The drama notwithstanding, his party has, however, not issued any new manifesto though it has renewed its old pledges of protecting the "self-respect of the Telugus" and implementing welfare programmes for the underprivileged and the poor. Commenting on the NTR offensive, the Congress(I) party leader in the state legislative council, K. Rosiah, observed: "Playing on emotions is an effective gimmick to get votes. But that cannot go on endlessly. Let NTR substantiate the charge of neglect and we will respond point by point." Said Coordinating Committee Chairman K. Brahmananda Reddy: "No new projects, whether in the field of irrigation, power or industry, were launched by him (NTR). His complaint is like creating a ghost and claiming that he alone was fighting it." At least one tenacious Congress(I) campaigner, V. Hanumantha Rao, who lost the December Lok Sabha election from the Hyderabad constituency, has an answer to NTR. For the final 10 days of campaigning, travelling in a minibus Yuva Shakti Ratham, he chased NTR and his Chaitanya Ratham in a schedule staggered to be 24 hours behind NTR. He followed up NTR by playing speeches and tributes to Indira Gandhi through a public address system and then appealed voters to support the Congress(I) candidate in that area.

And all is not hunky-dory with the Telugu Desam. Besides the differences and internal dissent within its electoral allies—the BJP, Janata, CPI and CPI(M)—from whom support may be minimal, its own fabric is falling apart with several party activists campaigning for the Congress(I) or the breakaway Democratic Telugu Desam of Nadendla Bhaskara Rao. Among those suspended from the party or dismissed were two former legislators, including Eli Varalakshmi who was elected in a by-election following the death of her husband and Telugu Desam endowments minister, Eli Anjaneyulu in 1983. Another setback for the party was the resignation of G. Hanumantha Rao from the chairmanship of the Prakasam zilla parishad and the Telugu Desam as he was not consulted in the selection of candidates in the district, including his native Martur constituency which he had vacated for NTR's son-in-law Dr Venkateswara Rao. This time Venkateswara opted for Parchur in the same district.

Another challenge the Telugu Desam may face is from the Democratic Telugu Desam which has also fielded young and new faces. It is finally contesting 222 seats. Says party General Secretary Turlapati Satyanarayana: "Our confidence has increased with the involvement of the backward communities which did not even get tickets from parties like the Congress(I) over the years. Our party will be a formidable force." But Bhaskara Rao, who toured the state like NTR did not display such optimism, and his campaigning was low key, restricted to giving away badges with his photograph, cassettes of his speeches, and copies of the manifesto offering sops. Most candidates of the party were left to fend for themselves.

The party appeared to be concentrating heavily on Malakpet in Hyderabad, from where Bhaskara is contesting, and in 50 other constituencies where it sees better prospects. It is depending heavily on Muslims and government employees —the prime beneficiaries of decisions taken during Bhaskara Rao's brief tenure as chief minister. Only eight of the 25 ex-MLA's in the breakaway Telugu Desam group, are contesting.

However, despite the threats from within and without, Telugu Desam General Secretary P. Upendra was able to confidently observe: "We will win 230 of the 249 seats we are contesting. It will be a spectacular victory." And perhaps it will be for many political analysts feel that the Telugu Desam is riding high because nothing dramatic of any serious consequence has happened between the Lok Sabha elections and now that would make the Andhra voter change his mind in favour of the Congress(I) or any other party. Said one: "If the death of Mrs Gandhi could not trigger off sufficient support, the new Central Government measures like the anti-defection bill or other declarations of good intentions cannot provide the Congress(I) the decisive edge." Edge or no edge, one certainty seemed to be that Bhaskara Rao, who virtually forced the election, will find his party's symbol of the rising sun is more like the setting sun. —AMARNATH K. MENON

MAHARASHTRA

Pawar Play

WHO WILL be the next chief minister of Maharashtra? Judging from the characteristic self-confidence with which Sharad Pawar of the Congress(S) strides on the state's political stage, he seems to think he might well be. His arch-rival and incumbent Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil, on the other hand, has gone further and forgetting his earlier protestations to the contrary, actually announced last week that yes, indeed, he would be the

> "The going may not be quite as good as the Congress(I) imagines. It is not quite as advantageously placed this time."

next chief minister—only to be snubbed by the party high command. AICC(I) General Secretary Srikant Verma pointed out that "the leadership issue is still open" and MPCC(I) President N.M. Kamble said pretty much the same thing.

That uncertainty is being exploited by Pawar and his Progressive Democratic Front (PDF) to the hilt. "They don't know who will be the next chief minister. What kind of a team is it that asks to be elected when they can't tell who is the captain?" Pawar asks derisively. In fact, the very issues of strong leadership and party unity with which the Congress(I) played the Opposition so effectively during the Lok Sabha campaign are now in the Opposition's favour. Indeed, the PDF, composed of the Congress(S), BJP, Janata and the PWP, has shown a high degree of togetherness and had little trouble with seat allotments in contrast to the situation during the Lok Sabha poll.

The Congress(I), on the other hand, has still to recover from the shock of 13 of its MLA's, including 13 of the 29 ministers being dropped in what is referred to here as the "midnight massacre". At 43 Pawar represents youth and dynamism and Vasantdada, at 67 leaning heavily on his walking-stick, symbolises age. Pawar can boast that his PDF's two-year government in 1979-80 had a fairly good record, while

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Just a year ago Vasantdada had described his own administration as crippled.

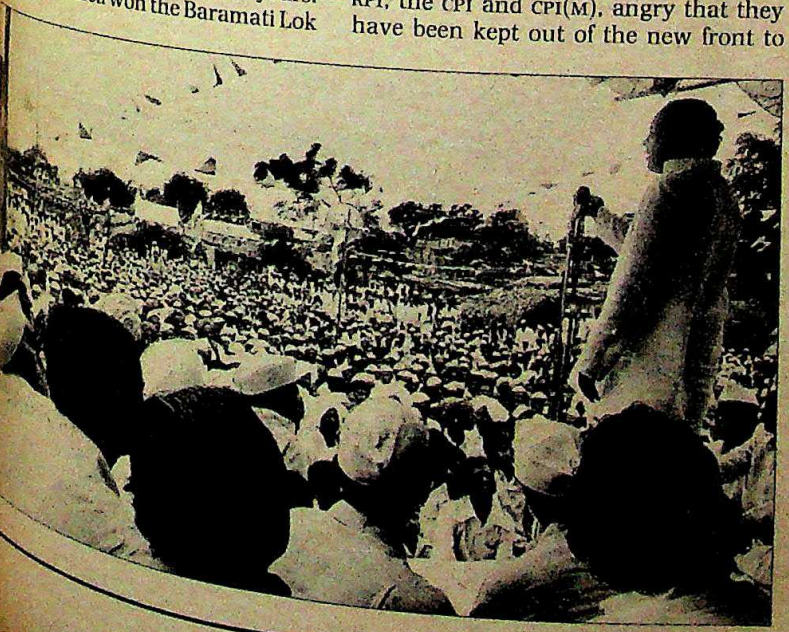
The enmity between the chief minister and his former protege began in 1979 when Pawar, then in the Congress(U) quietly deserted his mentor to bring down Vasantdada's coalition government and install himself in power with the help of the Janata Party. The two rivals share several characteristics: both are Maratha peasant leaders from the sugar-rich area of western Maharashtra who have strong grassroots support in their regions. Both are pragmatic and wily and according to their detractors not to be trusted. And both have been encouraging rumours about the other cannot count on his party's loyalty.

In fact, Pawar has been touring the state with his sights set on the chief ministership for the last two years. Though he himself won the Baramati Lok

Patil and Pawar (below) addressing public meetings: chief contenders

Sabha seat convincingly in December, he has made it clear all along that his real target was the assembly poll. The BJP and Janata, in a chastened mood after the Lok Sabha defeat, are ready to go along with Pawar. In the ticket distribution the Congress(S) got 124 seats, the BJP 66, Janata 61 and the leftist PWP 29.

Despite the PDF unity, however, other opposition parties will cut into the anti-Congress vote. The multiplicity of parties is most apparent in Bombay city which has 34 seats. The contenders include Datta Samant's Kamgar Aghadi Party, the two Muslim Leagues as well as the Shiv Sena, which was rapidly jilted by the BJP after a disastrous association and the RPI, the CPI and CPI(M), angry that they have been kept out of the new front to make room for the BJP.



This led actor and MP Sunil Dutt to belittle the Opposition by saying: "While the Congress(I) is a happy home where parents and children live peacefully, the Opposition is nowhere near a house and is no family at all." But his analogy was not apt. The Congress joint family was far from happy, with 28 rebels in the fray including a dozen MLA's. One of them, Shalutai Buddhiwant from Parvati, Pune embarrassed the party by claiming that the Congress(I) had misused her signature to falsely announce that she had withdrawn. "I am very much a contestant", she said at a press conference where she explained how the party tried to fob her off with an MLC seat which has so far not materialised.

In west Nagpur, former minister Satish Chaturvedi, denied a ticket, is standing as an independent against the convenor of the notorious National Students Union of India (NSUI) conference held last year in the city, Avinash Pande. In Jalgaon another MLA and former chairman of the state transport corporation, Suresh Jain, is contesting on the Congress(S) ticket, which has created some unpleasantness in the PDF camp.

More dangerous than the rebels whose numbers are comparatively small are the senior partymen who have been unceremoniously dismissed and are sulking in the sidelines. These include Vasantdada's recent cabinet ministers Shivajirao Patil Nilkangekar, Pratibha Patil and Baliram Hiray as well as sugar barons Y.J. Mohite from Karad, Ratnappa Kumbhar from Ichalkaranji and Shankarrao Kolhe from Kopargaon. Also bypassed have been former deputy chief minister N.K. Tirpude and N.M. Tidke from Vidarbha and Baburao Kale from Marathwada. While the majority of Sanjay Gandhi youths has been junked, about 40 Youth Congress activists have been given tickets, they being part of a significant new lobby emerging in the state encouraged by the prime minister and Arun Nehru.

To silence the oldsters, the Congress(I) offered the sop of tickets to their relatives instead. Baliram Hiray's ticket went to his wife Indirabai, who will now be contesting against her sister-in-law Pushpa Hiray of the Congress(S). N.K. Tirpude's ticket has gone to his son Rajkumar. Nilkangekar's son Dilip has been substituted for him and Pratibha Patil's husband Devisingh Shekhawat will be her proxy. Another dropped minister, Kallappa Awade, has been replaced by his son Prakash. One deserving relative who was denied a ticket, however, is the chief min-

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ister's dynamic and controversial wife Shalini Patil. Rejected for a ticket from Kopargaon she seemed visibly upset as she remarked: "I feel I was being taken advantage of in time of need and side-tracked when the going was good."

But the going may not be quite as good as the Congress(I) imagines. Though it won 51.2 per cent of the popular vote and 43 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in December, it is not quite as advantageously placed this time. "The issues of an assembly poll are different," points out Pawar, who has based his campaign on "bringing back for Maharashtra its lost prestige". In one-party rule, he said, the chief minister will mortgage the interests of the state to the Centre just to ensure that he is not dislodged. Pawar argues that non-Congress governments such as those in Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh have received a better deal than Congress(I)-ruled states. But in all this Pawar makes no criticism of Rajiv Gandhi aware as he is of the young prime minister's personal appeal in the electorate.

In Marathwada, where in 1980 the Congress(S) won 17 out of 48 seats, all PDF candidates have posters and banners projecting Pawar as the leader while the Congress(I) relies only on Rajiv Gandhi. Vidarbha in eastern Maharashtra with 66 seats is another region which could prove fertile territory for the Opposition. Last week Congress(I) Vidarbha candidates sent an SOS to Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat, who is the observer for the state, protesting that the chief minister Vasantdada Patil, MPCC(I) President N.M. Kamble and Central ministers Vasant Sathe, Narasimha Rao and Ghulam Nabi Azad have not bothered to campaign here. In contrast the PDF campaign is off to a good start.

Considering the Lok Sabha results, however, the mood in the Congress(I) continues to be buoyant. Vasantdada talks confidently of 235 out of 288 seats. Pawar puts his estimate for the PDF at a more modest 170, which Vasantdada dismisses as empty bravado. The prime minister, in Kopargaon last week, compared the PDF to a torn umbrella which would not withstand the rain. But what Pawar would like to know is that if the Congress(I) is so confident of Maharashtra "how come Rajiv Gandhi is touring Karnataka and Maharashtra for 11 days out of his total 20-day election programme?" The answer will soon be forthcoming.

—COOMI KAPOOR

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Worthy Fight

WHO IS the Opposition's best friend in Himachal Pradesh? Who else but Bhajan Lal, the ambulatory chief minister of neighbouring Haryana. Bhajan Lal has helped breathe new life into the Himachal opposition and its hope of undoing the hopelessly one-sided verdict of December 1984. This is one of the factors which has given a competitive edge to the forthcoming election to the 68-member Assembly in the small, partly snowbound hill state. The one person who is not amused is Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh, who has to face a rejuvenated opposition and the thought that he may have lost some of the advantage which prompted him to gamble on a mid-term election in the wake of the parliamentary landslide.

> "The Congress(I) wave has not fully abated. But the advent of local factors, have made it a fight worth fighting for the Opposition."

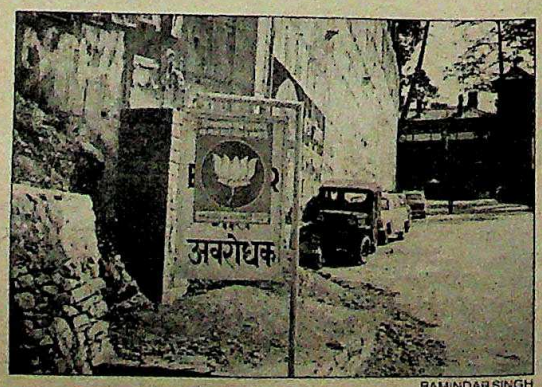
How has Bhajan Lal wrought this magical transformation for the Opposition? Simply by suggesting that Himachal Pradesh be merged once again with Haryana and Punjab. So, what may have been meant as a warning shot to force the Akalis in Punjab to the negotiating table, has backfired on his counterpart in Himachal, who goes around the state protesting that he will never accept Himachal's merger with its neighbours. But the main opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its electoral allies, the Janata and DMKP have seized with alacrity the opportunity to parade as protectors of Himachal's identity in the face of Bhajan Lal's expected onslaught. Virbhadra Singh's hopes of a replay of the December verdict may not have evaporated, but they are certainly going to be harder to fulfil.

All this could change and the merger issue still be defused if Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi categorically scotches it on his election-eve swing through Himachal on March 3. Till that happens the BJP and its allies will continue to argue that a Congress government in the state, bound by party discipline, would not be able to oppose merger if the Centre eventually decides on it. Only an opposition government in Himachal could do that, they say.

But anticipating that Rajiv may kill the merger talk, the BJP is keeping another potent election issue in reserve: a promise to supply all Himachalis with subsidised atta (wheat flour) at Re 1 a kilo, rice at Rs 2, and salt at 10 paise a kilo. This could prove to be a potent vote-getter, agrees Ram Lal, former chief minister who sits sulking in his Shimla home, annoyed that he has not been asked to help the party in electioneering. Ram Lal says he knows from experience that NTR in Andhra Pradesh succeeded in winning a lot of sympathy simply by giving people subsidised rations. The promise of cheap atta and rice "could work" in Himachal too, says he. Subsidised foodgrains were a subject of discussion wherever people gathered. "Even if we manage to get atta at Rs 1.50 a kilo instead of Re 1, it will be something great," they said.

Former speaker of the Assembly, Thakur Sen Negi, 75, a crusty bureaucrat who retired as chief secretary before entering politics, agrees that the foodgrains issue must be kept warm. Bhajan Lal, argues Negi, is not the kind of person to talk so loudly about merger on his own. "There is definitely some inspiration behind it." He says Rajiv could have refused outright to turn the clock back on history, "but he

BJP : the final speed breaker?



RAMINDAR SINGH

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hasn't.... so we are right in sounding the alarm". If it comes to a choice between believing Virbhadra Singh or Bhajan Lal, most people, Negi included, would believe the latter. Bhajan Lal's finely honed instinct of self-preservation would not let him stick his neck out unless he knew the merger move was blessed from above.

Ironically, the ubiquitous Congress posters proclaiming the message *"Congress Lao, Pradesh Badhao"* are gleefully interpreted by opposition candidates as proof that the Congress wants the state to be enlarged, merged with adjoining states. The BJP has cleverly put up its own posters alongside, countering *"Himachal ko bachao*, BJP *ko jitao"*. This apart, opposition unity and the presence of half a dozen serious Congress rebels in the fray, including some former ministers, has led to direct contest. The Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee(I) has had to expel several former ministers and an AICC member Mrs Bimla Mahajan, who are contesting as independents after being denied the party ticket.

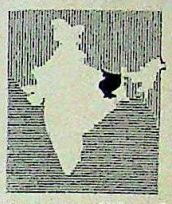
All this is not to say that it is still an equal contest in Himachal. Negi concedes that the Congress(I) wave has not fully abated and women may still turn out largely to vote for the Congress. But the advent of local factors, the personality of the candidates and the new issues raised have made it a fight worth fighting for the Opposition.

Other issues were also sought to be raised by BJP President Atal Behari Vajpayee when he stopped at Shimla at the end of a bone-chilling tour through Himachal which was punctuated by rain,sleet and snow. Vajpayee likened the Central Government to a train, with colourful new bogies, a spanking new engine and even a new driver. The train was speeding along obsessed only with speed. But the train lacked brakes and was in danger of capsizing or overrunning all obstacles. The Opposition could function as the brake to control this runaway train, said Vajpayee. Judging from his arguments it was clear that the BJP and the Opposition had decided not to dwell in the past and to look ahead. Quite appropriately, Vajpayee's meeting ended with loudspeakers blaring out the song *"Murh murh kay na dekh"*. Whether the coming assembly election will really give the BJP and the Opposition in Himachal Pradesh a chance to put its bleak past behind it, only the election results will determine.

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Shimla

BIHAR

Rebel Rousing



THE SOUNDS of celebration after last December's stunning Lok Sabha victory have been overtaken by the din of revolt in the Congress(I). In spite of efforts at all levels to control the situation and bring the recalcitrant in line, the party officials in Bihar discovered last fortnight that at least 18 MLA's and as many as 150 party workers including district-level functionaries were still in the arena posing a challenge to official candidates. "The fight this time is not between the Congress(I) and the Opposition but it is going to be Congress(I) versus Congress(I)," admitted a senior party leader.

The widespread rebellion has set off ripples of fear among party leaders who feel they may not be able to repeat their performance of the December elections.

The distribution of tickets last month has triggered off the present crisis in the Bihar Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (BPCC-I). As many as 70 sitting MLA's, most of them considered men of considerable clout and responsible for Congress(I) victories in the past, were dropped from the list. Consequently, many aspirants including a number of DCC presidents who had sought party tickets were openly trying to sabotage the prospects of the official nominees. Though BPCC(I) chief Bindeshwari Dubey admitted "some of the defected partymen are working behind the scene to defeat Congress(I) nominees," he asserted that the presence of rebel candidates would not really affect the prospects of the party. But many of his supporters said that Dubey himself was feeling unsure in the Shahpur constituency in Bhojpur district.

The threat is no trifling matter, for last fortnight the high command rushed Union Works and Housing Minister and former chief minister Abdul Ghafoor to contain the situation and assess the mood of the partymen. In some of the more sensitive districts, the situation has assumed unmanageable dimensions. Muzaffarpur is dotted with rebels and the chances of the official candidates are far from comfortable in six of the 11 constituencies. Most of the rebels who include prominent citizens like *mukhiyas*, members of the zilla parishad, chairmen or members of the regional party divisions, are known supporters of Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh. In each of the 16 constituencies of Purnea district, every official candidate is facing two or three rebels.

In Nalanda's Biharsharif constituency, posters of the official candidate Shakil-uz-Zaman, BPCC(I) minority cell convenor, were destroyed by party workers protesting the denial of a ticket to Dr R. Isri, the DCC chief who had already filed his nomination in anticipation. It was only when Dr Khalid Rashid Saba, minister of state for urban development, interceded and persuaded the local leaders to cooperate with the party that peace was made between the two camps. However, Dr Isri boycotted both the chief minister's and Jagannath Mishra's election meeting when they were held in Biharsharif.

Dubey too was at the receiving end of protest. On his way to a meeting in Dhanbad, Dubey, who is also president of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), was greeted by black flags and slogans. The meeting itself was disrupted and the local Congress(I) MP Shankar Dayal Singh had to be rescued by securitymen. The reason for the altercation was, as elsewhere, "wrong selection" of the candidates for the eight seats in Dhanbad. Trouble started when one of the candidates complained that party workers were sabotaging his campaign. The workers led by Mannan Mallick, DCC president, retorted that the candidate was not even a member of the Congress(I) party.

The widespread rebellion has set off ripples of fear among party leaders who feel they may not be able to repeat their spectacular performance of the December elections. Privately some leaders admitted that the Congress(I) could not expect more than 250 seats though in the Lok Sabha elections they had led by a wide margin in 276 of the 321 constituencies going to the polls. Said J.P. Choudhary, former AICC member and party leader from Ranchi: "For the first time the party is immobilised and people are not showing any enthusiasm due to

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the confusion created by the leaders." Even if the party receives a massive victory, it will not be because of the efforts of the state party leaders, but "because the people have no alternative," he added.

Kamalnath Singh Thakur, MLC, and Mishra supporter feels that regional issues are of no consequence and that Rajiv Gandhi remained the most important issue to the electorate. "Rajiv Gandhi's determination to check black money had created tremendous psychological impact on the minds of the poor and middle class people," he asserted.

K.M. KISHAN

Jagannath Mishra at an election meeting: internal squabbles

The indiscipline in the ranks was not the only issue worrying party leaders. With caste an important consideration, distribution of tickets defying this tradition has been resented. Maithili Brahmins of the Darbhanga region were sore that many of their leaders had been ignored. Sensing the mood of the crowds in Darbhanga last fortnight, a constituency the Congress(I) lost to the DMKP in the general elections, Rajiv Gandhi during his two-day electioneering in the state told his audience that it was untrue that those denied tickets were corrupt. The party wanted to introduce new faces as an experiment, he said. Interestingly, Jagannath Mishra, a Maithili Brahmin and sole member of the central campaign committee was conspicuous by his absence at this meeting. Bhumihars were annoyed that their leader Ramashray Singh had been denied a ticket. The Kaisthas were unhappy that only one ticket had been given to them. And the Yadavs were indignant that the five MLA's their leader Ramlakhan Singh Yadav had brought to the Congress(I) had been sidelined.

To make things worse the non-gazetted officers in the state began an indefinite strike last fortnight, which was called off after three days, further blackening the Congress(I)'s chances. "If the strike continued and if the Government failed to concede their demands the party may lose many seats because the employees had been a deciding factor in many ways," said a Congress(I) leader. The chief minister has been under attack in this issue for not negotiating immediately to settle the strike and also for trying to create a "third force" outside the Congress(I). Defending himself hotly against such a charge, Singh said: "Only a fool can say this about me. Those who coined the idea should know that in the Congress(I) there is neither first force, second force nor third force. Congress(I) is a well-organised national party led by Rajiv Gandhi and we all are committed to his leadership and the party."

Attempting to restore discipline, the BPCC(I) called a meeting of PCC presidents last fortnight to prepare a list of "rebels" for expulsion from the party. attendance was dismal and no consensus could be reached. Dubey conceded that it would be wrong to expel the rebels before the poll was held. The meeting decided that the party leaders would continue their efforts to persuade the rebels to give up their fight. Acting on Dubey's suggestion it was decided that three lists would be prepared: of rebels in the field, of those working against official candidates and of those who filed nominations, withdrew their candidature and are now working for the party.

In spite of the strife, the Congress(I) hopes to benefit from the disunity among the opposition parties. Interestingly, in only one constituency is the fight straight and in another triangular. In 88 constituencies the number of candidates ranges between four and nine, while in the rest there is a multi-cornered contest. As many as 2,755 candidates out of a total 4,320 are independents. Among the major opposition parties the DMKP has fielded 282, followed by Janata 236, BJP 250, CPI 160, Congress(J) 75, CPI(M) 47, and Congress(S) 42 to fight elections to the 321 constituencies going to the polls.

Pitted against an opposition so divided, the Congress(I) appears set to win the next round—but the fight is not going to be so easy since the party is currently suffering much the same fate in Bihar.

—FARZAND AHMED

MADHYA PRADESH

No Contest

WITH a record number of 112 rebel candidates in a house of 320 and a three-month-long student agitation on a sensitive issue like reservations showing signs of hotting up as the assembly elections draw nearer, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Arjun Singh is having to fight just that much harder to deliver the goods this time round. What is not worrying him, however, is the prospect of facing any tangible threat from the main opposition party in the state, the BJP. The party is limping along in disarray after a humiliating defeat in the recent Lok Sabha elections where the ruling party made a clean sweep of all the 40 seats.

> **"Singh can afford to be optimistic with the BJP in no position to capitalice on the Congress revolt and anti-reservation stir."**

But Singh is going to have a lot of explaining to do to the people as the anti-reservation agitation which began on November 18 and was spearheaded by the students, spread to 25 of the state's 40 districts. Over the past three months, there have been numerous processions, incidents of stone-throwing, road blockades, and slogans against what the students see as disproportionate concession to the weaker and backward sections for job and admission reservations, in an obvious bid to win votes.

According to the agitating students, there was already a 55 per cent concession for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. On November 18, shortly before the Lok Sabha elections, a further 25 per cent concession was announced, covering also the backward classes, women, the handicapped, and other economically deprived classes. The net result has been that 1,358 of the 1,725 seats for engineering students are already reserved even before a student appears for the competitive examination. Similarly for the polytechnic courses, of the 3,720

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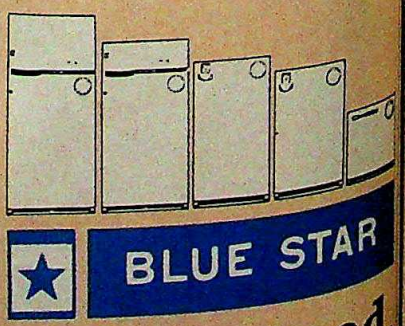

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seats in the state 2,831 seats are already reserved.

"What about us, who do not fit into any of these categories?" asks Shailendra Singh, a student leader and secretary of the Students Action Committee. "We thought it was time we brought it up and we choose the election time to do so because we can at least hope to drive home our point now," he says. He and other student leaders presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when he visited Bhopal to address an election rally. Arjun Singh, who is otherwise known to rise to most occasions and effectively at that, has chosen to take the easy way out. He has so far neatly evaded any statement that may suggest a reversal of his policy. He merely appealed to the students to call off the agitation and promised to meet them after the election.

But the fact that the issue has become something of embarrassment cannot be denied. In fact, even the BJP has remained pretty much non-committal on the issue. This is probably because neither party wants to take any particular stand. With 70 per cent of Madhya Pradesh consisting of the tribals, Scheduled Castes, and other backward classes, the outcome of the polls depends largely on their votes. While some sympathy is evident in the towns for the anti-reservationists, in the rural areas the agitation is actually expected to strengthen the Congress(I) chances. Therefore, naturally, the Congress(I) lost no time in laying the blame at the BJP's doorstep. Congressmen like Motilal Vohra, PCC(I) president, charged the BJP with supporting the agi-tation—a charge which was quickly and vehemently denied by the state's BJP leaders.

Though the issue involved a large number of students of no particular political affiliation there was evidence to suggest that disgruntled Congressmen may be involved in fuelling the agitation. After having been unceremoniously denied tickets to contest the assembly elections, most of them were too frustrated and cut up to hide their glee when the agitation picked up. "I am only hearing pro-Rajiv and anti-Arjun Singh slogans," claimed one prominent dissident gleefully.

At Arjun Singh's election meeting in Shahdol, where former Madhya Pradesh law minister, K.P. Singh who was denied a ticket and was present as an official party observer, anti-reservationists created a stir by setting fire to some huts in the town. K.P. Singh denies that he had anything to do with the agitation. "I was away for most of the time and I actually persuaded the students to give up the agitation," he says. According to the chief minister's supporters the agitation began in Rewa from where another prominent dissident Srinivas Tiwari hails. From Rewa to Shahdol the agitation spread through the prominent dissident areas like Jabalpur, Chattarpur, Sagar and finally Bhopal. Strangely enough, at many places, leaders of the National Students Union of India, the student's wing of the Congress(I), were seen inciting the agitationists.

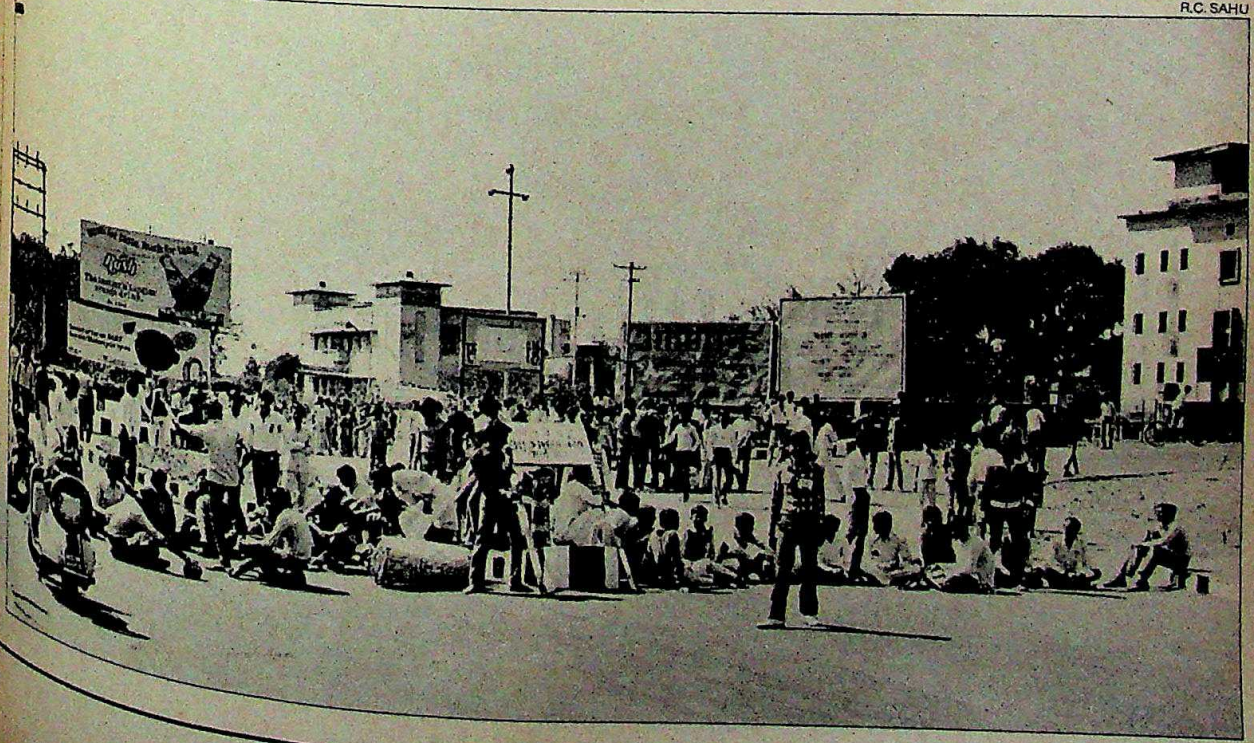
The dissidents obviously aim to prove that Arjun Singh does not have the capacity to capitalise on the ruling party's recent electoral success. And it is probably their last chance to voice their disapproval of the dropping of as many as 92 MLA's including 14 former ministers and corporation chiefs. "This is a revolt of unprecedented proportions," says a dissident.

Says Suresh Seth, a former mayor and minister who has been denied a ticket and is now contesting the Indore seat as an independent with the support of the BJP, "Arjun Singh wants only yes-men around him and he is harbouring visions of being the prime minister." While Arjun Singh insists that the expulsions will have no effect on the party's performance, the revolt is likely to put paid to any ambition on the part of the ruling party to attempt a repeat performance of the Lok Sabha elections.

However Singh can afford to be optimistic with the BJP in no position to capitalise on the Congress revolt and anti-reservation stir. In the Madhyabharat region of the state which was considered

Anti-reservationists block roads in Bhopal: emotive issue

R.C. SAHU



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the BJP's strong base, the party secured lead in only six of the 102 assembly segments. In Chattisgarh where there are 90 assembly segments, the party did not get a lead even in one while in Mahakoshal region which had 76 seats, the party gained a lead only in one assembly segment. Their staggering defeat earlier has forced even BJP leaders like Sunderlal Patwa to fight the assembly elections from two constituencies, Bhojpur and Manasa in Mandsaur district where he comes from. "I am fighting from two constituencies on the direction of my party," he says. Just how difficult a task he faces is evident from the question of Ram Singh, a villager in Bhojpur. "Who is Patwa? If you want the patwari he is not here."

And Patwa is not the only one fighting the gruelling battle with his back to the wall. Former Janata Party minister and the BJP's favourite 'Mr Clean', Kailash Joshi who has all along been winning from Bagli, was also affected by the party's near-neurotic fear of being routed and filed his nomination from two more places. But at the last moment decided to fight only from Bagli where no one is betting on his chances. In fact, so great is the BJP's fear of defeat that as many as 16 former MLA's refused tickets.

To make matters worse, former chief minister, V.K. Saklecha, who is now contesting the election as an independent has clearly got the support of the Congress(I), though this is only because the official nominee of the Congress(I) failed to arrive in time to file his nomination. Saklecha who has formed his own party, has three nominees fighting against the official BJP nominees. Significantly, Arjun Singh's Government which launched a case against him when he was in the BJP seems to have conveniently forgotten all about it. And it is to Singh's credit that he has also managed to get his most outspoken critic Rama Shankar Singh, a former Lok Dal nominee, to fight on a Congress(I) ticket. There is certainly enough indication that Singh is not a politician to be trifled with, that the high command is still quite convinced that revolts and agitations notwithstanding, Singh is still their best bet. In fact, so great is the party's faith in him that he was allowed virtually a free hand in distributing tickets in the state, and is the only chief minister in the country to have the maximum number of nominees of his own choosing. Though he has yet to justify this faith in him, for the wily Singh, this is the stuff chief minister's dreams are made of—full party support and an overwhelming majority in the state.

—RAJU SANTHANAM in Bhopal

ORISSA

One Man's Hope

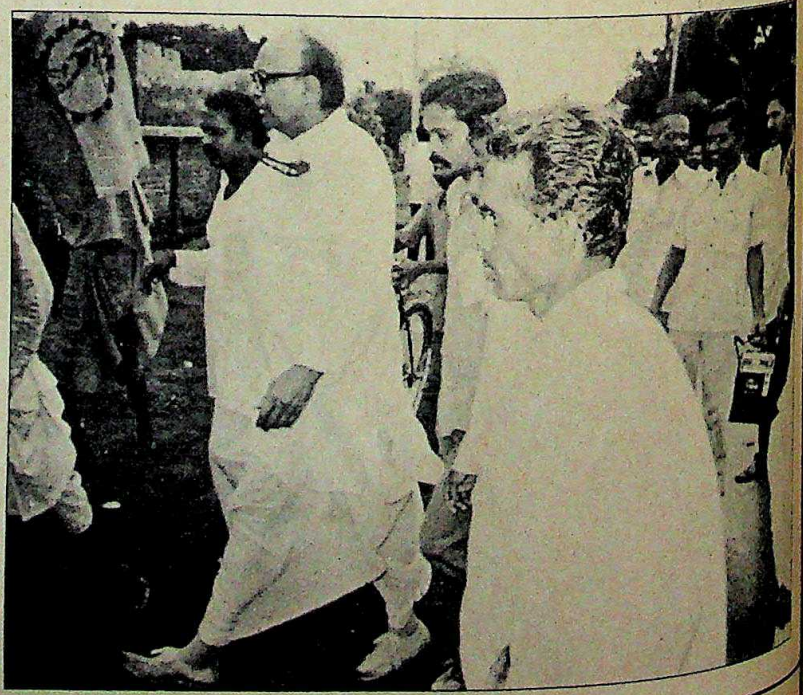
IF TEAR-JERKING statements at public meetings could arouse sympathy and win votes, then the veteran Janata Party leader Biju Patnaik, 73, would romp home against all odds. Biju tells his audiences: "March 5 is my birthday. Give me your vote as a last gift, elect me as your chief minister as I may not survive long. I want to die serving my state and the people." He harks back to the illustrious days in the state during his chief ministership two decades ago and tells people that they can change the course of history. At least while he is talking to them, very few in the audience realise that Biju's party had only 14 members in the outgoing Assembly and even if it retained its strength this time, it would still be hardly anywhere near capturing power, leave alone Biju Patnaik becoming the chief minister.

The charisma that he still displays in Orissa appeared to be the only saving grace for Biju Patnaik.

Political realities have it that his party led in only 16 assembly segments and that too mainly in the coastal areas. In the last assembly elections, his party had so few members in the house that it could not get recognition as the main opposition party. Biju had then out of disgust vacated his seat. Many hope that if the situation repeats itself this time, he would have to again leave the Assembly. The prospects apart, his party is heavily criss-crossed from within with a silent war launched by a group known as the 'salseed lobby' to instal as leader Ram Chandra Rath, the former Union minister of state. Backed by powerful industrial and agricultural interests, the group was able to pressurise Biju into accepting many of its proteges for party tickets.

Tensions with the Rabi Ray group of former socialists had also brought about acute disenchantment among many party workers seeking to contest in the poll. As many as 25 of them left the party and have filed nominations as independents in open rebellion against the party. Biju is stated to have denied tickets to even those whose names were cleared by the party's parliamentary board. Worse, he is said to have gone about changing candidates even after the date of withdrawal, thus causing much resentment among the rank and file of the party. Surendranath, former president of the state unit of Janata Party, who resigned protesting

Biju Patnaik campaigning: with hope



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against Biju's 'dictatorial attitude', said the only intention of Biju was to capture power with the help of his 'yes-men'. The result has been that the party's campaigning has not picked up at all what with Biju's own ill-health and his having to concentrate on his Bhubaneswar constituency.

Another factor that may thwart his bid to return to power in Orissa was the party's failure to arrive at an understanding with the other major opposition parties like the CPI. The idea of forming a regional party was deliberated on the eve of the poll but it could not materialise in spite of the best efforts of the salseed lobby which is known to be interested in taking the state unit of the party away from the national mainstream. In all this confusion, Biju has consequntly not only ended up leaving his party almost resourceless but has also driven the warring opposition parties to limits of exasperation. The Congress(I), on the other hand, has steadily managed to effectively control its campaign to what may prove to be to its ultimate advantage.

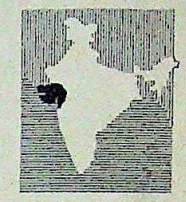
Rajiv Gandhi's open praise of the state administration in its bid to modernise Orissa too came as a boost to the local leadership everywhere. In many respects this has quite completely taken the thunder out of Biju's campaign. Last fortnight, all he could single out as an issue was the failure of the state Government to set up the state's second steel plant at Daitari—an issue that could be hardly considered significant enough to arouse the masses. This was in sharp contrast to the kind of campaigning that Biju carried out during the Lok Sabha poll when he highlighted local issues, pointed to the seeming corruption in the J.B. Patnaik Ministry, saying openly that if he was voted to power he would "put all corrupt Congress(I) people behind bars".

The charisma that he still displays in Orissa appeared to be the only saving grace for Biju Patnaik. It had been this single factor that had spurred him on every time he set his foot on the campaign trail. It was also largely because of his hopes in Orissa that his party could tot up as many as 35 lakh votes against Congress(I)'s 46 lakh in the recent Lok Sabha poll. His supporters have fondly hoped that if the party could increase its number of votes by just another 10 lakh, they would have as good a chance of forming a ministry as the Congress(I). But simple arithmetic often does not work in politics as Biju Patnaik and his followers may discover at the hustings.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

GUJARAT

Testing Time



AS AGITATIONS go, the anti-reservationists last fortnight stole the headlines with their acts of violence and arson in different towns of Gujarat. The massive campaigning for the upcoming assembly poll to that extent was relegated into the background. They had created cause enough for the Madhavsinh Solanki Ministry to spend sleepless nights at a time when it could sit back and expect to repeat the party's Lok Sabha poll performance of near-total rout of the Opposition.

The agitation led mostly by anonymous students in many towns all over Gujarat against the revised reservation policy of the state Government have cast their long shadow over the assembly poll. With the annual examinations approaching and the high court's stay order on the policy, it was anybody's guess how the shadows would lengthen, although it must be said in favour of opposition parties that none of them has made any visible attempt to capitalise on the issue. In fact, their reactions have been as low-key as to be almost minimal. And understandably so because at least 75 per cent of the people in the state stand to benefit by the revised reservation policy.

To that extent, the Solanki Government's political sagacity in announcing the revision virtually on the eve of the poll can be properly appreciated. But to the extent that the policy only gives a new fillip to casteism of a reverse kind, the change has been universally castigated almost from the day it was announced in mid-January.

The latest agitation started a month later at the L.D. Engineering College, Ahmedabad, where the students were having their semester examinations. The college management was asked to postpone the exams and in view of widespread incidents of arson and rioting in the city, the Government took the peremptory step of closing 54 colleges of Gujarat University affecting some 50,000 students. All secondary and high schools in the state were asked to close down till March 15, the obvious calculation being that the Government wanted no trouble during the assembly poll.

Even as the agitation spreads to newer towns, some thoughts are being spared for what is described as the 'half-baked' policy of reservation. The state Cabinet had made a low-key announcement through Welfare Minister Devjibhai Vanvi that on the recommendations of the Rane Commission, some 82 backward castes be accorded more reservation to the tune of 18 per cent in medical and engineering colleges as also in govern-

Students protest: unpopular policy

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ment jobs. This raised the total reservation from 31 per cent that had already been in existence and had been so violently objected to four years ago to a whopping 49 per cent.

What the state Government did not reveal from the Rane Commission's findings soon came to light and it transpired that Justice Rane had in fact based his report on the premise that caste should not be the basis for reservations but new parameters of backwardness should be formulated. These, he is said to have suggested, should be based on the income and educational level of the family, its occupation and its landed property among other things. The Government which had been deliberating over the report for the previous 18 months has not made the report public and the impression has spread that it had interpreted Justice Rane's recommendations out of context.

Notwithstanding that the anti-reservation agitation has had its impact, this is likely to be neutralised in the countryside where Solanki has his real mass base.

Yet the vehemence with which the issues are debated in the streets and the media would make it seem that a drastic social change is sought to be introduced by the Solanki Government. In reality, it marks only a further spurt in the change that has been visible in Gujarat over the past few years, especially the five years of the Solanki Ministry. Explaining the ideological basis for the policy a few days after the changes were announced Solanki told INDIA TODAY in New Delhi: "The poor farmers and tribals need a break if they are to catch up with the modern-day world. Education is the only effective medium through which this can be brought about. Other communities have had their say for centuries. It is now time for the lower and the underprivileged classes to come up." But the bias in favour of the neglected communities, Solanki insisted, is not necessarily against the traditional upper classes. It only means that they would have to strive that much harder.

Much of this rationalisation is, however, drowned in the cacophony of arguments and allegations, especially against the backdrop of hectic campaigning across the state. There is much truth in the general view that the agitation is confined to the urban areas. Even Solanki had cited instances where urban feelings made no difference to the overwhelming support the ruling party received during the Lok Sabha poll. Anti-Kshatriya feelings in the heart of Kaira district had led to massive booth-capturing in a prosperous Patel-dominated town like Dharmaj, but the final result showed that other communities turned up in bigger strength elsewhere to vote for the party candidate. This kind of backlash cannot be entirely ruled out for the assembly poll either.

On other counts, the very fact that so many of the party's candidates are new has given a new dimension to an otherwise lack-lustre campaign as the Opposition does not make any bones about its strength in most constituencies. No meaningful unity could be achieved and in most constituencies the opposition candidates are fighting against each other as also against the formidable Congress(I) candidates. On its part, the Congress(I) had reason enough to feel happy because for the first time, the dissidents within its ranks have been virtually wiped out. Exulted Solanki: "The very fact that many professionals from various areas have been included shows the eagerness of the party to infuse new blood and introduce a new political culture."

Among the new faces in the fray is Nalin Patel, president of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce. Says Patel: "The newcomers will be enthusiastic and clean. This is the right time to strengthen the hands of the Government." Among the more glamorous personalities are Upendra Trivedi, the popular hero of Gujarati films who is contesting from his home town Bhiloda in north Gujarat, and Urvashidevi, daughter of the former Maharaja of Baria.

Notwithstanding the shadow of casteism, the voting pattern may change at best only marginally. Some surprises in the urban areas may initially create the impression that the anti-reservation agitation has had its impact, but this is likely to be neutralised in the countryside where Solanki has his real mass base. Nonetheless, what is also clear is that the agitation is not something to be taken lightly.

—C.J. PATEL and RAMESH MENON

RAJASTHAN

The Jat Factor

EVEN in its wildest dreams, the Opposition would not have expected the kind of windfall that came its way when a relatively unknown independent MLA from Deeg was killed in what was officially described as an 'encounter' with the police early last week. The chain of events that hit the headlines in newspapers across the country led to the resignation of chief minister Shiv Charan Mathur, the swearing-in of a comparative newcomer to the political arena in the state and finally to a perceptible erosion of the ruling party's image just a few days before the state was to go for the assembly poll.

It all depends on how the Opposition capitalises on the killing of Man Singh. If no wave of any significance develops, the Congress(I) has no reasons to lose sleep over the episode.

Even before the dramatic turnabout, Rajasthan's opposition parties had showed an unusual propensity for unity in the face of the worst kind of adversity they found themselves in following the December poll for Lok Sabha when the Congress(I) captured all the 25 seats. In fact, this times round, Rajasthan became the first state in the country to witness seat adjustments among major opposition parties. The BJP, the DMKP and the Janata Party had hammered out a consensus to put up single candidates over as many as 185 of the 200 assembly seats. This was in sharp contrast to the total lack of understanding between and among these parties only two months ago. In as many as 16 Lok Sabha constituencies, candidates of two of the major opposition parties and in seven constituencies, candidates from all the three opposition parties were battling it out with the Congress(I) candidate. Small wonder all they managed to do

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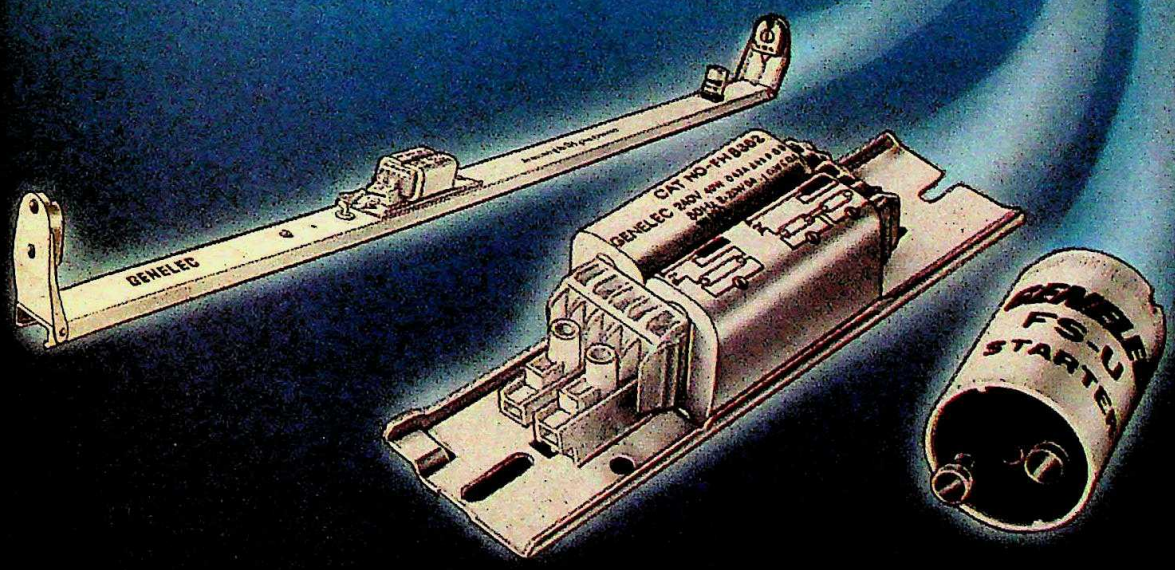

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was to cancel each other out.

Now it seems that the lessons of the rout have been learnt. Opposition leaders for once shelved exaggerated claims of influence and tried to sort out personal differences. The agreement could not have come a day too soon: the assembly poll is a struggle for survival.

Not that the odds are not heavily stacked against them. Consider the facts: not only had the ruling party captured all the 25 Lok Sabha seats, it also led by overwhelming majorities in as many as 187 of the 200 assembly segments. Moreover, what no claims of opposition harmony could conceal was that the victors had romped home with huge majorities. In 132 segments, the Congress(I) received more than 50 per cent of the votes. Significantly enough, even if the total votes polled by BJP, DMKP and Janata were to be clubbed together, it was all too apparent that the Opposition could lead in only 38 segments.

But the opposition parties were determined to reverse the trend. The campaign strategies as they unfolded over the past month further reinforced the impression. As the BJP state unit President Hari Shankar Bhabhra says: "We are not going to be drawn into any discussion with regards to the Centre." Bhabhra says that the opposition's campaign moved around the theme of Rajasthan's backwardness and the feeble efforts of the Government to fight it. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat who masterminded the unity talks and is projected as the alternative leader of Rajasthan, says: "We tell the voters that if the results now are the same as the last time, we will end up with a one-party system. The Opposition will become irrelevant and there will be no avenue left for people to air their grievances. We will have a one-party dictatorship."

In contrast, the Congress(I)'s poll strategy has been built around the new prime minister and a harking back to his family's contribution to India. Says Nawal Kishore Sharma, the Rajasthan PCC(I) president and Union minister of state for petroleum, quite frankly: "Rajiv is our trump card. His image among the people is very good and we are going to cash in on it."

AMLOK PATNI

Chief Minister Deopura being sworn in: comparative newcomer

Opposition leaders, on the other hand, hope that the extraordinary margins of their defeat will in a sense work in their favour. They claim that even at village level there is concern over the decimation of the Opposition that the Lok Sabha elections brought about. They in effect seek the sympathy vote which the Congress(I) itself sought earlier.

Added to that is now the Jat factor after the killing of Man Singh who belonged to the Jat community. A wave of Jat anger started sweeping eastern Rajasthan and threatened to engulf the entire state barely a week before the poll. The spate of violence and demonstrations that followed the cremation of the Bharatpur Maharaja's brother was clearly underplayed by the new government headed by Hiralal Deopura. In the election speeches, party candidates either side-tracked the issue or made passing remarks about the new ethos of discipline the party exuded. They even put up a nonchalant front. Says Pradyuman Singh, former minister of state for home and a recent rejectee at the party ticket distribution: "I don't think the incidents will affect votes in more than about three assembly constituencies near Deeg. Man Singh was hardly a great social worker. Why should people be expected to respond?"

AZAD SHARMA

BJP, Janata and DMKP leaders releasing joint manifesto: real unity

Others were even more harsh in their comments. Sharma says: "He was an eccentric and what he did was the action of a madman. His killing has undoubtedly hurt the sentiments of a section of people. But even under normal circumstances, police action arouses anger. So it is not unexpected. But the reaction is by and large nominal."

Notwithstanding this kind of bravado, the party echelons were clearly taut with tension. The Jats are spread over Bharatpur, Dholpur, Alwar, Sikar and Jhunjhunu districts. Above all, since the state historically consisted of scores of old princely states like Bharatpur, the sentiment among the masses has been always sympathetic to the former rulers. How important is the support of the old princely families for political gain is exemplified by the ruling party itself for its having nurtured virtually dozens of them. In the latest election campaign, the party was fervently hoping that Lt. Colonel (retd) Bhawani Singh of the former Jaipur royal family would actively campaign for the party. He had earlier given his oral support to the party and if he indeed openly campaigned, for the party the Congress(I) felt that the impact could be significant at least in and around Jaipur. On the other hand, if he too kept out as many others of his kind were beginning to do, the party may have a difficult contest ahead.

Barring these factors, however, it all depended on how the Opposition capitalised on the killing of Man Singh. Waves of any kind take an incredibly short time to spread and it cannot be entirely ruled out that a Jat wave or a pro-princes wave might yet develop in Rajasthan. If no wave of any significance develops, the Congress(I) leaders have no reason to lose any sleep over the whole episode.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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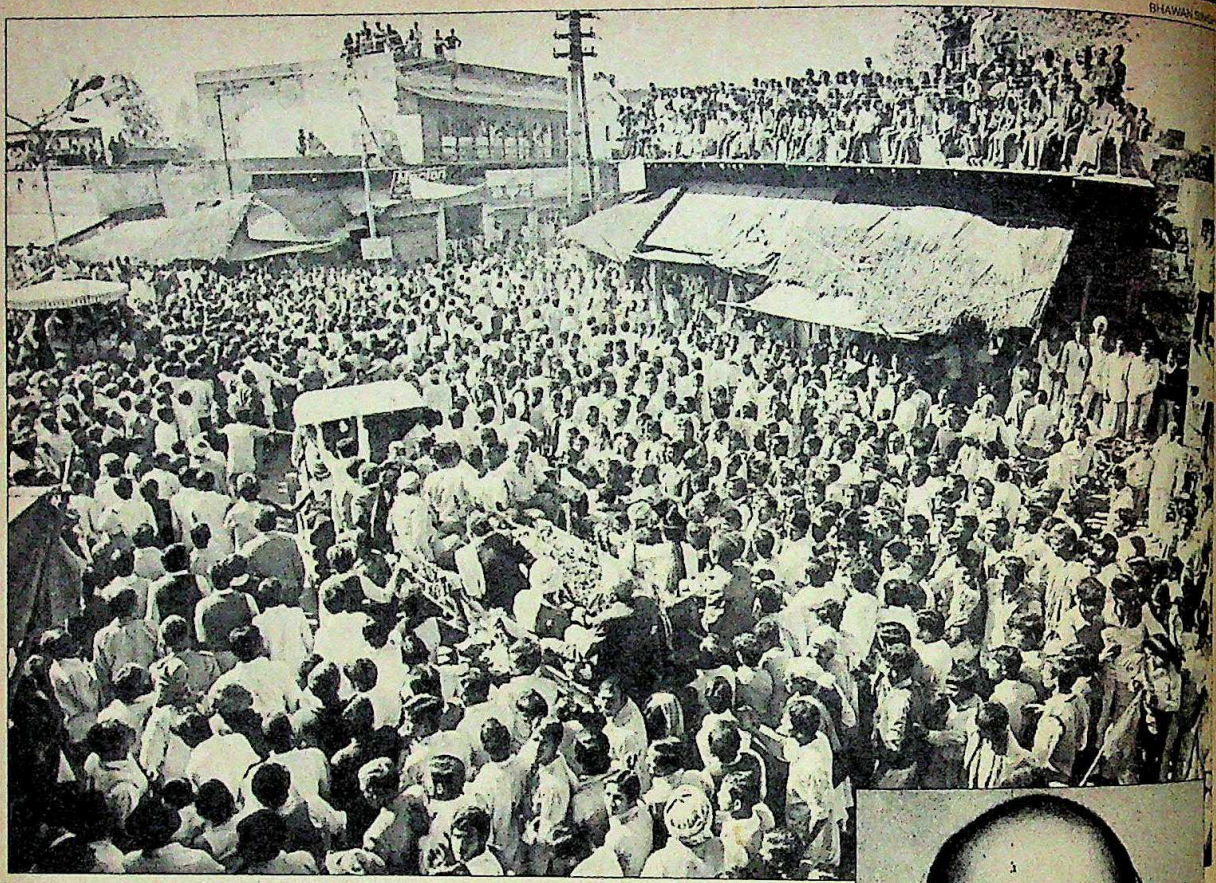
BHAWAN SINGH



RAJASTHAN

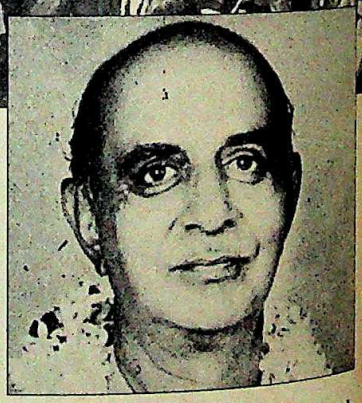
Controversial Killing

ON THE face of it, it sounded like a cops-and-cowboy melodrama out of a curry Western: people's hero is humiliated, wreaks revenge to restore honour, then falls in full public view to a hail of bullets on the main street of his one-horse town. But in reality, there was something peculiarly and inimitably Indian about the bizarre incident in Deeg last week, in which Raja Man Singh, local MLA and scion of the ruling house of Bharatpur, first smashed the chief minister's helicopter in a fit of rage and then came to a sticky end at the hands of the police.

If Man Singh was promptly catapulted to martyrdom by his Jat followers, the police action aroused violent public reaction, and the Government was left in a deeply compromising situation politically at the crucial time of the assembly elections (*page 38*). The scenes of public protest that followed Man Singh's killing forced the Rajasthan chief minister Shiv Charan Mathur to resign (*see interview*) and, by week's end, the police officer who ordered the firing, had been suspended and a judicial inquiry had been ordered into the matter.

Meanwhile, the immediate repercussion was a daunting prospect for the ruling party. The princely family of Bharatpur being the only Jat ruling house in the country, the reaction to the ex-Raja's bloody death could reverse an already reluctant Jat vote that the Congress(I) has fervently nurtured in as many as six Jat-dominated assembly constituencies in and around Bharatpur.

Curiously enough, the whole episode occurred in the heat of the election campaign. And while it may be easy to cast the 64-year-old Independent political leader in the role of the half-demented feudal going on a rampage, and equally expedient to imagine that the policemen, led by Deputy Superintendent Kahn Singh Bhati, fired in the interest of public safety, both possibilities seemed improbable at closer investigation. The massive turnout at Singh's funeral in Bharatpur signified that he was, in fact, a much-loved and popular figure.



Man Singh (above) and massive crowds following the funeral cortege: spontaneous support

His eccentricities notwithstanding, the fact that he had retained his assembly seat uninterrupted since 1952 is clear indication of the confidence he inspired in his mandate. And the growing number of eyewitness reports to the shootout, which happened after all in the crowded main street of Deeg in broad daylight, suggest

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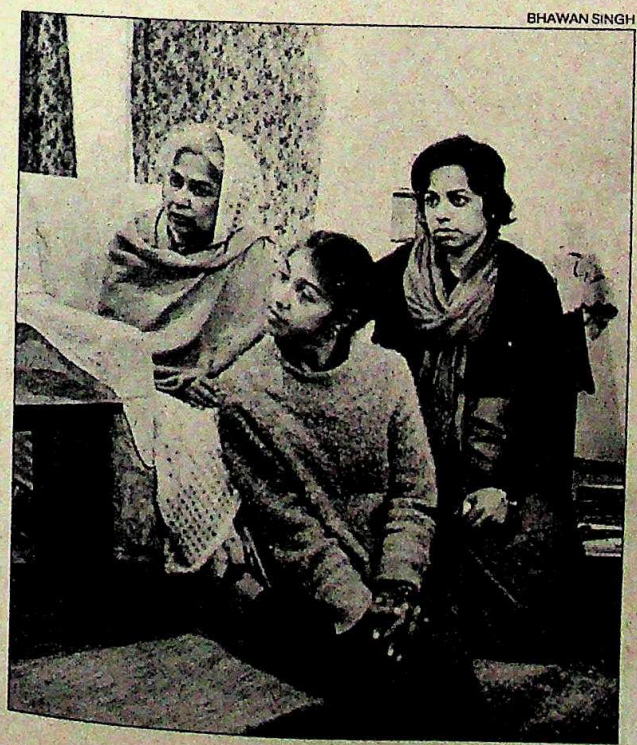
BHAWAN SINGH

that the police firing was both hasty and unjustified. There is no proof to suggest that Man Singh was armed (his revolver was later found packed away in a trunk at his camp) and though a single *katta* (country-made pistol) was recovered from the party of about 16 men travelling in his vehicle, it cannot be assumed with certainty that it was used.

What is certain is that the police party led by Bhati fired several rounds, first to puncture the tyres of the vehicle, and then shot at him in the arm and back, killing him on the spot, and two of his supporters who died on the way to hospital. Vijay Singh, Man Singh's son-in-law who was sitting beside him, ducked when he heard the bullets whizzing past and was later dragged out by the police and hit on the head with rifle butts. "It was definitely a planned murder," says Singh, who is married to Man Singh's third daughter Deepa. "It was the police jeep that rammed into Raja Sahib's vehicle, and not the other way round. Ask anyone on the street as they all saw it."

The damaged helicopter (above) and Man Singh's widow with daughters

BHAWAN SINGH



In fact, Singh claims that his father-in-law was going to give himself up for arrest when he heard that he was charged under Section 307 of the IPC with an attempt to murder, after he had rammed his World War II weapon carrier truck repeatedly into the chief minister's helicopter parked at Deeg, thus imperilling the pilot's life who leapt out to safety in the nick of time.

Last week, the three-seater Turbo Bell helicopter owned by Maneckji Aviation Pvt Ltd of Bombay, was lying abandoned in the school compound where it had first landed on the fateful afternoon of February 20. Its fibreglass bubble was broken and its engine badly damaged. Evidently the incensed Man Singh had rammed his one-tonne vehicle into the helicopter not once but several times, as sweet revenge for Congress(I) workers tearing

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S.C. MATHUR

"I followed my conscience"

WHEN Shiv Charan Mathur, 59, took over as chief minister of Rajasthan, he was a surprise choice. But by the time he resigned last fortnight, he'd been in the job longer than anyone other than Mohan Lal Sukhadia. Mathur came into politics with a byelection from Bhilwara in 1964. Re-elected in 1967, he was first minister for education and then for agriculture and civil supplies. But in 1968, he had resigned following opposition allegations that he had acquired some land illegally. He resumed his post after an inquiry found the charges to be false. Mathur lost the 1977 election, and although re-elected in 1980, kept a low profile till he was asked to replace Jagannath Pahadia.

As news of Man Singh's slaying spread through the state and tension rose, Mathur at first carried on as normal. Finally, at 12.30 p.m. on February 23, three days after the incident, and prompted by a firm message from the high command Mathur drove to Governor O.P. Mehra's residence and emerged an hour later having submitted his resignation. Later that evening, Revenue, Labour and Mines Minister Hiralal Devpura was asked to take over as chief minister. Three hours after he resigned, Mathur spoke to Jaipur Correspondent SREEKANT KHANDEKAR. *Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *Why did you resign? Should a chief minister be responsible for the acts of each of the thousands of government employees?*

A. I want to maintain the high traditions set in the party as shown by Shastriji when he resigned, particularly because this incident occurred at the time of elections and involved a person who was himself a candidate. The judicial inquiry will determine the truth of the incident, but what is undeniable is that he was killed. By resigning, I have sought to assuage the feelings of the contesting parties.

Q. *Does this mean that were the elections not being held and had a legislator been killed by the police, you would not have resigned?*

A. Had the circumstances been different I would not have quit. The im-portant thing was that the person shot was a contestant.

Q. *When did you actually decide to quit?*

A. The matter had been lurking in my mind ever since the death (February 21). And last night (February 22) after electioneering during the day I reached a decision and informed Delhi—I decided not to delay it further.

Mathur: relieved

Q. *Was it your own decision, or did the prime minister ask you to step down?*

A. The prime minister did not ask me. I followed the dictates of my conscience. After sending off the letter to the prime minister's office, I spoke to his aides who felt that my stepping down would enhance my prestige as well as that of the party.

Q. *What difference would the killing of Man Singh have made on the elections had you not resigned?*

A. It would have affected us in only three or four constituencies in the Bharatpur area. That's all.

Q. *How did you react to the helicopter episode? The allegation is that you asked the local police to take strict action.*

A. I did take the incident very badly, but I made it clear that the law should take its own course.

Q. *How will this move affect your political career?*

A. The last time I resigned (in 1968) it made a good impression. In fact, there were several editorials in leading dailies praising my action. This time too I am sure the people will be convinced that what I have done is in keeping with the highest traditions of democracy. As for the future, I don't think one should look upon politics as just a career. I am willing to perform any duty or accept any charge that the party gives me. I wouldn't mind working as even an ordinary party worker.

Q. *How do you feel after quitting?*

A. (Smiling) Don't you think I look relieved and composed?

down his personal yellow-and-blue flag with the figure of Hanuman emblazoned in the centre and also destroying his campaign posters.

"A nobleman will tolerate any humiliation, but not that of his personal standard being insulted," explained Man Singh's distraught wife later at his Moti Jheel Palace in Bharatpur where he was cremated amid a vast crowd of supporters who spontaneously turned up to shout slogans like *"Giriraj Maharaj ki jai"* and *"Raja Man Singh amar rahe"*. Other family members, a wide cross-section of Rajput nobility from distant parts of the country who had turned up in mourning, echoed Man Singh's white-haired widow's sentiments of the unholy desecration of the royal standard which her husband had also adopted as his political symbol.

In the streets of Deeg, any feeling of half-hearted regret at Man Singh's action was eclipsed by outrage at the manner of his death. Balkishan, a pavement boot-polisher whose stall lies exactly opposite the scene of the police confrontation, claimed in a voice heavy with emotion that Man Singh was shot at pointblank range without provocation. "He was butchered in cold blood and the whole bazar saw it," he said.

BJP leader Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, former chief minister of Rajasthan, who was at the funeral, was yet more explicit about the cause of the slaying. "The chief minister made a very provocative speech saying that Man Singh would be taught a lesson. Next day he was taught that lesson by gunshots. If, in fact, the Raja had caused a provocation by damaging the chief minister's helicopter they should have arrested him, not murdered him," he said vehemently.

An indication of the emotions aroused in the Jat community was available when the congregated mob following the funeral cortege around Bharatpur city set alight four police jeeps. Two days later three people were killed when the police opened fire to disperse angry crowds that gathered outside a guest-house in Deeg where a new DSP was staying. Much of the mob fury was focussed against the ruling party, in particular the Congress(I) MP Natwar Singh, now minister of state for steel, who was advised against attending the funeral.

While the Deeg election has been countermanded (curfew was clamped in the town after the police firing) the killing has at once provided an opportunity for Bharatpur's erstwhile ruling family to temporarily paper over their political differences as well as given opposition par-

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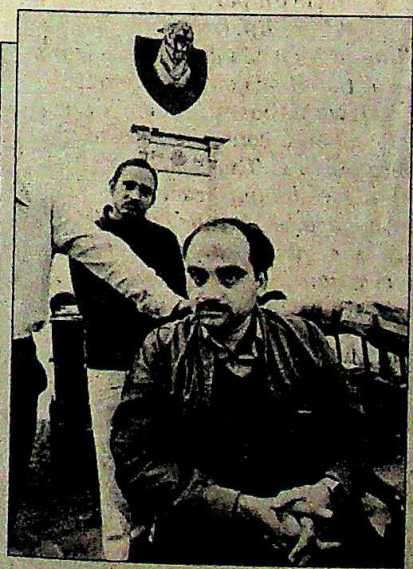
ties in the Jat belt of Rajasthan-Uttar Pradesh-Haryana an unexpected fillip. At least four of Bharatpur district's nine assembly constituencies are Jat-dominated but the ripples could rock the ruling party's chances further afield. When the Deeg by-election is called, it is likely that Deepa will contest. "My father used to take me everywhere on his political campaigns," she told INDIA TODAY last week, "and he often suggested to me that I should take a more active interest in politics."

OTHER family members are also trying to cash in on the widespread sympathy the tragic death has effected. Man Singh's younger brother's son, Arun Singh, was claiming that if the Government did not arrest Bhati forthwith, he would immolate himself in the main public square of Bharatpur. And his cousin, Vishwendra Singh, son of Man Singh's older brother Maharaja Brijendra Singh of Bharatpur, was suddenly extolling his deceased uncle's virtues when it is a well-known fact that there was no love lost between the brothers. "Because he didn't have a son, he treated me like one," he said. In last year's parliamentary election, while Brijendra Singh had backed the Congress(I) candidate Natwar Singh (also distantly related to the ruling family), Man Singh, ever the contentious younger brother, obstinately refused to do so, and in fact filed his own nomination papers. It was with difficulty that he was persuaded to withdraw his candidature but even so, in the Deeg assembly segment, Natwar Singh lost with a margin of 6,000 votes.

As tangled as the saga of the Bharatpur ruling family's politics are the twists in the personality of a man who straddled them firmly for a span of 33 years. From all accounts Man Singh was a forceful, capable and effective leader, scrupulous in his dealings and amazingly intuitive in capturing the pulse of the people in every election. Although he changed his constituency on more than one occasion, he eschewed political alignments throughout his public career except once when he fought the election on a Swatantra Party ticket because it represented the interest of the princely families. And despite his idiosyncracies such as sudden fits of uncontrollable rage or an unabashed propensity to liquor, he was not the cantankerous, high-handed loon that the helicopter incident makes him out to be. Nephew Vishwendra Singh is probably right in describing him as a "strong-minded figure, aware of his heritage and roots and a totally public man". In short, he possessed unquestionable qualities of leadership—a fact emphasised by the unanimity of Jat anger at his killing and the tension it has created in the area.

Deserted main street in Deeg



"It was definitely a planned murder. It was the police jeep that rammed into Raja Sahib's vehicle, and not the other way round."

—VIJAY SINGH

The killing apart, the anger is fuelled by the ham-handed way the whole episode was handled by the state authorities. A full day elapsed before any moves were initiated to arrest Man Singh, and it is clear that the police party were given no instructions on how to handle him. Nor was the arresting officer chosen with care: Bhati has been involved in controversial incidents before where lives have been lost, and caution alone demanded that a more senior officer be deputed for such a delicate task.

How, if at all, the ruling party will manage to assuage the hurt sentiments of a community will depend as much on Congress(I) strategy and leadership in the few days left before the poll. Accepting the chief minister's resignation is a step in the right direction. So is ordering the suspension of new Bhati and summoning all the policemen involved for further investigation. But it will take considerably more to offer a proper requiem to a man whose hold upon his mandate was unshakeable. Eccentric prince he may have been, but his uncanny awareness of the working of grassroot politics was immeasurably superior to that of local Congress(I) leaders.

—SUNIL SETHI in Bharatpur

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TAMIL NADU

Straws in the Wind

BUT FOR the histrionics, the political developments last fortnight in the ruling AIADMK in Tamil Nadu were like the closing shots of a typical MGR film. The hero and his heroine, Rajya Sabha MP and former propaganda secretary of the party Jayalalitha Jayaram, who had been estranged for a few agonising months thanks to MGR's hospitalisation in New York, were to all appearances happily reunited. Although there have been no violent staircase encounters between the convalescing hero and the "villains" who kept Jayalalitha away from him during his illness, an articulate AIADMK partyman predicted: "MGR is going to slowly rehabilitate Jayalalitha. He may not do anything dramatic immediately, but she will be built up again over a period of time."

The signs of MGR's Jayalalitha tilt are pretty obvious. The new 17-member state cabinet has been described by political commentators as a compromise effort aimed at continuing the status quo because important ministers had been retained. On the other hand it shows subtly but surely where the new MGR wind is blowing. The composition of the cabinet was a sure snub to the so-called coterie of Information Minister R.M. Veerappan, Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan and MGR's wife V.N. Janaki with whom Jayalalitha had waged an open and direct war of words on the eve of MGR's return.

> **The composition of the cabinet was a sure snub to the so-called coterie with whom Jayalalitha had waged an open and direct war of words on the eve of MGR's return.**

Confirming the trend S. Thirunavukarasu, the leader of the AIADMK's youth wing and a strong ally of Jayalalitha, who had been demoted from the excise, commercial taxes, handlooms, and textiles portfolio in the caretaker cabinet by Nedunchezhiyan supposedly on MGR's orders, has been elevated to the higher food portfolio in the new cabinet. Thirunavukarasu had even gone to the extent of announcing his resignation from the caretaker cabinet, questioning whether MGR's decision to demote him was an independent one or an influenced decision. MGR persuaded him in a confidential tete-a-tete soon after his return to revise his decision. Significantly the chief minister, unable to utter more than a few monosyllables, had waved Janaki and

Jayalalitha and MGR: talking again

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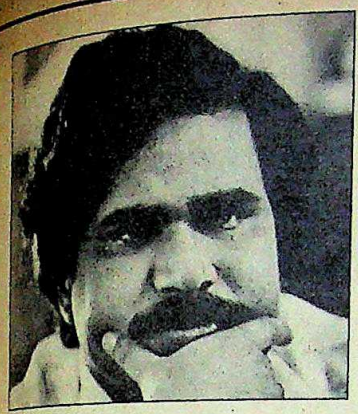

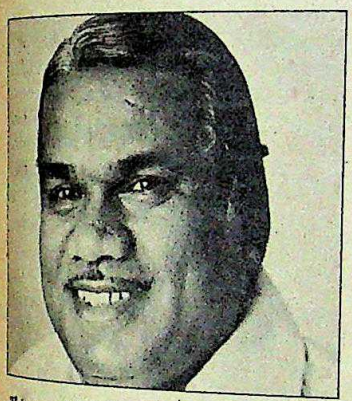

Thirunavukarasu (top) and Krishnaswamy: restoration rites

Nedunchezhiyan out of the room when Thirunavukarasu came for his meeting. Thirunavukarasu's berth in the new cabinet has come in spite of all the talk in the Veerappan camp about the certainty of his being dropped to add new significance to the murky drama.

Nor was Thirunavukarasu the only straw in the wind. K.A. Krishnaswamy, the earlier minister for dairy development, one of those party leaders who had privately questioned the correctness of Nedunchezhiyan professing to act for a hospitalised MGR, has now been rewarded with the additional portfolio of labour. On the other hand, S. Raghavananadam, former labour minister known to have been one of the critics of Jayalalitha, lost his ministership in spite of the attention he sought by publicly announcing a visit to Tirupati to thank Lord Venkateswara for saving MGR from death. C. Ponnaiyan, former industry minister who was close to Veerappan, has now been cut down to law. MGR himself is retaining the industry portfolio.

The other former ministers who were dropped were all either critics of Jayalalitha or people who owed their induction in the cabinet to the fact that they were loyalists of the former AIADMK food minister S.D. Somasundaram from the Thanjavur-Tiruchi-Pudukottai belt. Somasundaram, who was dismissed from the cabinet and expelled from the party (INDIA TODAY, September 30, 1984), was a virulent critic of Jayalalitha, but had considerable clout in the Tiruchi-Thanjavur region. MGR's tactic to undermine his strength had been to take his loyalists and followers into the cabinet. People like S.R. Radha, T. Veerasami, R. Arunachalam, K. Kalaimani, and S.N. Rajendran, the other five ministers who have been dropped, all fall into this category. From the earlier cabinet of 25, P. Kolandaivelu has been elected to the Lok Sabha and M. Vijayasarathy lost the assembly election.

If these aren't pointers enough, MGR's defiance of the Veerappan-Nedunchezhiyan clique has been consistent even otherwise. On the eve of his return from New York, when there was still considerable speculation about the actual state of his health, Nedunchezhiyan had ventured to comment that MGR might be a minister without portfolio for a while so that he could take time off to fully recover from his illness. Nedunchezhiyan would not like to be reminded of this public statement of his now because MGR has taken on a host of important portfolios, like home, public and general administration and industry, at least for the time being.

The shape of things to come was fairly evident even when MGR, after being sworn in as chief minister for the third time, lost absolutely no time in restoring his trusted lieutenant and confidant, the Director-General of Police K. Mohandas, to his earlier post of DGP (intelligence) from the innocuous designation of special officer, training and administrative reforms. Mohandas had been dethroned on the eve of MGR's return in a move widely known to be Nedunchezhiyan's.

But the coup de grace to the Veerappan clique came with Jayalalitha's ultimate success in meeting MGR. Meeting MGR itself had become well nigh impossible for Veerappan's opponents in the party. Thirunavukarasu had only to announce that he was going to New York to see his leader when pat came a telex message from MGR in Brooklyn asking him to hold on in Madras. And ever since MGR entered Apollo Hospital in Madras on the midnight of October 5, Jayalalitha had been consistently denied access to him. She made several unsuccessful attempts to see him at the hospital. Wiser by Thirunavukarasu's experience, she did not attempt to go to New York.

Even when she went to Meenambakkam airport in the early hours of February 4 with a very weighty and impressive garland with which to welcome her leader back home, Jayalalitha was not allowed to see MGR. She waited for over three-and-a-half hours at the airport VIP lounge, but all to no avail. But the ice thawed ultimately, and the two had a full hour's meeting at the secretariat on the morning of February 19. And this was amidst widespread rumours that they had met privately earlier. Looking very cheerful and happy, Jayalalitha emerged with MGR from the secretariat after that meeting and saw him off to his car before driving away. That evening MGR issued a statement arguing that "no significance need be attached to the meeting", claiming it was a routine courtesy call by Jayalalitha, but the very fact that MGR saw the need to issue such a statement spoke its own story.

That is where things stand now in the silent political movie lorded over by a speechless MGR. The shots have frozen where the hero has again apparently made peace, in sign language, of course, with his heroine. But how exactly the villains are going to be vanquished and made to eat humble pie yet remains to be seen.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

Veerappan (top) and Nedunchezhiyan: pointed snubs

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PUNJAB

A Dangerous Limbo

BLUE is fast yielding ground to saffron in Punjab's "blue belt"—the southern districts in the Malwa region so dubbed because of the blue turbans the Akalis wear. Malwa has traditionally been Akali country. But saffron or *kesri*-coloured turbans are now seen as often. Senior Punjab officials touring the state have recently been greeted by a sea of saffron turbans at public meetings and functions everywhere. Saffron is the colour signifying sacrifice and; in this case, defiance of Central authority.

This is only one of the signs of a growing sullenness, a mood of resentment. "The *kesri* turbans are only a straw in the wind but they are indicative of a trend," said a senior Punjab official concerned with the maintenance of law and order in the troubled state. "Today it is only the colour of the turban, tomorrow this defiance could take a more direct form," said the official. Other pointers are the attacks on the two head priests, and the recent wave of arson incidents involving government-run schools. "There will be more such incidents," he fears.

The mounting anger among the youth of the state has left an extremely thin dividing line between extremists and non-extremists. The people arrested in connection with the most serious offences in recent weeks are all youth who have no previous criminal record. Neither Darshan Singh nor the four associates arrested after their abortive bid to kill the head priest of the Akal Takht, Giani Kirpal Singh, have a criminal record. Darshan Singh told the police that he and his co-conspirators had harboured a grudge against Kirpal Singh for making a statement on television that the Golden Temple was not damaged during Operation Bluestar. He allegedly added that since that day he had been looking for an opportunity to kill the jathedar.

Following this disclosure, the Punjab police is reported to have told the Central Government that the lives of the jailed Akali leaders would be in danger if they were released. "They don't want police guards or gunmen, and safeguarding their security will be a serious problem," said the official. This is not to say that the Government was planning to release the jailed Akali leaders. Home Minister S.B. Chavan, who sits on the three-man cabinet committee on Punjab, made it clear to INDIA TODAY that the time had not yet come for direct negotiations with the detained Akali leaders. "It has been made clear that the Akali leadership has to unequivocally say that it will not insist on the Anandpur Sahib resolution. This is a precondition for any negotiations with the Government," Chavan declared. He said the Akalis had disapproved of extremist violence "but let them say unequivocally they don't approve of the use of violence for solution of problems". However, even as Chavan was still talking of the Anandpur Sahib resolution, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in his latest speeches before

H.S. LONGOWAL

Cautious Tone

AT THE small Udaipur airport the sight of any Sikh passenger gets the rather oversized police detail visibly stiff. And the reason for this is more than the background of a hijacking from here in the past. In a stately Rajasthan State Electricity Board guest-house on the outskirts of the town now stays Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, dictator of the Akali Dal morcha launched from the Golden Temple three years ago. And the initial police reaction invariably is that every Sikh alighting at Udaipur either wants to contact Longowal on the sly or attempt to do something else, perhaps even more felonious.

Yet, people have made it to the makeshift prison, often with official backing and kept the old leader in communication with the key surviving leaders of his party through a regular exchange of letters. In some of these he has answered crucial questions on the Akali perception of the present situation, their attitude towards the Government and terms for a possible solution. Last fortnight, INDIA TODAY was able to get access to some of these, scribbled in Punjabi and signed by Longowal himself. The following are some of the key statements he makes:

► "It just so happened that two emotional youths got after Sant Bhindranwale but he did not actively support Khalistan. He passed on the buck to me saying that if Sant Longowal supports Khalistan I too would. But neither did the Akali Dal support Khalistan, nor was there any transmitter for contact with Pakistan. Nor, I will state categorically, has the Akali Dal ever supported extremism or secessionism.

"I will state categorically, the Akali Dal has never supported extremism or secessionism".

SANT HARCHAND SINGH LONGOWAL

► "Following its philosophy of peace the Shiromani Akali Dal is agitating for its just rights in a way acceptable to any free country. An evidence of this is the courting arrest of over 3.35 lakh people up to June 3 without any violence in

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> "The Akali leadership has to unequivocally say that it will not insist on the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. This is a precondition for any negotiations."
>
> S.B. CHAVAN
> *home minister*

the assembly elections dropped insistence on the resolution and laid down two simple preconditions for talking to the Akalis: that they disown the terrorists and that they raise only such demands as could be discussed within the framework of the Constitution. This appeared to be a climb-down from his earlier uncompromising position, and one that could open the door for negotiations.

It would only be fitting for Rajiv to take the initiative himself on Punjab in the light of the fact that people like Chavan are not even aware that there are two versions of the Anandpur Sahib resolution. Chavan admitted as much, but added he was sure the version of the resolution he had seen must have been the "authentic one".

The Akali leadership on its part is in a quandry. The second string leaders acting as the party's spokesmen are hardly in a position to know the mind of the detained leaders. Yet what they say is being taken by the Government to represent Akali thinking. And the Government itself refuses to say whether or not it is talking directly to the detained Akalis. Despite reports of a Longowal-Subrahmaniam meeting (*see box*), Chavan insisted, "If Subrahmaniam has met detained Akali leaders he has not reported to us (the cabinet committee) what transpired. I am not quite sure whether he has met them or not. We have not been sending any emissaries from the Government. But private efforts are always there; volunteers are trying to help."

With the Government undecided about talking directly to the detained Akali supremos or at least reluctant to admit it was opening a channel to Longowal, the situation appeared for the moment to be hanging in a limbo probably awaiting the assembly elections to be over so that the issue could once again go to the top of the Government's agenda.

Meanwhile the proposal to create a 500-yard-wide belt of no-man's land along Punjab's extremely porous 350-mile border with Pakistan, appeared to have run into trouble with the state agriculture department strongly opposing it. The department has told the Government that the cost of acquiring over 65,000 acres of this extremely fertile and expensive land would run into hundreds of crores, not to mention the value of the crops that would be lost. A small state like Punjab cannot afford the luxury of letting this fertile soil lie uncultivated. "In any case this is a hare-brained scheme," commented a senior Punjab official, and it would not help a great deal in preventing exfiltration of Punjab youth across the border. A better way of tackling this problem and that of terrorists who sneak in from Pakistan would be to use the newly constituted anti-terrorist cell of 700 to 800 men drawn specially from the Border Security Force and the CRPF

Another development which could worry the detained Akali leaders is the emergence of the National Sikh Forum in Punjab, with Amrinder Singh of Patiala and Lt-General J.S. Aurora as its co-convenors. For the moment the forum appears to have decided to stay out of the political arena and not to challenge the Akali Dal's authority in Punjab. But Amrinder is known to harbour strong political ambitions and is keen to fill Punjab's leadership vacuum. For the moment, however, the council's first priority is to defuse the tension in the state and secure a return to some semblance of normalcy. But how soon, remains anybody's guess.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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spite of the death of 300 of them at the hands of the Government. Lakhs of Sikhs had taken the oath of remaining peaceful at the Akal Takht sahib in the presence of the head priests. How can a Sikh defy such an oath?

▶ "At the time of Independence Mahatma Gandhi was against the division of the country. But those who had the hunger for prime ministership and power did not bother. The comrades (communists) spoke the same language too.

▶ "What has happened in Delhi has deeply shocked me. The community will not be able to make up for the loss in a long time. But I believe that the same thing would have happened some time even if Mrs Gandhi was not killed. It is said that the very community which stood for the welfare of the whole mankind has itself been terrorised like this.

▶ "This question, I have often been asked, that who should the Sikhs support in the elections. I strongly feel that our fight is with the Congress and not with the Hindus. So we should determinedly defeat the Congress—but the final decision on this is with the party executive and Mr Thekedar. We should be in touch with the other opposition parties. But in times such as these we must tread carefully."

Longowal's tone conforms to his utterances of the past. But in spite of the clear statement of support for the country's integrity there is a certain amount of hesitation in talking about the Anandpur Sahib resolution directly. That is the most crucial part on which emissaries have been trying to get a conciliatory statement out of him.

And there has been no dearth of such emissaries in Udaipur. The traffic began with sundry, middle ground Akali sympathisers such as Giani Gurdit Singh, of the Singh Sabha Shatabdi Samiti who met Longowal within a fortnight of his arrest. He was followed on August 29-30 by Akali Dal MP Lehna Singh Tur who also happens to be the son of a former Akali Dal morcha dictator and strongman Mohan Singh Tur. After the assassination, Buta Singh was immediately sent to Udaipur in the second week of November. His was not a particularly successful mission as Longowal refused to talk to him till the high priests' excommunication order on him was operative.

The Government acted more diplomatically now by sending soft-line Akalis, Ravi Inder Singh, the former Punjab assembly speaker and Raja Narendra Singh of Nabha, a former legislator. The two, on return, reported that they found him in a conciliatory mood. This, understandably, is what prompted R.V. Subrahmaniam, senior advisor to the Punjab governor to visit Udaipur.

As the most powerful Akali leader, Longowal faces daunting compulsions. From the prison, he has no control over the party rank and file. At the same time, if released, he would face physical threat from the extremists who accuse the party leaders of having fled from the Golden Temple. Yet, as his statements and reports of the emissaries show, he is not averse to conciliation. That is an encouraging sign, for any effort to resume the dialogue on Punjab obviously has to begin at Udaipur.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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MANIPUR

Bloody Encore

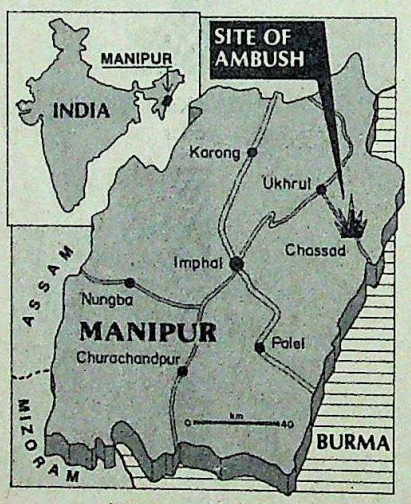
THE MARAUDERS were the same, weapons similar and the spot on the winding hill road chosen for the massacre not too far from where Manipur Chief Minister Rishang Keishing's convoy had been ambushed during the December election campaign. Only the victims this time were different—a junior commissioned officer (JCO), 12 jawans of the army's Grenadiers Regiment and a circle officer with two jawans of the Village Volunteer Force (VVF), an armed rabble raised from among the local population to counter insurgency in the villages. But the message was the same as in December, that the 2,000-strong National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) is getting impatient with the change in the insurgency scene elsewhere in the northeast and wants to reassert its presence.

The ambush, which left all the 13 armymen and the VVF circle organiser dead and another wounded marked a serious turn in the situation which has been building up in the past few months, beginning with a series of small incidents in Nagaland's Mon district, then at Pfutsero in the Sema Naga country.

But last fortnight's ambush is by far the most serious in this series and is almost as significant as the infamous massacre of 22 troops and a major of the 21st battalion of the Sikh Regiment at Namthilok, in Ukhrul district in February, 1982. As a senior army officer stated, "Since the days of high insurgency in the '60s there have not been more than a dozen times that the army has suffered so many casualties in one ambush. It has been a folly to think that the Naga insurgency is a thing of the past."

Like the Namthilok ambush the latest one, which took place between Chassad and Kangpat on a decrepit second world war road connecting Ukhrul with the border tracts along Burma (*see map*), was planned meticulously and with firm knowledge of the truck's arrival. The truck, on a routine "administrative move" was trapped on a sharp, blind bend. The men had no chance. Recovery of empty shells from the spot indicates that some of the jawans fired back. But the resistance was obviously disorganised. Highly placed sources also say that the empty shells of weapons used by the ambushers bear Chinese markings. But the most intriguing factor is the role of a VVF man. Of the three VVF men in the truck, one, the circle organiser, died, one was found wounded and the third was missing. He was the one who first reached a nearby village and informed people of the ambush. Intelligence agencies suspect that he was in league with the rebels and has now escaped to Burma along with them. Else, they say, there was no chance of his survival.

The search has yielded nothing so far. Patrols are now scouring the adjoining Burmese jungles in tow with the Burmese army. According to initial reports, however, the ambush was led by the same self-styled lieutenant Livingstone who pulled off the Namthilok massacre. He, along with the NSCN "Foreign Secretary" Angelus has been occasionally seen by intelligence operatives in the area.



The location of the ambush and (above) Livingstone: deft planning

The ambush, security agencies feel, is a clear indication that the rebel activity is part of a conscious plan to stir up trouble. Further evidence to back this theory was available later last week when yet another band of NSCN guerrillas got into an accidental scrap with a routine patrol of Nagaland police near Dimapur, the state's railhead bordering Assam. The short, bloody ecounter left three guerrillas and a police sub-inspector dead. Two of the fleeing rebels were caught after a long pursuit and officials say their interrogation may help find out more about the NSCN plans.

Senior officials in the Home Ministry ascribe the renewed violence to the growing feeling among the NSCN that it is being isolated now with the capitulation of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) in the Imphal valley following Bisheshwar Singh's entry into the Assembly and the near-agreement between the Government and the Mizos. Since the bulk of the pro-Phizo Naga Federal Government (NFG) men have already come overground after the Shillong peace accord, that would leave the NSCN almost alone to fight the Government's might. Officials say the renewed activity is meant to pressurise the Government into approaching the NSCN for negotiations.

But reports from Kohima indicate that as far as the state Government is concerned such pressure is irrelevant since Congress(I) Chief Minister S. Chubatoshi Jamir has been in constant contact with the NSCN through emissaries. During the assembly election in November 1982 the NSCN had issued a circular soliciting votes for him. Since then, even the Centre is in the know of at least three groups of emissaries sent across the border by Jamir to contact NSCN men. Jamir has been defending this liaison by arguing that since his arch-rivals in the Naga National Democratic Party (NNDP) keep contact with NFG it is unavoidable for him to be on talking terms with the other group. The NSCN and NFG have a long history of fratricidal conflict. But so far the Centre has not made up its mind on opening another front for negotiations.

But this indecision has led to a paradox which the Manipur Government finds upsetting. The NSCN the best trained among all the insurgent groups in the northeast has still not been outlawed despite requests from the Government. Officials admit that this has been done under pressure from the Nagaland Government which argues that there is no point banning the NSCN since it hardly exists within Indian borders.

Last fortnight, while further reinforcements were sent to Ukhrul, the Manipur Government had intensified its campaign for the ban. And if it wins this time, the murderous NSCN bands will have only themselves to blame.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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It's a hard days night
I've been walkin' the town
Makin' a living
And I'm feelin' down
I've been on the move
'Cos I got money to make
But after it's all over
A man needs a break
So here's to the good times
It's gotta be said
I'm ready for a Royal
I'm lookin' for the Red

Yeah, I'm lookin' for the Red

WHEN YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR A LIFT

Royal Reserve

Philosan

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FASHION SCENE SUMMER '85

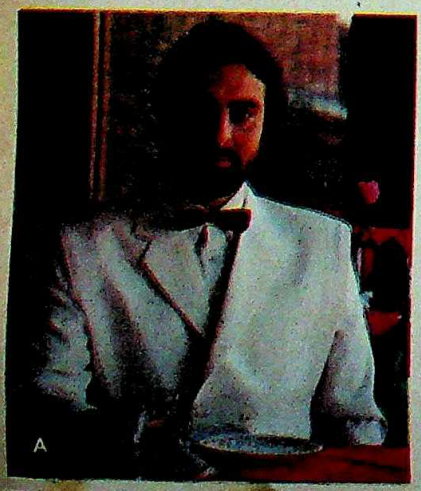
THE SPOTLIGHT'S ON THE REFINED MASCULINE LOOK.

By Dinky Mascarenhas, Menswear Stylist & Wardrobe Consultant, Charlie, Bombay.

"The highlights of the season are dignified classics inspired by the on-going dialogues between Indian and Western fashion sensibilities.

A. THE SUMMER TUXEDO: It heralds a new urban ease in formal evening wear. With a superbly crafted off-white jacket cut away from the shoulder, to bring the bodyline into sharp focus. And ably supported by an off-white dress shirt, slim brocaded Bow-Tie, jet black Tuxedo trouser, black socks, and patent leather black dress shoes.

B. THE JODHPURI: Universally acclaimed as the "Nehru Coat" it returns home to the fashion mainstream this season. The styling details include a shoulder-to-hip parallel cut, a slight tapering at the waist, a valet pocket and self-fabric buttons.



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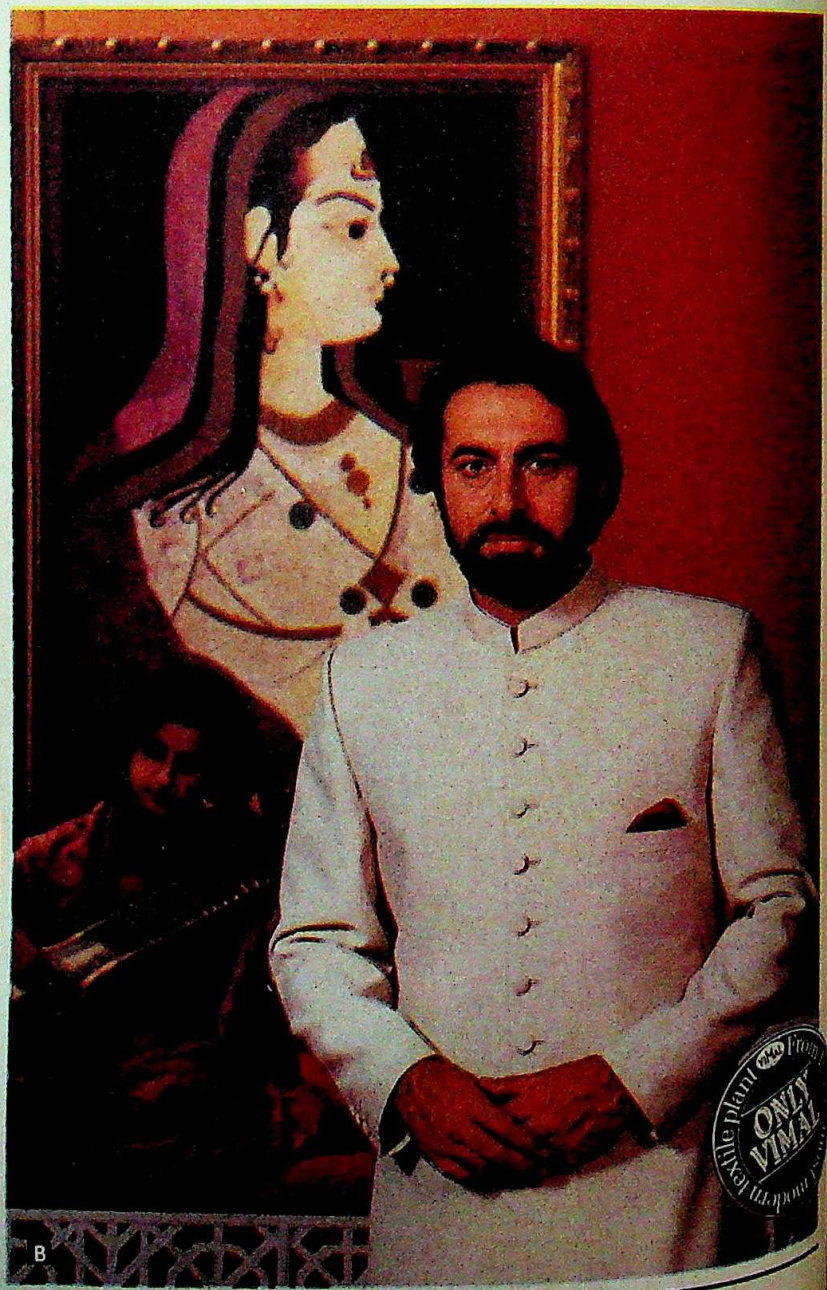

B

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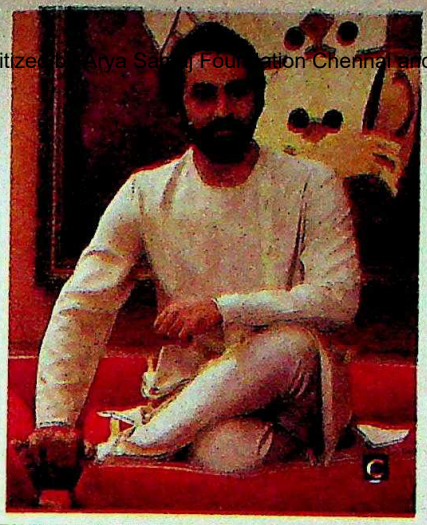
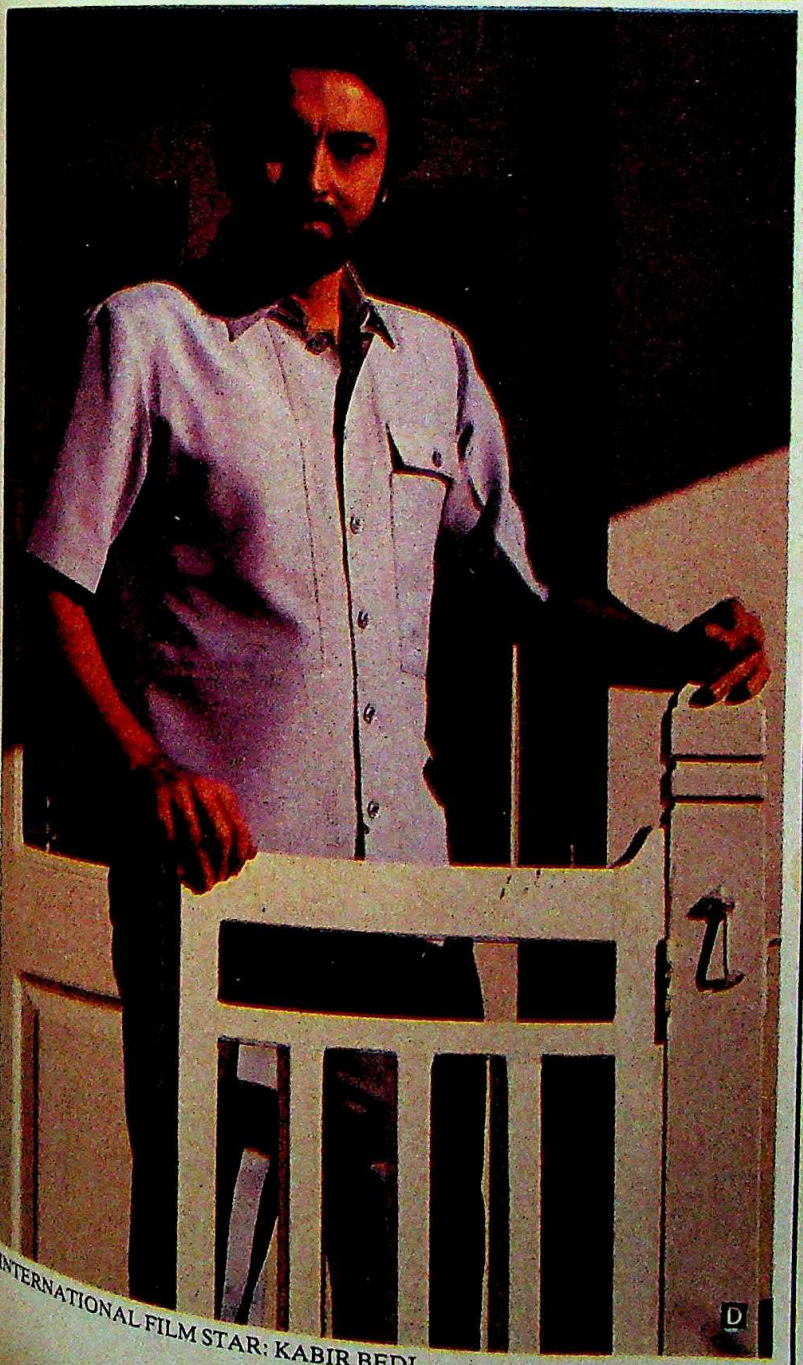
C. THE KURTA CHURIDAR: In styling, simple to the point of ingenuity. The detailing is minimal, but clever—an asymmetrical opening that runs vertically, and is fastened by 24 carat gold buttons.

D. THE SAFARI: Designed to take the starch out of summer, with easy-to-wear shapes and a decidedly more elegant look. The styling emphasis is on relaxed contours and out- sized geometric pockets.





INTERNATIONAL FILM STAR: KABIR BEDI

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The perfect gentleman.
He always wears a Cherry smile.

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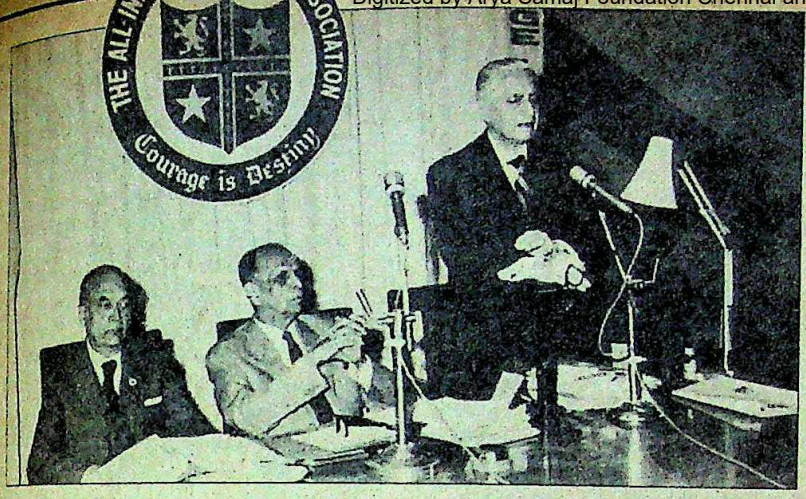

Fernandez (above) and Anthony addressing the Bangalore meeting, with Barrow to his right; rift in the ranks

ANGLO-INDIANS

Tiff at the Top

MANY familiar greyheads in Parliament have fallen and made way for younger men after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi took charge. But one of the few to be retained is the venerable Frank Anthony. The 75-year-old Anglo-Indian leader was renominated to the Lok Sabha for the seventh time last month, along with another veteran, A.E.T. Barrow. For more than three decades now Anthony, who heads the powerful All India Anglo-Indian Association (AIAA) has remained the unchallenged leader of the nearly one-lakh Anglo-Indians in the country.

But not any more. Last fortnight, soon after Anthony's renomination members of the Anglo-Indian Guild, a breakaway group of the AIAA met in Bangalore and shot off an angry letter to the prime minister informing him that these "two aged men" had done nothing for the community for the past 20 years and that they should be "retired" immediately.

Guild members argue that Anthony's only contribution has been the setting up of Anglo-Indian schools. But these had become so elitist that the children of the community could not afford to go to them. They accuse him of ignoring Anglo-Indians in the south, where the bulk of the community exists, and point out he has not visited the four southern states since 1975. Joss Fernandez, a former MLA and guild chairman, says expressively: "Mr Anthony's contribution has been a big fat zero. He is totally out of touch with the needs of the Anglo-Indians."

A rather hurt Anthony immediately issued a press statement dubbing the charges that he had neglected Anglo-Indians in south India as "not only deliberate but malicious untruths". He dismissed the guild as not being a representative body of the Anglo-Indians and said that the AIAA had 70 branches in the country and had always been recognised by the Congress party. It was through his own "unremitting work and unsparing dedication", says Anthony, that the AIAA had been built up. He added: "The position of recognition and continuing respect the community holds in independent India has been due entirely to the work and achievements of the All India Anglo-Indian Association." About the age factor Anthony says: "I am 75 and, touch wood, very fit."

Anthony points out that the guild is not representative of the entire Anglo-Indian community. But within two years of its inception it claims to have captured the support of a majority of the Anglo-Indians in Karnataka. Two years ago the official candidate of the AIAA for nomination in the state Assembly was rejected by Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, who chose Fernandez (under the Constitution the Anglo-Indians have been allotted two seats in the Lok Sabha for their nominees and one each in all state assemblies.) The guild is popular because its members have visited many of the areas where Anglo-Indians live in penury and have tried to better their condition. Tyrone Pope, 28, who lives in a small house in the outskirts of Bangalore and works as a broker, says: "Joss really cares for the poor Anglo-Indians here. But who is Frank Anthony? I think the last time I had a glimpse of him was 10 years ago."

If the guild is winning the Anglo-Indians' sympathy in Karnataka it is because the bulk of the community who at one time were well-to-do have now fallen on bad times. Most of them have lowly paid jobs and cannot send their children to school. They live in tiny outhouses in the outskirts of Bangalore with improper drainage facilities. Many of the youth have taken to drugs and the women to prostitution. Don White, a retired brigadier and vice-president of the guild, says: "What has our member of Parliament done for these people? They were nominated to protect our interests but instead it has been eroded and eroded till it has touched rock-bottom. Now most of our people live in hovels."

But the real bone of contention is Anthony's contribution to the field of education. Anthony's "dream" was to start 20 schools that would be administered by Anglo-Indians. With this in mind he set up the All India Anglo-Indian Education Institution which has so far established five schools that have been named after him and impart a fairly high standard of education. In fact these schools have been so successful that by the end of last year the institution had built up a bank balance of Rs 1.13 crore. But guild members point out that the community as a whole has hardly benefited from these schools. Although they were started with the idea that the bulk of the students would be Anglo-Indians, in the Bangalore Frank Anthony Public School, for instance,

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they form hardly 5 per cent of the students. Says Fernandez: "The community members are not in those schools. Most of them are out of it because the fees are too prohibitive."

But William Marley, president of the state branch of the AIAA, says: "No Anglo-Indian child has been turned away from these schools. Our problem is that many of them do not apply at all even though we are willing to help the poorest of the poor with freeships and the rest with fee concessions." Anthony adds: "Our community is only a microscopic minority and naturally the representations in our school is low. There are only about 250 Anglo-Indian students in, say, Delhi and we cannot afford to run a school unless we take non-Anglo-Indian children too." Guild members however feel that the institution should have started vocational schools. This is because the average Anglo-Indian youth hardly finishes his secondary certificate and usually drops out of school. They also feel that the real issue was securing job reservations for the community and low cost housing to improve their living conditions.

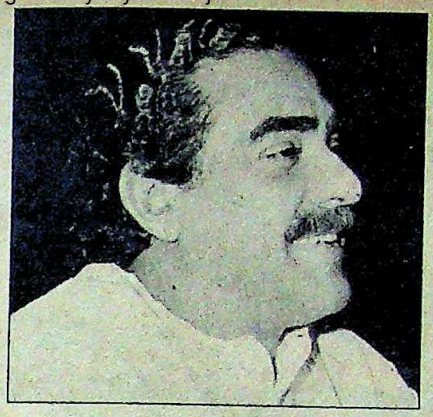
Meanwhile, a regular slanging-match has begun between the guild and the AIAA. Last year after Fernandez carried out what Anthony calls a "vicious and false campaign garnished with virulent lies" against him, Anthony filed a defamation suit against Fernandez. Undaunted, the guild set up a Joss Fernandez Fund so that he could raise the money to defend himself in the case. An all-out battle of wits now seems to be on the cards, and whatever the outcome, the community is bound to be more vocal about its problems than before.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

KERALA

Finance Fuss

COME budget time and finance ministers come under the glare of public spotlights. Kerala's Finance Minister K.M. Mani, however, is one member of the breed who is in the limelight for the wrong reasons—an attack from totally unexpected quarters, the ruling Front's coalition partner the Congress(I). Detailed notes prepared by the party's economic cell sharply criticise Mani for the manner in which he has handled the finance portfolio in the past five years and



Mani: under unexpected attack

particularly for benefiting affluent Christians in the districts of Idukki and Kottayam.

The author of the note is P.K. Gopalakrishnan, former planning secretary of the Kerala Government and now head of the Congress(I)'s economic cell. Analysing the economic policy of the past few years, Gopalakrishnan says that "most of the subsidies and largesse have gone not to the really poor and deserving section but to the comparatively affluent and richer section". Singling out the two districts which have been the backbone of the Congress(I) in the state, Gopalakrishnan says that the lobby of rubber, cardamom and pepper farmers is so powerful that the agricultural tax on cash crops has come down by 12 per cent. He also argues that despite the construction boom in Idukki, the sales tax revenue had dropped by 21 per cent in the last five years. In contrast, in other parts of the state, it had doubled. Worse, out of scores of sales tax recovery cases about some Rs 88 crore, there had been stay orders on amounts totalling more than 44 crore.

The net result, continues the note, is that the state Government today finds that its resource position is unprecedentedly tight at a time when it is finalising its Seventh Five-Year Plan. The forbidding projections are that the current year's deficit will be Rs 290 crore and the deficit at the end of the seventh plan will be at least Rs 800 crore while the finance commission had projected a surplus of Rs 635 crore for the state.

While no cogent explanations as to where things went wrong are forthcoming from any source, there seems general unanimity over the view that much will depend on the stand the Centre takes over the state's mounting deficit. Mani is hopeful that the Centre would agree to his request to convert this deficit into a long-term loan. The Centre on its part would, of course, insist on firm assurances from the state that it would exercise economy and mobilise additional resources.

What the state does to meet these requirements should become clear when the budget is actually presented. For the time being, however, the unflappable finance minister concentrates his attention on explaining the phenomenon of heavy deficits. He told INDIA TODAY that the present economic situation in the state was not the result of any flaw in financial management but simply because of the excess of expenditure over all possible sources of revenue. He points out that against the total allocation of Rs 1,550 crore, the expenditure had gone up to Rs 1,630 crore. Added to this, he says, have been some unexpected administrative expenditures due to which the state's commitments had increased to Rs 620 crore. To offset this, the Centre gave Rs 136 crore for the two years preceding 1984, thus leaving a liability of Rs 484 crore. Mani claims that by raising an additional Rs 200 crore by way of sales tax and general financial discipline, the deficit would be reduced to Rs 268 crore by January-end and insists this problem be viewed from this point of view. Says he: "Even though we are trying to keep the overdraft within permitted limits, the situation might become difficult since the Government has had to pay a sizeable amount to its employees in February on the encashment of privilege leave account."

Taking a realistic view of things, Mani insists that even if the state started with a clean slate in the financial year 1985-86, it will still have to face a huge deficit at the end of next year in the normal course. He estimates that this may be as much as Rs 1,100 crore at the end of the Seventh Five-year Plan. On the drop in agricultural revenue, Mani argues that concessions were granted to improve the state's agricultural economy.

While Mani is prepared to be sanguine on this score, independent sources convey a different strain of music. Marxist economist Dr Mathew Kurien, director of the Indian Institute of Regional Development Studies, says that the Congress(I) in its anxiety to shield the Centre is putting the blame entirely on the regional parties. If this was so, it would appear that Mani is only a pawn in a larger political game that has been played out on the fragile canvas of Kerala.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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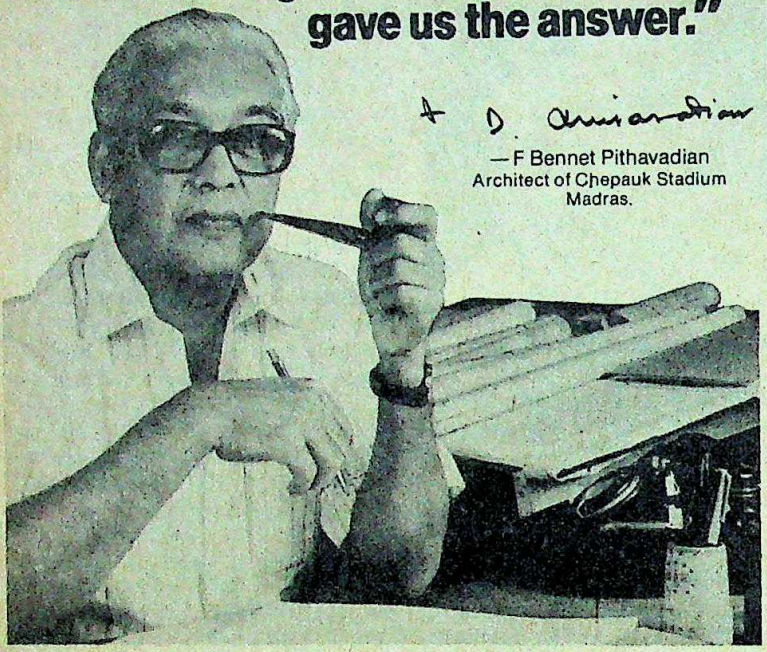

— F Bennet Pithavadian
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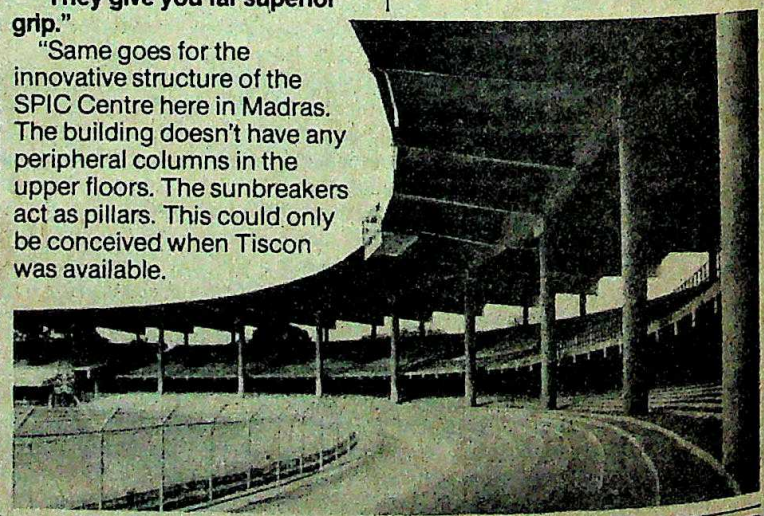

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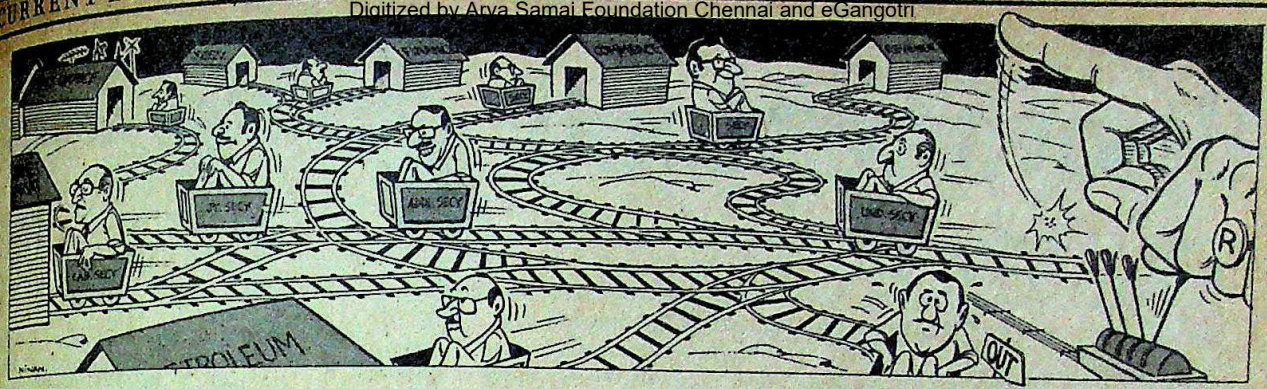

ADMINISTRATION

Switching Tracks

WAS IT only an electoral gimmick or was it a genuine attempt to make the bureaucracy more responsive to the needs of the new Government? The latest round of reshuffling involving every second secretary-level appointment at the Centre seems to have been a generous mix of both. When the contents of an official order signed by Additional Secretary and Establishment Officer Roop Krishna Tikkoo containing the names of 34 officials hit the front page of national dailies last fortnight, it was interpreted as a drive to clean up the administration. In one bold move, 15 secretaries were changed, 15 additional secretaries promoted and four others reverted to their states. The transfers followed the appointment of a new cabinet secretary and secretaries in the Home, Commerce and Finance ministries.

However, the transfers and postings were not confined to ministries and departments. The prime minister's office, too, saw the induction of two joint secretaries. Admitted a senior bureaucrat affected by the reshuffle: "It is the first time since Independence that so many top level changes have been made in one order. The new Government has opted for a wholesale change at the top rather than gradual, selective changes. Let us wait and see how it works."

On the face of it, this game of bureaucratic musical chairs defies logic. But a study of the transfers throws up a pattern in which some basic designs emerge. For example, the current reshuffle has affected not only the Prime Minister's Secretariat, which has never before had so many incumbents of the rank of joint secretary and higher, sensitive departments like Petroleum, Finance, Personnel and Defence Production have all been affected. Moreover, IAS men have been given preference over technocrats and professionals in key positions.

The winds of change blew immediately after the resignation of the prime minister's principal secretary P.C. Alexander in the wake of the spy scandal, and the replacement of cabinet secretary C. Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib by P.K. Kaul. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi quickly followed up on these changes by a review of top civil servants aimed at replacing controversial civil servants as well as rewarding those who had maintained a clean image.

As a fallout of these conversations, a list of over 100 civil servants posted at the Centre and in states was prepared for possible re-allotment of posts. With the departments of Revenue, Steel, Petroleum, Personnel, and Civil Supplies considered crucial to government, a policy decision was soon taken to replace their secretaries. As a result, K.N. Singh (Revenue), U.C. Aggarwal (Personnel), and A.S. Gill (Petroleum) made way for V.K. Dhar, K. Ramanujam, and K.V. Ramakrishna respectively. Gill, earlier superseded by Kaul for the post of cabinet secretary, went on leave, Aggarwal was appointed officer on special duty in the Cabinet Secretariat, and Singh was given the insignificant post of secretary, Department of Statistics.

In another spin-off, changes in the departments controlled by the prime minister himself or his office covered Culture, Space, Atomic Energy, Personnel, Tourism, Petroleum, Wildlife, the Cabinet Secretariat, and Youth and Sports. All of them will have new secretaries or additional secretaries after the transfer and promotion of officials. For instance, Y.S. Das, additional secretary, Atomic Energy, has been promoted as secretary, Culture, and T.N. Seshan, additional secretary, Space has been promoted as secretary, Forests.

But the most significant appointments are those of Manishankar Aiyar, a Doon School and Oxford-educated IFS official and R.V. Vasudevan, an IAS man from Uttar Pradesh. While Aiyar will aid Information Advisor H.Y. Sharada Prasad till the latter retires three months hence, Vasudevan is likely to help Gopi Krishna Arora, an additional secretary in the prime minister's office. This renders the prime minister's office the most powerful new-look secretariat in the Central Government, composed as it is of three parliamentary secretaries, one secretary, two advisors, one additional secretary, five joint secretaries, and a dozen director and deputy secretary-level officials.

Contrary to the widely-held impression that the prime minister prefers decentralisation of the decision-making process, the expansion of the Cabinet Secretariat has, on the other hand, served to fuel the belief that a new concentration of power at the top has begun. For the first time, the secretariat, which reports to the prime minister, will have three secretary-level officials: with Kaul and Aggarwal is Mohinder Singh, also officer on special duty.

Given its tasks of processing intelligence reports, planning, foreign affairs, and monitoring the functioning of departments, it may well become the core of decision-making. Evidently, it is believed that a stronger Cabinet Secretariat would aid the implementation of new work ethics and make the administration result-oriented. Commented a senior Home Ministry official: "The Cabinet Secretariat will now work as a think-tank. It will provide guidelines and give an administrative boost to put into practice the new philosophy of the young and dynamic prime minister." But only time will tell what results will ensue, and if they will.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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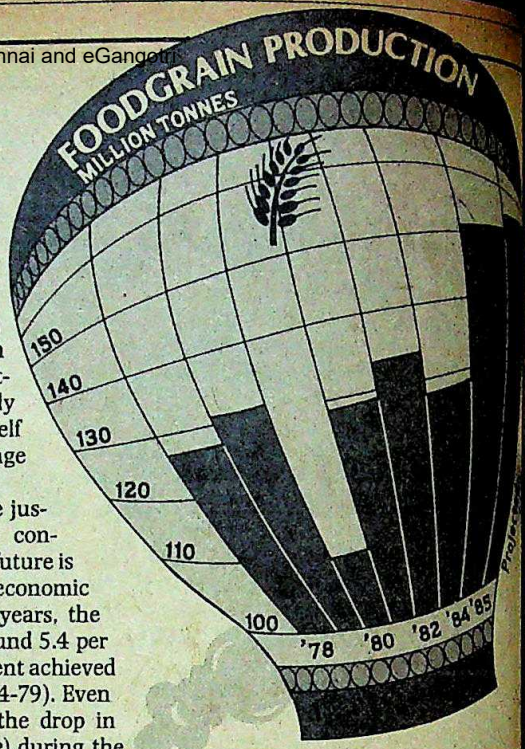
THE ECONOMY

Buoyant Mood



THE CONTRASTS are obvious. Five years ago, it was a scene of enveloping gloom; today there is a sense of things going well. Then, prices were running amuck, having just risen 22 per cent in one year; now, inflation is running at no more than 5 per cent. Then, there were long queues for diesel and kerosene, and cement was being sold in the black market; today, there are no queues and cement production has risen more than 50 per cent in five years.

In 1979-80, agricultural production had just nose-dived by a frightening 23 million tonnes (18 per cent); in 1984-85, the economy is coasting along on the strength of successive bumper harvests, and the Government's grain silos are over-full with record stocks of more than 22 million tonnes. Then, industry was on the skids as the industrial production index registered a drop of 1.4 per cent; now, the industrial sector is building on a 4.5 per cent growth last year and is expected to top that with 7 per cent growth this year. Then, coal was in short supply after production had stagnated for four years, and the power stations were registering their lowest ever levels of capacity utilisation; today, coal production has risen almost 50 per cent in five years, and the power shortage is estimated at a bearable 5 per cent: much less than normal. Immediately after the 1979 oil shock, domestic oil production had stood at barely 11 million tonnes. But five years later, the figure is almost three times as high at 30 million tonnes. Then, it seemed that the economy had pretty much run aground; now it seems ready for a lift-off.

Quite naturally, there is no sense of crisis. As the Central budget gets readied for presentation to Parliament and a new five-year plan is due to get under way next month, the nightmare of 1979-80 and its immediate aftermath are forgotten. In their place, there is a mood of optimism about the future, a sense of economic well-being that compares favourably with almost any other period of the last two decades.

There are problems too, of course. Both the Planning Commission and the Government are faced with a serious shortage of hard cash with which to finance fresh investment for future growth (*see box*). If, despite these, the mood is not affected by the fear of harsh taxation or a call for the tightening of belts, it is partly because the Government itself has refused to talk the language of bleak austerity.

This may or may not be justified, but underlying the conscious talk of a brightening future is the increasing pace of economic growth. Over the last five years, the economy has grown at around 5.4 per cent, repeating the 5.2 per cent achieved in the fifth plan period (1974-79). Even after taking into account the drop in gross national product (GNP) during the intervening year 1979-80, overall growth in the last decade has averaged 4.5 per cent a year. This is well above the average of the previous decade, and the myth about the economy being stuck at a 'Hindu rate of growth' of 3.5 per cent has been shattered.

Few economists doubt that the economy could now be set for still faster growth ahead. Says veteran administrator and economic pundit L.K. Jha: "I believe it is possible to grow faster, and some of the new policy thrusts are in the right direction." Adds C.H. Hanumantha Rao, member of the Planning Commission: "It is not unrealistic to plan for a 5 or 6 per cent rate of growth. This is certainly achievable."

A faster growth rate will cause a more than proportionate increase in per capita incomes. For with population growing at 2.2 per cent annually, an over-all economic growth rate of 3.5 per cent means that per capita incomes increase at a slow 1.3 per cent annually. But if economic growth is now stepped up to a little over 5 per cent, per capita incomes will grow at 3 per cent—more than twice the earlier rate. So while the last 30 years have seen per capita incomes rise at an average by about 45 per cent, the next 10 or 12 years could see another 50 per cent rise in average incomes.

The new mood of optimism in most circles is also justified for another reason. Between the mid-'60s and mid-'70s, the world economy had been growing rapidly. Japan, South Korea, Singapore and other countries were emerging as the global high-fliers. The contrast in India was then painfully apparent, with a slow growth rate and missed economic, industrial and trade opportunities staring everyone in the face.

But the story of the last decade stands out in sharp contrast, and is as different from the previous 10 years as cheese is from chalk. The world economy has been buffeted by two successive oil shocks, global trade has shrunk for two or three years running, and most national economies have been caught in a deep recession that some compare to the Great Depression of the 1930s. In this difficult and gloomy environment, the Indian economy has done surprisingly well. Far from slowing down, it has accelerated its growth rates, it has successfully avoided the debt trap while keeping foreign exchange reserves at a manageable level, it has sustained and increased investments, and it has been on an expansionary surge that few others have achieved. Says former finance minister Pranab Mukherjee: "Our faster growth has been achieved despite the difficult global situation, and despite two droughts at home, and this is a very creditable performance." While Indian income levels are much lower than elsewhere, and poverty levels much more stark, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had a point when he said at an election meeting last fortnight that the Indian economy has been growing faster than the American, British or Japanese econo-

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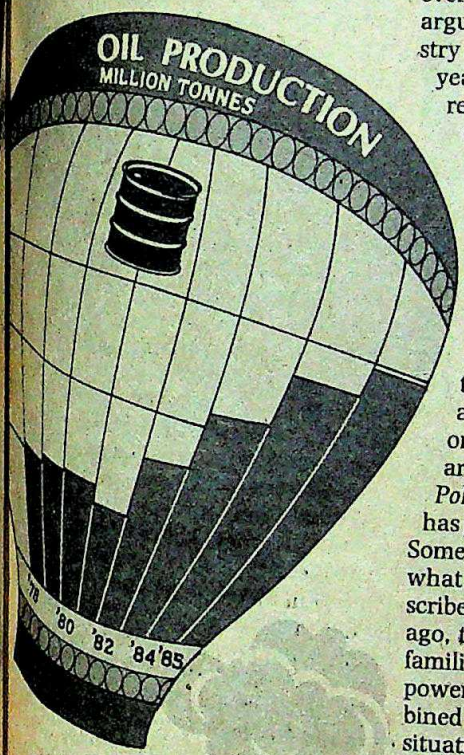
mies. However qualified this success, and however limited a point such a comparison makes, it remains undoubtedly a noteworthy success.

Yogendra Alagh, chairman of the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices, argues that the Indian economy perhaps "took off" around 1976-77. "That was the year in which gross investment became more than 20 per cent of the gross



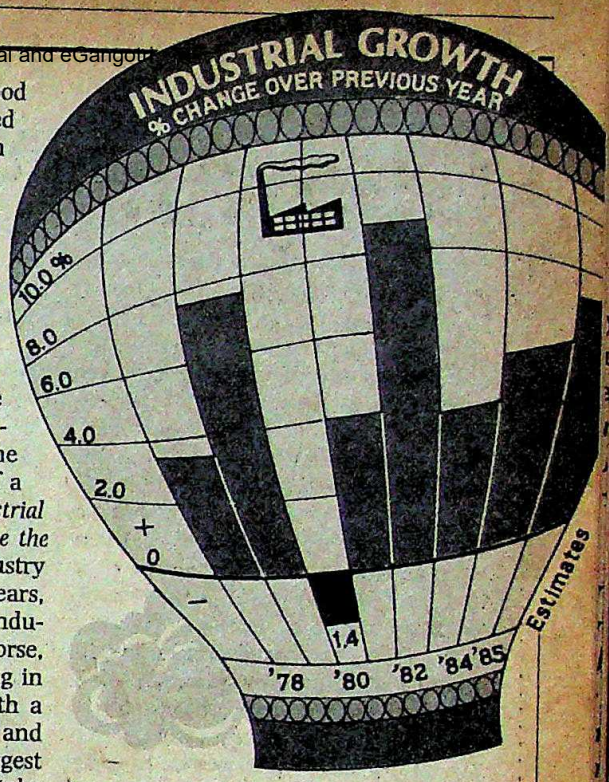
domestic product (GDP). That was also the period when the Government started changing its industrial policies. I believe that the Indian economy achieved a structural transformation somewhere around that period." Alagh and others in fact argue that the economy has been growing much faster than the official figures indicate, because a lot of what is produced is not reported in order to evade taxes, or is not reflected in the official figures for other reasons. So while the official figures suggest that industry has been growing at between 5 and 6 per cent annually, Alagh guesses that the actual growth has been at least around 7.5 per cent. "This is certainly reason for optimism," says Alagh.

If an investment rate now of around 25 per cent of GNP (compared to around half that level 30 years ago) is one reason for the improved performance, there are several other reasons why things have been getting better. One is plain good management. Another is improved luck with the rains, and a third (in relation to the handling of the foreign exchange reserves) is the large remittances from Indian workers abroad, helped by new savings and investment policies announced by the Government.

The optimism about faster growth is not, of course, shared by everyone. Some economists have argued that if anything Indian industry has been slowing down over the years. Isher Ahluwalia, author of a recently published book (*Industrial Growth In India: Stagnation since the mid-sixties*), says, "Heavy industry has slowed down over the years, and there has been overall industrial stagnation. What is worse, productivity has been dropping in industry." But discussions with a number of economists, both in and outside the Government, suggest that the majority are inclined to take an optimistic view of the recent record. And eminent economist K.N. Raj argued recently in the *Economic and Political Weekly* that industrial growth has picked up since the mid-'70s.

Some of the optimism can be explained by what a senior government official described as "a spirit of can do". Five years ago, the economy seemed caught in the familiar vicious cycle of shortages of power, coal, steel and rail transport, combined with a potentially disastrous oil situation. But whereas the problems seemed insoluble then, they seem manageable now, because the last five years have shown that many of the problems have in fact been tackled. Said the official: "The oil production has been troubled, there is no noticeable railway bottleneck, and plenty of coal is available. So if some problems still remain, like the power shortage, it should be clear that when the Government gets down to it the problem can be solved. There is no need for any sense of defeatism about this."

He certainly has a point. If the oil situation seemed near hopeless five years ago, and is well under control today, the explanation lies with the much maligned public sector. For the Oil and Natural Gas Commission marshalled all its men, money and materials to achieve an expanded production target dead on time. Good management once again holds the explanation for the sudden turnaround in the railways, which because of sheer sloppiness had failed to register any increase in freight carried for around four years.



But one good man at the top, in the form of M.S. Gujral, changed that overnight. Good management was once again on display in keeping prices under check, even during the difficult year of 1982-83, when the rains failed.

While the improvements of the last five years are undeniable, it would be wrong to link this to the transition from Janata to Congress(I) rule. The economy in fact performed reasonably well during 1977-78 and 1978-79, before the setbacks of 1979-80; and the first year of renewed Congress(I) rule, 1980-81, was particularly undistinguished, and marked by a definite drift.

Nevertheless, government policy has played its role in building confidence. The policy on granting letters of intent and industrial licences has been greatly liberalised so that much larger numbers of new projects have got cleared, and Indian industry has started on a long-delayed process of modernising its technological level because the Government has eased up on foreign collaborations and allowed more generous royalty payments. Finally, as Pranab Mukherjee points out, new stock-markets have been opened in a number of small towns, and the capital market has been booming. Till the late 1970s, less than Rs 100 crore used to be raised in the stock-markets every year to finance new projects. For the last three years, the figure has been closer to Rs 1,000 crore.

The new Government is now further bolstering confidence because of the tone of its public comments. Cleanliness is

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once again an officially sponsored virtue (no more talk of corruption being a global phenomenon), there is a promise to clean up the administration, and telephone users are not being told that if they don't like the service they can return their telephones. Instead, an ambitious programme is under way to deliver telephones on demand in five years' time, and to introduce new electronic technology for the country's telephone exchanges.

Rajiv Gandhi has consciously tried to bolster the positive mood. Addressing a gathering of the electronics industry last fortnight, he said: "The problem will not be with government constraints or restrictions, or time taken by the Government. But can you keep up with what we are doing?" Earlier, addressing a full meeting of the Planning Commission, he said the effort should be to anticipate economic problems and get ahead of them, rather than forever trying to catch up with demands. In his campaign speeches, he has promised a new industrial policy, an impetus for modernisation and raising the quality of products, the wiping out of the black money menace, a new agricultural policy, further simplification of procedures, and much else. Industry Minister Veerendra Patil has in turn promised to de-licence a number of industrial areas, while policy announcements have already been made that enable manufacturers in a number of areas to adopt flexible production strategies.

While the promises and statements of intention are yet to be matched by hard decisions, so that it is not really clear what exactly the Government is talking about, the intention seems to be to allow industry more elbow room, provide greater scope for private investment, and to pull the public sector out of unnecessary areas. However, as an economist in the Government pointed out: "This does not mean any really fundamental change in policy. The stress is still on self-reliance, on public sector investment, on anti-poverty programmes. We are not about to go in for a free enterprise system, we are not going to try and be another Singapore. I think the stress is more on streamlining, on making things work better."

Meanwhile, the promises have flowed so thick and fast that there is the real danger now of expectations being raised to a level where they cannot possibly be met. Thus, Raja Chelliah, a tax expert who is now a member of the Planning Commission, lists a number of reasons why it is difficult to eradicate black money: "Promoters of companies want to take out their share of the total investment by inflating construction costs, over-invoicing of imports is a common practice, smuggling is a major problem, many foreign companies pay 3 to 7 per cent commissions to people, and illegal activities of various sorts generate black money. The underlying causes are basically human greed, shortages, high taxes and controls. So it is not an easy problem to tackle."

"I believe it is possible to grow faster, and some of the new policy thrusts are in the right direction."

L.K. JHA
veteran administrator

"It is not unrealistic to plan for a five per cent plus rate of growth. This is certainly achievable."

C.H. HANUMANTHA RAO
member, Planning Commission

Despite such known difficulties, however, the popular mood is one of expectation, reflecting a confidence that the Government means business. Even the well-known fact of a difficult budgetary situation has failed to douse expectations, as would normally have been the case in the pre-budget season.

In yet another vital area of national effort, the transition has been made from gloom to hope: agriculture. As recently as three years ago, the accepted wisdom was that the green revolution had lost steam, and that the growth rates of the past could not be expected to continue indefinitely. Foodgrain production had peaked at 132 million tonnes in 1978-79 and had not crossed that level since then. But the record harvests of the last two years have changed all that. Even more important, there is now firm and incontrovertible evidence that the green revolution has spread beyond Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh into central and eastern Uttar Pradesh. This is an area much larger than either Punjab or Haryana, and the potential for increasing food production here is therefore enormous. Agricultural economists now talk in almost lyrical terms of the enormous potential of the region, and of the possibility of the green revolution spreading in time to neighbouring north Bihar. Yogendra Alagh, who was earlier chairman of the Agricultural Prices Commission, recalls a jeep drive from Lucknow to Gorakhpur some time ago, and talks of the evidence that hit his eyes of a new farmer awareness, of wheat yields having risen from the normal 10 or 11 quintals per hectare in the area to 18 and 19 quintals per hectare. In the best cases, the yields had touched 25 quintals, which compares with Punjab's 29 quintals. Says Alagh: "We must remember that Haryana achieved an average of 19 quintals per hectare of wheat only around 1973. So central and eastern Uttar Pradesh are at most only a dozen years behind." He goes on to point out that in the last decade, the increase in wheat production in Uttar Pradesh has been more than the total wheat production in Punjab today: around 9 million tonnes. And the increases are now definitely greater in the eastern districts than the already advanced western districts.

C.H. Hanumantha Rao, a well-known agricultural economist,

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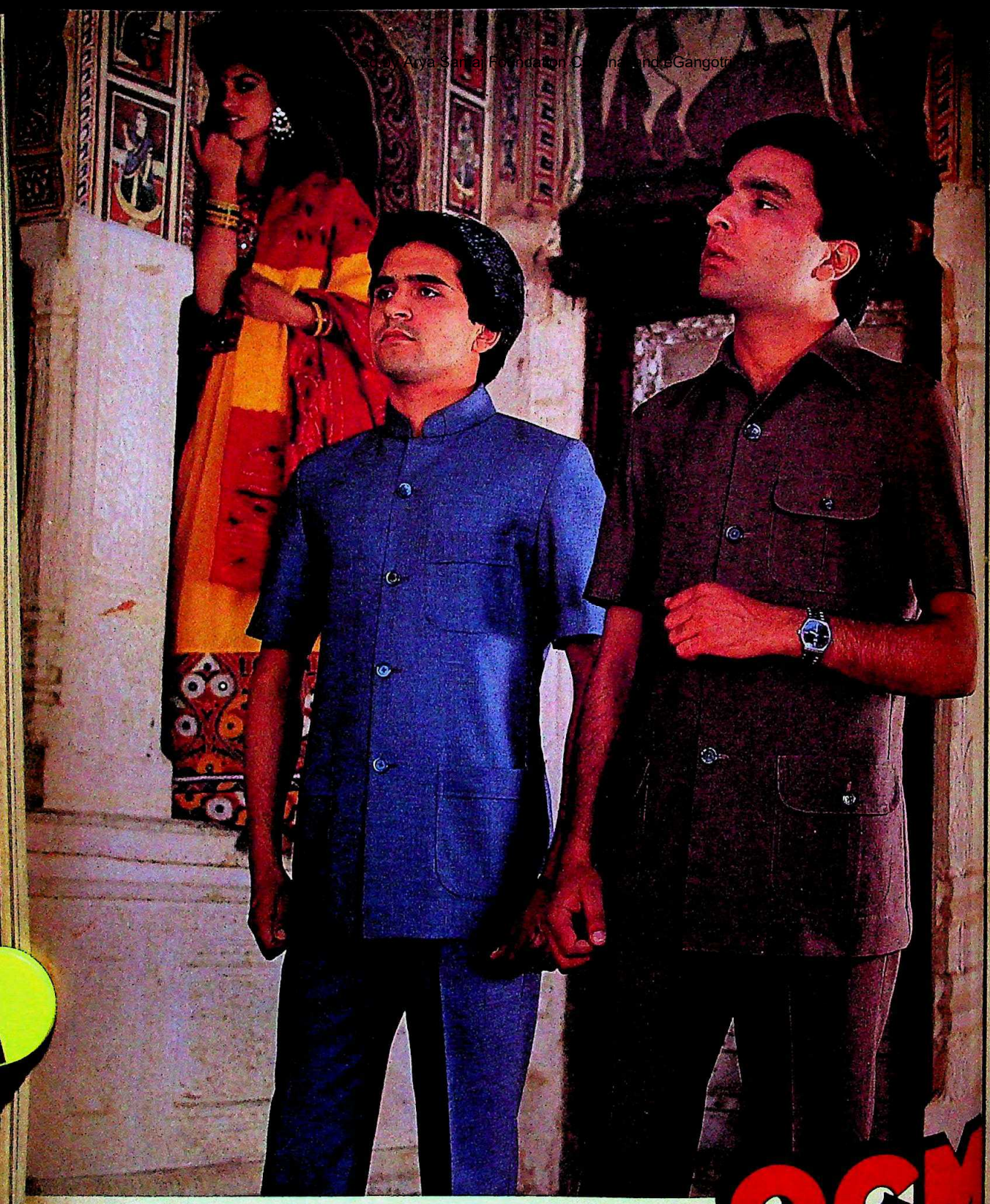

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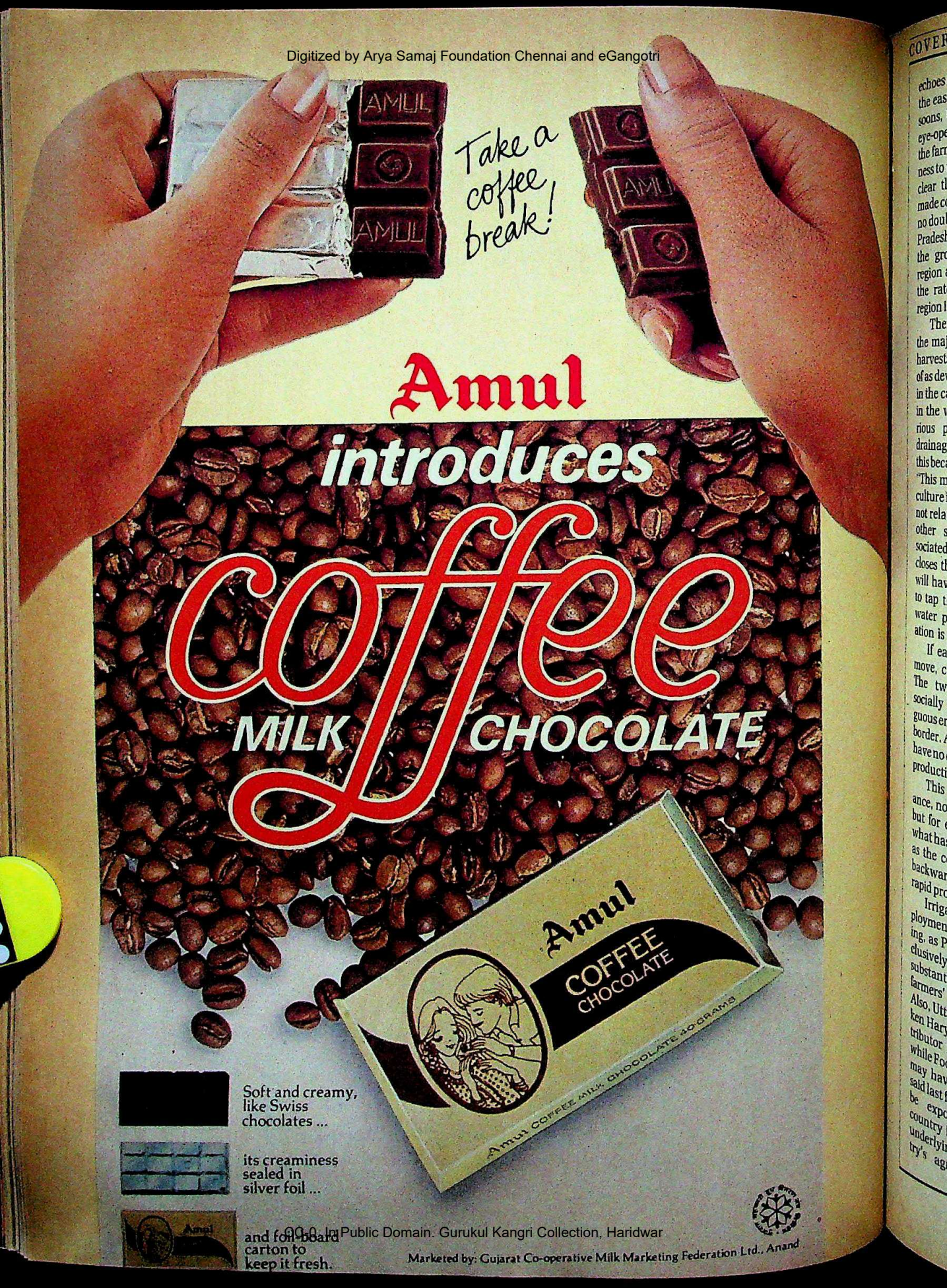

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echoes these findings. Recalling a tour of the eastern states during the last monsoons, Rao says that his tour was "an eye-opener". "I was very impressed by the farmer's awareness and his willingness to use new technology. It was quite clear that the extension network has made considerable progress, and there is no doubt in my mind that eastern Uttar Pradesh is on the move." Characterising the growth in wheat output in the region as "phenomenal", Rao said that the rate of growth for wheat in the region is an astounding 6 to 7 per cent.

There are problems of course. Rice is the major crop in the region, and rice harvests are still plagued by the absence of as developed a technology package as in the case of wheat. Also, rice is grown in the wet season, when there is a serious problem of waterlogging and drainage. Wheat remains unaffected by this because it is a winter crop. Says Rao: "This means that the problems of agriculture in the area are crop-specific, and not related to the farmer's ignorance or other social problems normally associated with the area." And he discloses that the Seventh Five-Year Plan will have a special programme package to tap the region's enormous groundwater potential so that assured irrigation is provided.

If eastern Uttar Pradesh is on the move, can north Bihar be far behind? The two regions are economically, socially and geographically one contiguous entity divided by an artificial state border. And the agricultural economists have no doubt that the next spurt in crop production will be in north Bihar.

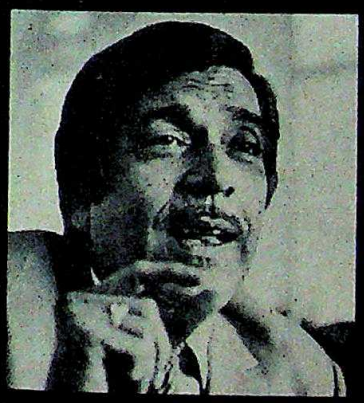
This is of truly enormous significance, not merely for Indian agriculture but for employment and prosperity in what has often been derisorily dismissed as the country's cow belt, perennially backward and incapable of achieving rapid progress.

Irrigated agriculture is far more employment-intensive than rainfed cropping, as Punjab and Haryana have conclusively shown, and the impact of substantial sums of money coming into farmers' hands cannot be minimised. Also, Uttar Pradesh has already overtaken Haryana as the second largest contributor to the central grain pool. So while Food Minister Rao Birendra Singh may have been sounding off when he said last fortnight that India would soon be exporting foodgrains (half the country is still under-fed, after all), the underlying optimism about the country's agricultural and food outlook seems entirely warranted.

A buoyant agriculture can only be good news for industry, guaranteeing as it does both raw materials and a market for finished goods. Sharayu Daftary, managing director of Bharat Radiators in Bombay, has little to do with agriculture, but she is on target when she says that "the agricultural base should be made more stable, with a more extensive irrigation network. We are basically an agricultural economy, and a strong agricultural base is good for everyone."

"When there are shortages, controls and high taxes, it is not easy to eradicate black money."

RAJA CHELLIAH
tax expert



"The increase in wheat production in Uttar Pradesh in the last decade is more than the total wheat production in Punjab."

YOGENDRA ALAGH
economist

Daftary's fellow-businessmen, meanwhile, have been buoyed by the promise of sweeping changes in industrial policy. Even within the Government, there is now the widespread realisation that many of the policies of the past have proved counter-productive, rendering industry both high-cost and inefficient. Restrictions on production capacities and new entrants into industrial fields have if anything enabled manufacturers to make fat profits on shoddy products, and restricted competition while preventing the realisation of economies of scale, technological upgradation and the building up of exportable surpluses. High taxes have converted consumer conveniences into luxury commodities and helped smuggling to flourish, while at the same time provided an impetus for tax evasion and the creation of black money. So a climate of opinion has built up in favour of opening up the economy, and encouraging competition so that it is the consumer who is protected rather than the producer.

A growing body of opinion now backs the Government in its bid to undertake reform of industrial policy. L.K. Jha says: "We should allow people the freedom to produce and to diversify, and not stifle competition among the giants. And we must stop refusing to give licences on the ground that enough licensed capacity already exists, because this shelters the inefficient." He argues that the opposition to this is likely to come not from the left (because this now has only a small voice left in Parliament) but from the right: "Industrialists have always known that they are more pampered rather than hampered by the licensing system."

There are in fact some businessmen who view the promised liberalisations with suspicion. Shyam Sundar Kanoria, who is in jute, cotton textiles and chemicals, says: "Import liberalisation will do incalculable harm to the economy since a large amount of productive capacity in the domestic economy would be under-utilised."

While some businessmen are still non-committal because they say that the Government has not really announced anything concrete yet, several industrialists are all in favour of expanding capacities and giving industry a free rein. Says Virenchee Sagar, managing director of Nirlon Synthetic Fibres and

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Chemicals: "The Government must recognise the need for economies of scale, and I hope this will be reflected in allowing nylon and polyester plants to expand to a proper capacity." Adds Rohit Patel, managing director of Rohit Pulp and Paper Mills: "We should be allowed to import technology freely if we are to improve our product and reduce costs."

While the new Government's policy package for industry is still being worked out, the turnabout in the field of electronics gives some indication of which way the new policy is likely to be headed. Right through the 1970s and early 1980s, the Government had turned its back on the electronics and computer giants of the West, believing in a go-it-alone policy.

But with the evidence mounting that this was proving counter-productive and that India was missing the electronics bus, the Government has done an about-turn and announced a new open-door policy that allows more open competition and beckons international companies to start new partnerships with Indian firms. Numerous electronic super-giants are now beginning to set up hardware and software facilities in the country, while the tax concessions announced earlier have resulted in some lowering of prices and faster growth of the market.

A similar open-door policy has been allowed in the automobiles sector, where a lot of industrial investment is due to take place as manufacturers update their products and new producers ready to enter the market. This is in sharp contrast to the attitude six or seven years ago, when the existing car companies were denied access to new technology, and the Government was in fact threatening to nationalise both the car producing firms.

If all this has generated new enthusiasm, it is partly because of the discovery that people in India do have the money to spend. Five years ago, official committees were estimating demand for colour television sets in thousands, whereas sales are now in hundreds of thousands. And few could have forecast that the promise of a modern car would find 135,000 people willing to put in deposits of Rs 10,000 each for the pleasure of waiting in line. Clearly, there is a larger market waiting for goods than had been believed, and people clearly have the money to both save and spend: a realisation that has altered perceptions even in government.

A number of economists in the various ministries confessed last fortnight that they had initially felt the decision to go in for colour television was a wasteful mistake, but that they had been forced to

BUDGET

Taxing Time

A STATE Government finds that its total tax revenue is less than the salary bill of its employees. The Central Government finds that tax revenues have suddenly failed to keep pace with economic growth. And the country's planners find that the seventh plan may not get off the ground for want of money. Put all three together, and there is a fair chance that budget day will bring bad news.

It is an odd paradox: the economy is doing well, but tax revenues are far from buoyant. And both the Central and state governments are strapped for cash in a way that they have not been for a long time. The states have run up overdrafts with the Reserve Bank of over Rs 2,000 crore, and the Central budget might show an equivalent deficit, making for around Rs 4,000 crore. Apart from the fact that this would be an all-time record, it spells trouble for plan investment.

The financial experts in the Planning Commission say that while the proposed seventh plan outlay is Rs 180,000 crore, the money is short by over Rs 39,000 crore. Various efforts are on to reduce this, but with what success remains to be seen. At the moment, the annual plan for 1985-86 is likely to see only a small increase in investment levels. In some sectors, there might be no increase at all, marking a very inauspicious start to the seventh plan.

"There has been a runaway increase in non-Plan expenditure," says Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh in explanation for the difficult financial position, and he specially mentions additional dearness allowance payments to government employees as an important factor. His predecessor, Pranab Mukherjee, says the problem has its root in the fact that 73 per cent of what is called revenue expenditure (as different from capital expenditure) is accounted for by just three items: defence, interest payments on government loans and subsidies on items like food, fertiliser and exports. What is unstated is that the last year was a pre-election year, and both the Central and state governments went on a spending spree.

Uttar Pradesh, for instance, has always been among the states with a relatively good fiscal record. This year, however, the state has not only exhausted its normal loan limit for contingencies but also run up an RBI overdraft of Rs 260 crore. Chief Minister Narayan Datt Tiwari comments blandly that "yes there is an overdraft, but this is due to certain reasons and will be taken care of". Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the state consciously ran up its overdraft in protest at other states being allowed to get away with perennial overdrafts and because the Centre has not released money which the state Government says was promised to it. Whatever the reason, the Centre was forced to step in last month and ask the RBI to dishonour cheques issued by the state Government. A crisis was averted only when the overdrafts were quickly brought down to more acceptable levels.

But a fresh crisis is inevitable because the state Government's salary and wage bill of Rs 825 crore is more than its total tax collection of Rs 775 crore. Kerala's condition is not much better, with two-thirds of its tax revenue going into salaries. And of the state's sixth plan investment of Rs 1,630 crore, no less than Rs 1,260 crore came from the Centre.

There are several other pointers to a worsening crisis. For several years, the Central Government used to have a surplus on its revenue account which was used to finance investment expenditure. Since 1977-78, however, the Government has consistently run up deficits on even its revenue budgets. What this means is that the Government has been borrowing money not to finance investment but to meet its day to day expenditure. Such borrowings have climbed from Rs 128 crore in 1978-79 to a staggering Rs 2,325 crore this year.

The results now stare the Government in the face, because an increasing share of its expenditure is paid for not by taxes but by borrowings from the capital market. Such borrowings accounted for only 6.4 per cent of total developmental expenditure in 1975-76, but have climbed quickly to 16.2 per cent this year. The Government's market borrowings in 1974-75 totalled no more than Rs 481 crore. Ten years later, the figure is an astonishing Rs 4,100 crore, an increase of around 800 per cent. The Government is therefore caught now in a debt trap, with interest payments on loans climbing from Rs 1,228 crore in 1975-76 to Rs 5,674 crore this year.

One reason for this growing problem is clearly the fact that the progressive

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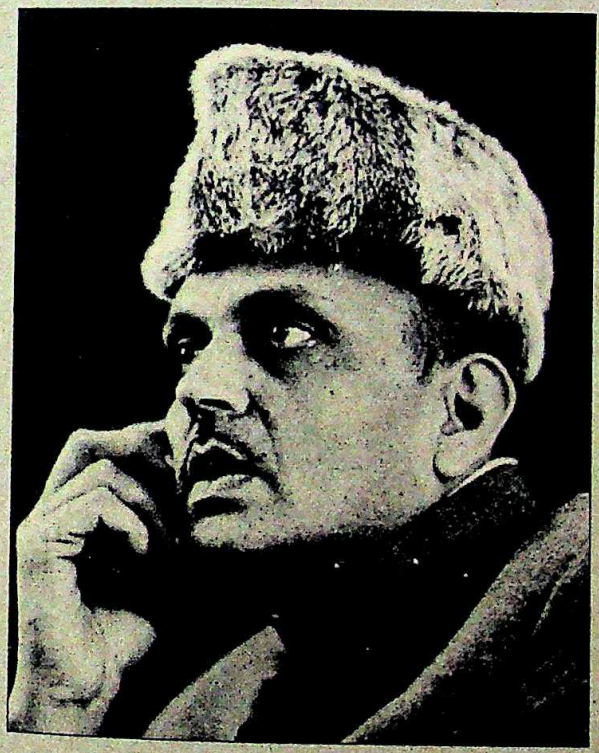
reduction of tax rates has not delivered results in terms of reduced tax evasion and therefore higher revenues. Pranab Mukherjee himself admits that "lower taxes have only marginally improved tax compliance," but argues that "we need more time to see the effect of lowered taxes". Meanwhile, M.Govinda Rao of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, finds from his research into the subject that "in the short-term, a reduction in income tax rates leads to a drop in revenue. What the long-term results are we don't really know". But the figures certainly show that taxes as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) have been dropping. C.H. Hanumantha Rao, member of the Planning Commission, says that in 1977-78 Central taxes accounted for 11 per cent of GDP, and points out that this has fallen slowly since then to between 10 and 10.5 per cent. "A 1 per cent tax increase in relation to GDP should yield Rs 10,000 crore in five years," he says.

The question is whether this will tempt the Government to reverse its policy of recent years of gradually reducing tax rates where possible. The maximum income rate has been reduced over the years from an expropriatory 97.75 per cent a decade ago to 66.25 per cent now, while the tax exemption limit has gradually been raised from Rs 8,000 in the mid-1970s to Rs 15,000 now. The income tax rates were lowered both last year and the year before, while wealth tax exemption limits have been raised. There has also been a lowering of excise and customs duties on electronics goods, on refrigerators, tyres and motor vehicles, among others. Veteran administrator L.K. Jha, who has over the years submitted a series of tax reports to the Government, argues that some of these did in fact lead to industrial growth and therefore to higher tax revenue.

The gradual reduction of tax rates on a selective basis was initiated because, as the Government said last year in its annual Economic Survey, "the scope for further increase in... tax rates is likely to be limited" — a statement that has more than a grain of truth. But the overall picture today is not very bright and a hard pressed finance minister might well be tempted to change course again, at least in relation to indirect taxes like excise and customs duties.

If falling tax revenue has been one problem, the performance of the public sector enterprises has been another. Most of them have consistently failed to generate a proper return on the Rs 30,000 crore invested in them by the Government. A Finance Ministry official points out that budgetary support for railway investment during the sixth plan was to have been Rs 2,200 crore, but that this had to be increased to Rs 4,400 crore because the railways did not make enough money to invest. And at the state level, a 1982 estimate says that the electricity boards, road transport corporations and industrial development corporations suffered a loss of Rs 2,200 crore. As a member of the Planning Commission said, "If large sums of public money keep getting invested in public sector units without any return, a crisis is bound to come."



Singh: looking for answers

The widespread raids launched last fortnight in Bombay on the office and residential premises of a number of businessmen were designed at least partly to try and raise some additional revenue during the current year. But such exercises are known to have limited effect, and Vishwanath Pratap Singh will have to look for more convincing solutions to the problem he faces.

Evasion is known to be a serious problem: Govinda Rao says that a study of the textile industry revealed that taxes evaded amounted to an astonishing 47 per cent of the taxes paid by the industry. And other estimates by fiscal experts suggest that the total tax evasion might be in the region of 20 per cent: around Rs 5,000 crore.

Any remedy on this front will have to be multi-pronged. For a start, the tax administration will have to be licked into shape, because even simplified income tax assessment procedures are followed in such a lax manner that the average tax realisation per assessee has been dropping sharply in places like Bombay and Delhi. On the excise front, the figures show that out of more than 1.2 lakh excisable units in the country, effective excise control is exercised on no more than 18,000, while thousands of small-scale units are left completely outside the excise pale.

The tax laws themselves deserve to be simplified for easier administration, and tax rates will have to be rationalised and lowered where necessary. For instance, the wealth tax, gift tax and estate duty together yield barely Rs 125 crore as revenue, but provoke the maximum amount of tax evasion.

An effective tax administration must also make penalties for evasion a perceptible threat. At the moment, as a tax expert said, "Honesty is taxed, and dishonesty is not penalised." Clearly, the solution to the entire problem lies in replacing high tax rates with moderate ones, but simultaneously transforming a lax and ineffective tax administration into a strict and watchful organisation.

This has been the task before the tax administration for a number of years. In the recent past, the Government has made a beginning on one front, but the results have been disappointing because there is as yet no action on the second front. When this changes, and if expenditure is brought under greater check than it has been so far, the Government's financial situation should begin to show some improvement.

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revise their opinions. Said one of the economists: "For a long time, the concept of development in India had nothing to do with goods for the consumer. We talked of steel and aluminium and power. But as income levels rise, you have to provide for more consumer goods, and this change has begun to take place."

Naturally, those consumers who have the money to spend are now happy. Indeed, the last few years have seen a veritable explosion in the number and range of consumer goods on offer to a rapidly growing clientele all the way up and down the income ladder. But many still make the valid point that it would be wrong for the Government to encourage untrammelled spending on consumer goods when half the population is still below the poverty line. Said an economist in the Planning Commission: "I would be in favour of a policy that persuaded the relatively better-off to restrain themselves and to keep in mind Gandhi's dictum that the rich should use their assets as trustees of the national wealth."

Ironically enough, the thrust towards liberalisation is despite the fact that the past measures aimed at opening up the economy have delivered somewhat questionable results. The progressive reduction of tax rates has not reduced tax evasion, as had been argued, and has in fact resulted in the Government finding its tax resources getting tight. Hanumantha Rao points out that Central taxes had totalled 11 per cent of the GDP in the late 1970s, but that this is now down to marginally more than 10 per cent.

Then, the permission to regularise production capacities in excess of the licensed limits has resulted in very little action (partly because of some continuing roadblocks), and the exclusion of production meant for exports has not produced the export boom that had clearly been hoped for. Numerous industrial units have not yet taken advantage of the permission to automatically expand capacities by 25 per cent every five years. And the schemes for setting up more free trade zones and for encouraging 100 per cent export-oriented units have still to get off the ground.

Most apologists for a more liberal industrial policy argue that this is because results don't come overnight, and because the steps taken so far are not yet a complete package. Isher Ahluwalia argues that "you can't expect too much from marginal adjustments. The liberalisations so far have only made a dent in the problem. And I don't expect quick results even now. These things take five years and more to show results."

It is also argued that even if the results so far are not quite what had been trumpeted, the reforms were inescapable anyway. When large areas of industry are obsolete and out-of-date, there is no escape from easing the restrictions on foreign technology tie-ups. The regulations governing industrial behaviour were clearly not achieving the desired results, so a change was unavoidable, besides which, Indian industry has been overregulated anyway, and far too much of the Government's energies have been spent in trying to say what companies can or cannot do, with little ultimate purpose or achievement. If anything, a lot of the policies are now clearly seen as having been counterproductive. As a top-rung official in the Planning Commission argued, "The new policies are in some ways an act of faith, but they are necessary. We could not have continued in our old way for much longer, because we were not getting anywhere."

"The Government must recognise the need for economies of scale and allow expansion to proper capacities."

VIRENCHEE SAGAR
managing director, Nirlon Synthetic Fibres and Chemicals

"We should be allowed to import technology freely if we are to improve our product and reduce costs."

ROHIT PATEL
managing director, Rohit Pulp and Paper Mills

But if the new thrust to economic policy is indeed an act of faith, several question marks must remain over their ultimate success in getting the economy moving further ahead at a faster pace. Indeed, some of the current buoyancy in both economic performance and mood must also be attributed to the succession of good harvests, while the five-year stability in international oil prices has also helped save money for other badly needed imports.

If these conditions change, if the weather gods turn unkind, if the fiscal crunch is not tackled, and if the new economic policies do not ultimately help deliver the goods, then the national mood could turn distinctly less buoyant, and the balloon could get pricked.

Right now, however, things certainly seem pretty hunky-dory. The growth rates have improved, prices are under control, there is relative peace among industrial labour, the economy is no longer plagued by shortages, new opportunities are being presented to industry, and the enormous agricultural potential of eastern Uttar Pradesh has begun to get tapped.

The fundamental transformation has in any case been made by a country that was once viewed as an international basket-case and which is now viewed by most international businessmen as a place of economic and industrial opportunity. That is not a small achievement. Even if it is by no means a complete achievement, it has at the moment given the economy a sense of confidence about itself as it gets ready for a new set of policies designed to chart a course through new waters.

—T.N.NINAN

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WEST BENGAL

Deep in the Red

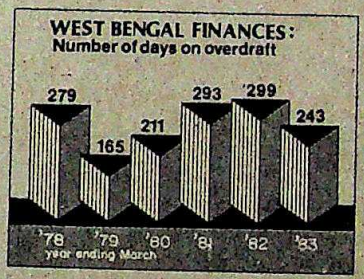
THE FINANCIAL situation of many state governments has become precarious in recent times, but the West Bengal case is in a class by itself, and should serve as a warning to other states of the danger of economic stagnation if financial prudence is thrown to the winds. The discontent of the people of Bengal with the Left Front Government is linked to its disastrous financial record.

To start with, what are the facts? The 1984-85 financial year is drawing to a close, but the state's annual plan is yet to be finalised. In the first four years of the Sixth Five-Year Plan, the state has been able to spend only Rs 1,791 crore out of its total plan allocation of Rs 3,500 crore. Out of its expenditure so far, the state Government's contribution has been only Rs 152 crore, with the rest of the money coming from the Centre, from market borrowings and from Reserve Bank overdrafts. Perhaps West Bengal is the only state whose contribution towards plan expenditure is totally insignificant. And by the end of March, when the Sixth Five-Year Plan ends, it will be the only state in the country that failed to spend close to 40 per cent of its plan outlay. As a matter of fact, out of the Rs 2,200 crore that the state Government is likely to spend over the five-year period, about Rs 2,000 crore will have been provided by the Central Government. The state Government was supposed to contribute Rs 2,177.99 crore to its sixth plan, but in actual fact it will contribute less than one-tenth of that.

In the current year, for instance, the Left Front Government insisted on an annual plan of Rs 758 crore. But the state's own resources were no more than Rs 148 crore. As regards Central assistance, since almost all the assistance allocated for the sixth plan has already been used up, only a balance of Rs 43 crore is left for the closing year of the plan. The state's share in government loans is Rs 163 crore. So the truth is that there is money for an annual plan of only Rs 354 crore.

Even this is an unduly optimistic figure, because in none of the past years has the state Government been able to contribute as much as Rs 148 crore to the annual plan. In some years, the state Government has contributed nothing at all to plan investment. Thus, in 1981-82, the actual plan expenditure was Rs 454 crore, and the state's contribution (after making an allowance for overdrafts from the Reserve Bank) was minus Rs 3.92 crore. The following year, while the actual plan expenditure was Rs 437 crore, the state's contribution was again negative, minus Rs 49.45 crore. And in the year after that, the state was able to make a positive contribution to plan spending only because the Centre gave a Rs 73.72-crore medium term loan. So in the last three years, the state Government has contributed nothing to its plan expenditure. So in these three years, if it were not for assistance from the Centre and for overdrafts from the Reserve Bank, the state would have had no annual plan at all.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



When the Sixth Plan ends, West Bengal will be the only state that failed to spend close to 40 per cent of its plan outlay. Despite this, the state has been on overdraft for an average of 200 days a year since 1977-78.

How did such a situation come about? At the risk of boring the reader, some more statistics are necessary. In 1971-72, when the Congress came back to power after a period of Left rule in West Bengal, plan expenditure was 9.68 per cent of the state Government's total expenditure. By 1976-77, which was the last full year of Congress(I) rule in the state, this figure had been raised to a very creditable 21.89 per cent. But since then, it has been a steady downhill road under Left Front rule. And in 1982-83, which is the latest year for which there are statistics, plan expenditure accounted for only 13.51 per cent of state government spending. This kind of decline can only be because the Left Front Government sees no distinction between plan and non-plan expenditure, and they have a different set of priorities.

There is a third way of showing the state's financial indiscipline. West Bengal has been on overdraft since 1977-78 on an average of 200 days a year, ranging from 165 days in 1978-79 to 299 days in 1981-82. Although the exact figures are not available for 1984-85, the picture will not be different from the earlier years. While it is true that many states have been on overdraft for a large number of days, there is no state which has been on overdraft in every year consistently for so many days. In fact, when the sixth plan funding arrangements were finalised, it was assumed that the state would not resort to overdrafts at all to finance the plan, or to bridge the gap in its revenue receipts.

The Left Front Government has repeatedly argued that all the problems it faces is because of the non-implementation of the recommendations of the Eighth Finance Commission. But the first four years of the sixth plan were covered by the Seventh Finance Commission, and the state Government received all the money it was entitled to in those years.

Also, all the states are governed by the same constitutional arrangements, the Gadgil formula for distributing money and other modes of transferring resources. There is no question of any discrimination to West Bengal. The real answer to the state's financial woes lies in the attitude of the state Government. Thus, the salary bill of the state Government has climbed from Rs 244 crore in 1976-77 to Rs 790 crore in 1983-84. And despite the fact that the state Government has been able to exceed its target of additional resource mobilisation, the erosion of its resource base is estimated at Rs 1,300 crore over the five-year period. The state which has the fifth highest per capita income in the country (Rs 1,267) should have been able to do better. The simple truth cannot be evaded. What has happened to the West Bengal economy is largely self-made. It can still be revived if corrective steps are taken. But is this going to be done?

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A.R. ANTULAY

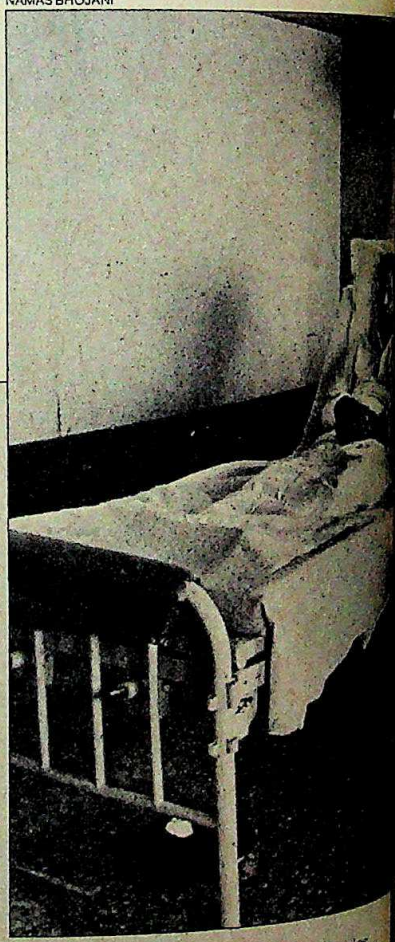
Awaiting Judgement Day

ABDUL Rehman Antulay, former Maharashtra chief minister, arraigned for over three years for alleged corruption and other criminal offences, will most probably hear the judicial pronouncement on him lying in bed in his cabin on the tenth floor of Bombay Hospital. He suffered a cardiac arrest on January 8, and was rushed to the intensive care unit where he lay for 25 days. A week before that, he and his fledgling Bharatiya Congress, comprising rebels from the Congress(I), were badly mauled in the Lok Sabha polls. And now, as his trial enters the closing chapters in the court of Justice Dinshaw Mehta at room No. 13 on the ground floor of the greystone Bombay High Court building, there are all signs of the one-time 'sultan' of Bombay running up against a solid and impregnable wall.

Justice Mehta will pronounce his judgement this fortnight on a complaint filed by Ramdas Nayak, a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which said that the former chief minister had indulged in cheating, bribery, extortion and corruption during his term in office between June 1980 and January 1982. The crux of the complaint is that Antulay had passed off his five personal trusts as government trusts and then collected donations for them from the public in consideration of distributing official largesses, such as cement, enhanced quota of industrial alcohol, and permissions to build and transact in real estate. An adverse judgement could mean fines and a maximum punishment of up to seven years imprisonment, though the road of appeal to the Supreme Court would still be open to both the parties. As a senior counsel of the high court said: "We've come close to a turning point in judicial history. No matter what the judge finally says, it'll be the first pronouncement by the judiciary on the honesty of a public servant following a complaint made not by the state but by a member of the public."

Though Nayak is the main complainant in the case, it is his senior counsel, Ram Jethmalani, a former MP of the BJP and the country's ace criminal lawyer, who has stolen the show as Antulays' star adversary. Jethmalani dug his teeth into

NAMAS BHOJANI



A.R. ANTULAY

"I shall live on and fight on"

THE ATMOSPHERE on the 10th floor of Bombay Hospital is a curious blend of incapacitation and political flurry. For all practical purposes, it is from here that Abdul Rehman Antulay, 56, is fighting his battles, all of them—medical, legal and political. Sadly though, each front is in the throes of crisis. Antulay's doctors are worried over the condition of his heart which, they say, has been rapidly deteriorating since early this year. They advise a diagnostic check-up, followed, if necessary, by bypass surgery in the US in April. The other piece of advice, given tacitly, is to bid goodbye to politics. Although the second is endorsed by wife Nargis, her husband would rather die than give up politics.

Workers of Antulay's Bharatiya Congress Party throng the hospital every morning, led by Bhaurao Patil, party general secretary and member of the outgoing assembly. With the former chief minister out of action in the assembly poll campaign, audio and video cassettes of his speeches are made in this hospital room, for use at rallies. Outside, at the door, his lawyers wait patiently—they are the least welcome because they rarely bring news to cheer. And in the changed circumstances, son-in-law Mushtaq has taken charge of the long evening consultations which take place in the Antulay home, Al Sabah Court.

Still, Antulay has his wits about him and flaunts his two best-known assets—a toothy smile and irrepressible bluster—as he tries to rally the minorities round in the light of his party's alliance with the Samyukta Republican Party, which is dominated by the Scheduled Castes, and a splinter group of the Dalit Panthers and the new Dalit Muslim Minorities Suraksha Mahasangh floated by the controversial Haji Mastan. Last fortnight, warned by his doctor to "talk slowly and without emotion", Antulay spoke to Principal Correspondent SUMIT MITRA. *Excerpts:*

On his future line of legal defence:

I don't know. I believe in the ultimate court, which is God's. God knows I've not committed anything wrong. I've taken money in cheques from those who are rich for the uplift of the poor. I have not misspent a single paisa from that. I did it because it was my conviction that the rich should pay for being rich, and the poor should get paid for being poor. I don't wish to give it any label, but this is my faith. My enemies are seeking a judicial verdict on this faith.

On Rajiv Gandhi:

After Sanjay's death, I, as the chief minister of Maharashtra, was the first high-ranking politician in the country to announce that Rajiv should be brought in as leader. I met him immediately after that and told him that he should contest from Amethi and not from Allahabad. Yet Rajiv opposed me. You may be surprised to know that Rajiv

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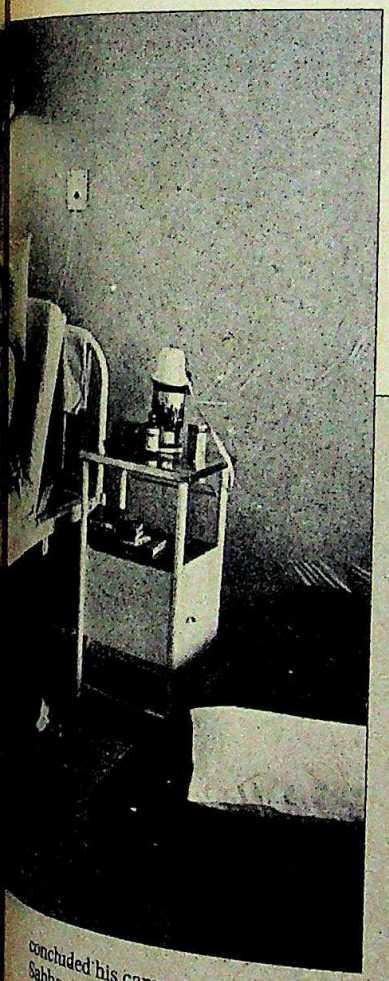
the case as early as September 1981—shortly after the media disclosures of Antulay's trust scandals—when he took up Nayak's brief on the criminal complaint simultaneously with the civil suit filed by Mrinal Gore, P.B. Sawant and others. While Ashok Desai, another luminary of the Bombay bar, who was the counsel for Gore, was finally able to argue the case successfully, leading to Justice Lentin pronouncing that there was indeed a 'nexus' between the donations and the largesses, Jethmalani plodded along a more circuitous way to put Antulay in the dock for trial in the criminal case.

Antulay in his hospital room: back to the wall



Jethmalani, and his suave, Oxford-educated son, Mahesh, have for the past few months slogged 14 hours a day on the case, returning all other briefs in dozens. Stacks of the files and papers related to the Antulay case have piled up on virtually every square-inch of available space in their Nariman Point office. Though they have argued the case entirely free of cost, so high has been the public interest in it that donations amounting to nearly Rs 75,000 have come along to Nayak to meet the incidental expenses, often from anonymous contributors and in denominations as small as five rupees. Said an exhausted but unfazed Jethmalani: "I've given my life's best in this case. I sink or swim with it."

Antulay, on the other hand, had mostly reverses coming his way. His worries are hidden adroitly behind a screen of bluster. "By God's grace, I shall win the case and prove that I'm the cleanest politician to take on Mr Clean," he says, archly referring to Rajiv Gandhi with his customary self-righteousness. But the die is clearly cast against him.

And Jethmalani feels he is getting closer to his quarry whom he has stalked all these years. He first ripped through Antulay's defence in 1982 when the Supreme Court upheld a high court judgement that the Maharashtra governor could sanction Antulay's trial without consulting the state cabinet, many of whose members were Antulay's cronies. Thereafter, Antulay's second line of defence also came down crumbling: it was that being an MLA, he was a public servant, and therefore he could be tried only with the sanction of his 'appointing authority', the speaker of the Assembly. The Supreme Court bluntly stated that an MLA was no public servant. Thus Antulay was up for trial by a special judge of Bombay High Court, on criminal charges, like any other ordinary accused.

Though the trial still has a long way to go—even if the charges are ordered to be

concluded his campaign before the Lok Sabha at my constituency. He said that some people had tried to raise funds by misusing his mother's name, and that they should be defeated. It was a call to defeat me. But what happened? Two days later, the candidate of his own party, the Congress(I), got such a drubbing at the hands of the electorate that he lost his deposit. True, I was defeated. But I managed to get 118,000 votes—only 34,000 votes less than the PWP candidate who won. But the Congress(I) candidate became one of the few in the country who lost their deposits.

On his legal expenses:

I can't tell you how much I've spent on my cases. This isn't a fair question. But I must tell you that I have proof that the Congress(I) bore the entire expense till I resigned from the party in mid-November last year. And Rajiv knew about it. It was in his presence on a number of occasions that M.L. Fotedar (the prime minister's political aide) handed out money to me.

By the grace of God, I shall live on, and fight on. I'm better placed than the Opposition. I shall prove that I'm the cleanest politician to take on 'Mr Clean'.

On Indira Gandhi:

She had a lot of affection for me. I met her first when I was a student in England and she had come there with her father in 1953, for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, and stayed at Claridge's. I at once pledged my loyalty to her. Four years later, in 1957, when I was elected member of the AICC, I wrote to U.N. Dhebar, the then AICC president, that he should quit to make way for younger people like Indira Gandhi. As in Rajiv's case, I was the first to start the 'draft Indira' campaign too. As you know, she did become AICC president in 1959. She always had a soft corner for me, though I can't say she very much appreciated it when Sanjay wanted me chief minister of Maharashtra in 1980. She had other nominees in mind. But Sanjay had his way. Again, in December 1981, Mrs Gandhi remarked about my continuing in office that everything depended on the "outcome of the case". As you'll remember, Justice Lentin's judgement came in January 1982. On that day, Sanjiva Reddy, the President of India, was in Bombay and he invited me to a hockey match. I declined because I knew the judgement (on the civil case) would come that day. It came at 2:30 and I resigned at 4 p.m. even though 211 of the 234 Congress(I) MLA's requested me not to submit my resignation.

On his future plans:

Maybe this bypass surgery will give me a new lease of life. By the grace of God, I shall live on, and fight on. I'm better placed than the Opposition. I shall prove that I'm the cleanest politician to take on 'Mr Clean'.

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framed, Antulay will have a right to cross-examine the witnesses all over again—the case has altered his quick, electric personality. He now needs the support of a wall to shuffle up to the telephone, barely a few yards away from his bed. A connoisseur of sumptuous biryanis, he eats two frugal meals a day. There is a reiterative reference to 'God's court', as if the court on this side has already delivered its judgement. And, bereft of an inner will to battle on, his familiar smile, often found sinister by many, looks pathetically vacuous now.

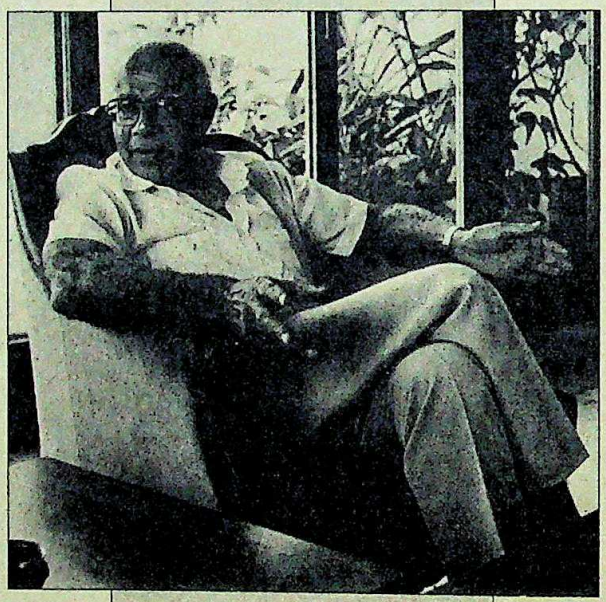
The case, numbered Special Case 24 of 1982, was transferred for trial from the Supreme Court last year by the order of a five-judge bench. Since April last year, it has been heard for well over 80 days, involving 53 witnesses, and has hogged media space like no other case in recent times. The essence of the complaint is that Antulay is guilty of having conceived a scheme of aggrandisement involving obtaining of funds from the public and then putting the funds substantially under his control. In the process, he is alleged to have committed offences of:

- cheating, under Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for having 'dishonestly induced' builders, sugar cooperatives capable of manufacturing industrial and potable alcohol, and property owners in making large contributions to the trusts;
- extortion, under Section 384 of IPC, for having intentionally put the makers of alcohol in fear of losing business by imposing cuts on their licensed quota in order to secure donations from them;
- bribery, under Section 161 and 165 of IPC, for having accepted illegal gratification by way of the donations in spite of being a public servant; and
- corruption, being a public servant, as defined in Section 5 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947.

The first major break in the ding-dong legal battle, however, came in the civil case when Justice Lentin of the Bombay High Court stayed the operation of the trusts' accounts in January 1982 and held that there was a quid pro quo involved in the donations made to them and favours shown to the donors. Antulay, who was at a meeting when the judgement came, drove straight to his residence, called a press conference, and announced his decision to resign.

But he was still able to block criminal proceedings on the ground that no chief minister could be tried without the governor's sanction for offences allegedly committed during his tenure in office. It took Jethmalani six months, and two appeals, to get an order out of Supreme Court that the governor could indeed sanction such trial on his own, without consulting the cabinet, that is. The judgement came on July 27, 1982, and the Governor, I.H. Latif, gave his sanction the next day.

HEMANT PITHWA



"I've given my life's best in this case. I sink or swim with it."

RAM JETHMALANI

But Antulay's trial before a special judge again got interrupted by a shrewd defence argument that the assembly speaker's sanction was also necessary. After the Supreme Court also waved it aside, Justice S.N. Khatri was appointed trial judge and the trial began in right earnest in April 1984. In August, Justice Khatri resigned voluntarily following some charges levelled at him by the prosecution, and Justice Mehta stepped in.

The striking feature of the trial is that it combines the hearings with an ongoing investigation. Antulay had indeed been indicted by the press through a series of investigative reports long before the case went to court. But the press focussed on circumstantial evidence which strongly, but obviously not conclusively, suggested that there was a link between the donations received by Antulay for the trusts and the favours shown to the donors by his government. The thesis had to be proved in court, and what the prosecution needed were nuggets of solid documentary facts, which they could come by only if the state machinery did not stand in the way.

Ironically, the case reached its final crescendo soon after Mrs Gandhi's death on October 31 last year, when a number of state government officials, as though reassured by the fact that there would be no retribution for them if they came up with evidence, began coming forward as witnesses for the prosecution, providing crucial testimony, explaining various anomalies in the documents already placed before the court, and throwing new light on the bizarre working of the state Government under the controversial chief minister.

The most prominent among these witnesses were V.T. Chari and Vijay Singh, former secretaries in the department of food and civil supplies; L.S. Lulla, a former Maharashtra chief secretary who had officiated as officer-on-special duty (OSD) in Antulay's secretariat; additional chief secretary B.K. Halwe; D.V. Ekbote, a superintendent in the food and civil supplies department. Except Lulla, all of them are in government service now and it is the opinion of lawyers—without meaning any prejudice to the integrity of the witnesses—that the officials would have been "inhibited" had Vasantdada Patil, the Maharashtra chief minister and Antulay's staunch foe in the field of politics, not taken such a tough stand with regard to him.

"Who am I to encourage or discourage court witnesses?" Patil asked INDIA TODAY. But the officials in his government, one and all, sang in unison against Antulay at the court, levelling charges such as:

- the written recommendations of Antulay for release of cement to builders who had donated money to his trusts were not recommendations but "orders

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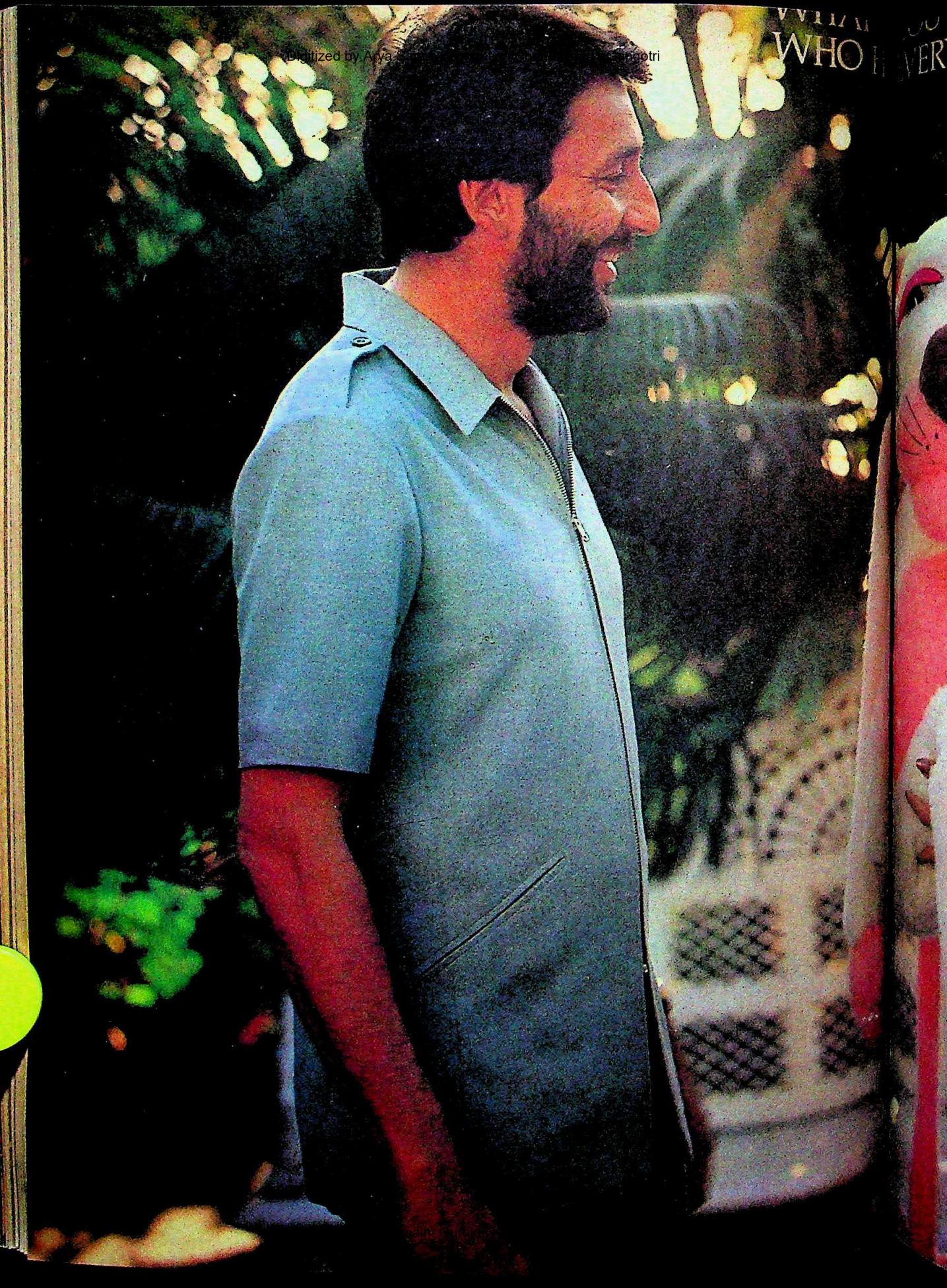

Adv. Prof. Kumar Gurukul

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to be given effect to";

▸ Pesi D. Tata, Antulay's friend who died in 1982, was actually the link between him and the businessmen who benefited from ad hoc allotments of cement and alcohol quota;

▸ that Antulay attempted to substitute official notes containing references to Pesi Tata by other notes, "less embarrassing to the Government", but also carrying his signature; and,

▸ that he indulged in overwriting on government files as the hearing on the earlier civil case began in September 1981, while he was still in office.

Also revealing are the depositions of builders, shopowners, manufacturers of industrial and potable alcohol and other private citizens who pointed accusing fingers at Antulay. Examples:

▸ Rajan and Deepak Raheja of Rajdeep Raheja Constructions said Pesi Tata had approached them with the offer of cement against a donation of Rs 40 per bag to the trusts;

▸ Mahesh Sadarangani of the K. Raheja group said that his company got 1,654 metric tonnes of cement after donating Rs 8,82,000 to Konkan Unnati Mitra Mandal, one of the trusts floated by Antulay;

▸ Lalchand Rohra, Mukesh Dadiani and Ramesh Merchant of Nanubhai testified that they had donated Rs 8 lakh to the Indira Gandhi Pratibha Pratisthan (IGPP) in exchange for a no objection certificate (NOC) from Antulay to sub-let its premises to the Indo-Suez Bank at a rent of Rs 1.2 lakh per month. Merchant, who had once been Antulay's tailor, deposed that he negotiated the price with Antulay himself at *Varsha*, the chief minister's official residence in the Malabar Hills area, where Antulay demanded Rs 10 lakh but it was bargained down to Rs 8 lakh; and

▸ Anilkumar S. Ruia, joint managing director of Kolhapur Sugar Mills, disclosed that his three companies paid Rs 4.25 lakh as donation to the Konkan Unnati Mitra Mandal in consideration of restoring cuts in their allotment of industrial alcohol, the figure being arrived at on the basis of "25 paise per bulk litre".

As against the impressive list of witnesses coming forward to depose against Antulay, those whose testimonies are regarded by the prosecution as "hostile" are very few: only Ajit Kerkar, managing director of India Hotel Company which owns the Taj group, and two builders, Niranjan Hiranandani and Mahendra Gala. Both Hiranandani and Gala, who had obtained cement from Antulay's ad hoc quota and had also donated to his trusts, said the two had no interrelation, which negates the crux of the prosecution argument. And Kerkar, who was himself a trustee on the IGPP, in addition to denying the suggestion of any quid pro quo, said that the Taj group had deposited Rs 1 crore with the Sethia Foundation Trust, yet another of Antulay's creations, not for any permission to build another Taj hotel on the premises of the National Council of Performing Arts (NCPA) at the prestigious Nariman Point but to ensure that the Taj employees, many of whom came from the Konkan area where the Sethia Trust proposed to set up a hospital, got medical facilities.

> **"There is very little hope left for Antulay really. All his braggadocio and rhetoric come from an illusion of power to which politicians often fall victim..."**
>
> ASHOK DESAI,
> *eminent lawyer*

Antulay's two young counsels, Nitin Pradhan and Vidyasagar Kanade, exuding the never-say-die spirit, think there are yet some "bright silver linings" on the dark clouds created over the case by "adverse media reportings on the trial". According to Pradhan, the versions put out by Kerkar and the two other builders corroborate the defence contention that there was indeed no "nexus" between the donations and the official favours. He also thinks it involves stretching the Evidence Act "a bit too far" to prosecute his client largely on the basis of words and deeds of Tata, "a man dead and gone long ago".

But Mahesh Jethmalani thinks he and his father have an "air-tight case". Says Ashok Desai: "There is very little hope left for Antulay really. All his braggadocio and rhetoric come from an illusion of power to which politicians often fall victim. It is ironic that even Antulay, who has a background in law, left his hoof marks all over on the files while taking decisions for which he was fit to be hauled over coals." Desai should know, because he and Antulay did their bar-at-law in London together.

The present trial of Antulay defies all set categorisation because it is indeed difficult to say where prosecution begins and investigation ends. But, as the hearings end this fortnight, the judge may either dismiss the complaint, thus giving Antulay a clean chit, or ask the charges to be framed, which means admission of a prima facie case against him. That will leave Antulay with another opportunity to cross-examine the witnesses, and prove his innocence. But an order to frame the charges, if given, is a development serious enough because it will definitely amount to adverse judicial pronouncement on the former chief minister in a criminal case.

Though the court holds the key to Antulay's survival, it is by sheer force of habit that he is seeking election again in the assembly election from the Sriwardhan constituency in coastal Maharashtra. He may win simply because he led his nearest rival in the assembly segment by nearly 18,000 votes in the Lok Sabha elections. But full five fathoms deep lie his chances of getting immunity from law again as an MLA in view of the earlier Supreme Court judgement.

Nor is there any hope that the Congress(I) leadership will extend its protective wing to him. Said Vasantdada Patil: "I really don't know by what accident this Antulay became the chief minister of Maharashtra. His chief ministership was a disgraceful chapter anyway."

Still, more than merely deciding the fate of Antulay, the clawing legal battle has derived its uniqueness from its unparalleled feature of combining trial with investigation. Witnesses have been called out not only to corroborate charges but to disclose new facts and unleash new evidence against the accused. "What can I do," asks Jethmalani, "when the law does not permit me to seize documents firsthand and to get at the concrete facts?" The trial has also redefined the level of public servants' immunity against law, and has broadened the scope and meaning of the word 'corruption' to include in its sweep even professedly altruistic exercises.

But, above all, and irrespective of Justice Mehta's final word on the case, it has shown the extent to which the court can go on doggedly pursuing a complaint when all other institutions of democracy seemed to have got stymied with fear and suspicion and the people had begun entertaining doubts about the fairness of the executive. The implications of the case have at last far surpassed Antulay, the man.

—SUMIT MITRA in Bombay

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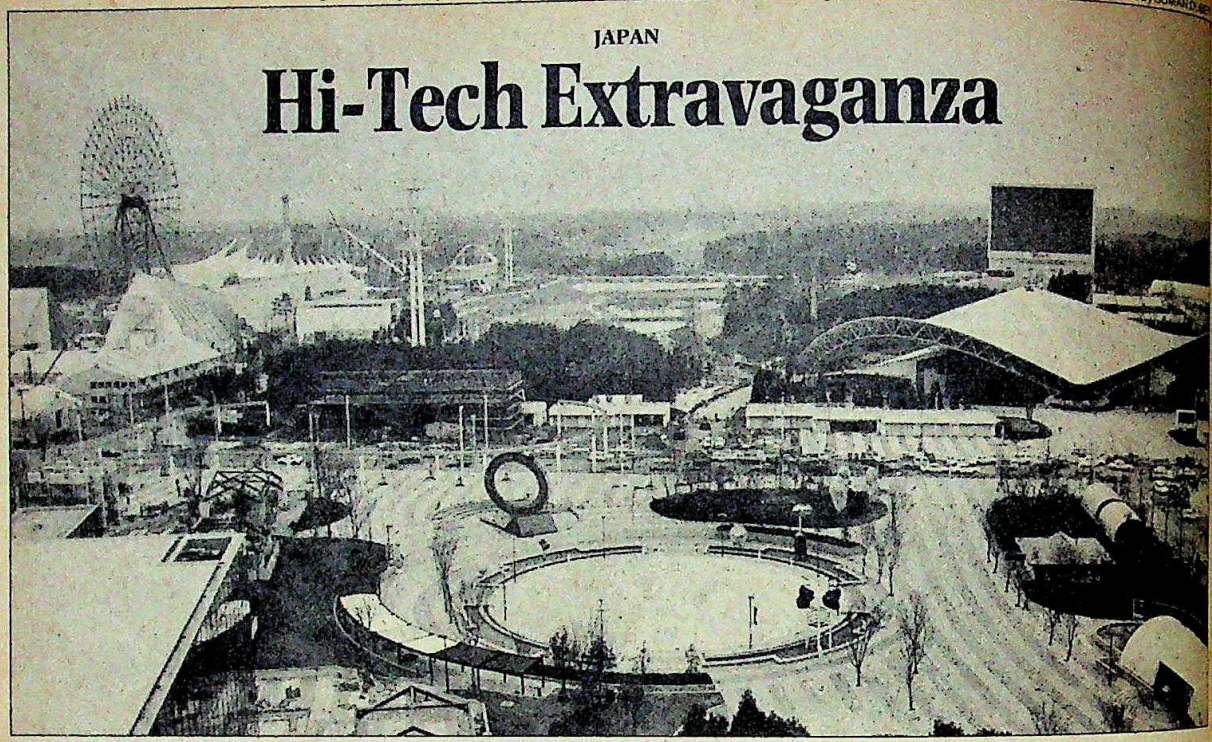
Photographs by SUMAN DUBE

JAPAN

Hi-Tech Extravaganza



Bird's eye view of Tsukuba Expo '85: glimpse of the future

WELCOME to the 21st century! Here are two robots doing an elaborate courtship dance, the lady robot playing typically hard to get till just before the proverbial happy ending. There's another gazing at someone's face and sketching a surprising likeness on a sheet of paper. A fourth robot, named Fanuc Man, picks up a set of dumb-bells weighing 200 kg and raises them like a medal-winning weight-lifter.

A computer makes a film of a voyage through a crystal of ice. Another simultaneously translates a document in four languages. A train magnetically levitates a centimetre above a pair of rails and, with no friction to slow it down, glides off towards its destination. Looming large over it all is a 40 by 25 metre television screen, a camera mounted on top which homes in on a viewer standing 200 metres away and projects his face 10 metres high.

The 21st century? Well, perhaps not quite but Japan's newest extravaganza, Expo'85 which opens mid-March for six months at Tsukuba near Tokyo, promises to give a tantalising glimpse of what's in store in the next century now a mere 15 years away. The theme is ideally suited to high-tech Japan: Science and Technology for Man at Home. And even though the foreign pavilions (which understandably do not include an Indian exhibit) far outnumber the Japanese, it is the Japanese who will steal the show.

Nobody is likely to grudge them that. They are the hosts and will, by the end of it all, have spent something like 645 billion yen (Rs 3,250 crore) to make the show a success. If past performance is anything to go by, a success it most certainly will be. The last Japanese Expo—at Osaka in 1970 which had an Indian pavilion—attracted 40 million visitors, 40 per cent above target.

The target for Tsukuba is 20 million visitors but Expo'85 Secretary General Yoshinori Ihara says: "We've really become even more ambitious, and we expect even more will come." The organisers also expect that half of all visitors to Tsukuba will be younger than 20 years. Why? Because today's children are the first generation of the 21st century. "We need to give dreams to the young," says the designer of the robot dance.

The dreams will, of course, be based on hard scientific reality. The dancing robots, for instance, aren't toys: they operate on complex systems which permit two robots to communicate with each other independently of human beings. The robotic artist may not be a fifth generation thinking computer for which the Japanese are going hell for leather, but it does demonstrate the immense possibilities of giving robots "visual" capabilities. Fanuc Man is really no weight-lifting novice: existing industrial computers can't manage more than 10 kg per arm.

The levitating train, a prototype which has yet to be given the go-ahead for commercial development, is Japan's answer to the energy crisis and urban congestion. The 66 km journey from Tokyo's Narita Airport to the city centre is at least an hour and Rs 750 by taxi; the High Speed Surface Transport (HSST) would cut travel time to 15 minutes and the fare to a fraction. More significantly, since it is propelled by linear induction motors and doesn't have wheels or any other parts in physical contact, the ride is incredibly smooth. The HSST can travel at 500 kmph, as fast as the swiftest cruising propeller driven planes, but its designers say that at that speed it encounters difficult aerodynamic problems, and the ideal speed of a train of eight carriages each carrying 100 to 120 passengers is 300 kmph. The Japanese, who pioneered the concept of the Shinkansen bullet trains are also working on a new kind of faster and energy saving intercity bullet train for the 21st century.

But scientific development isn't all so black and white, and there are some grey areas at Tsukuba as well, gadgetry that looks impressive but doesn't seem to have a ready application or, if it does, at what

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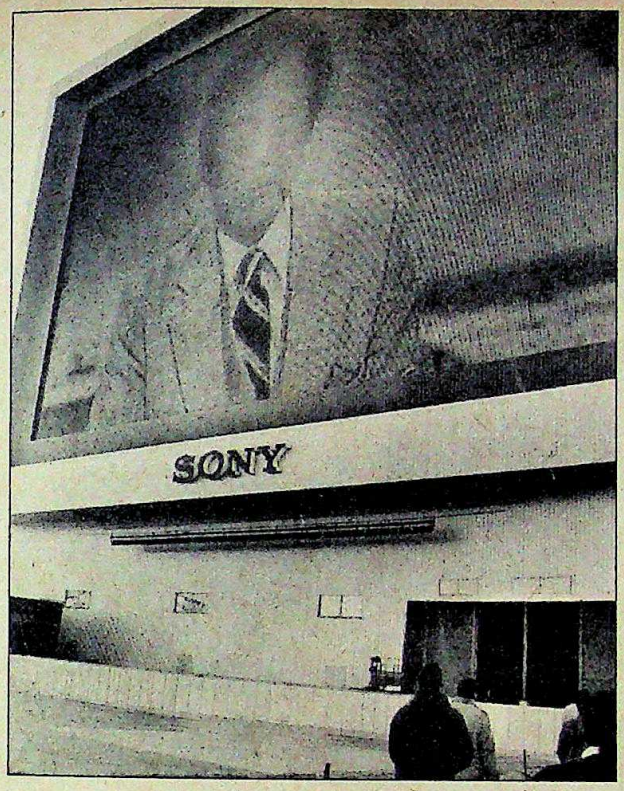
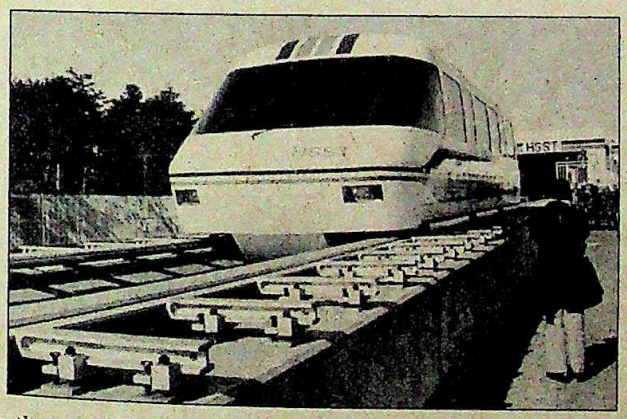
currently a prohibitive cost. There's an obvious use for a computer that can handle four languages at the same time and is programmed to weed out linguistic absurdities. But the one being used for this purpose at Tsukuba is reportedly the world's largest commercially produced unit and it's taken several very expensive months to programme. "We understand it graduated from high school recently," quipped the scientist responsible for its education, "and we are confident it will graduate from college by the time the exposition starts." The cost of tying down a machine of this kind for a year is prohibitive and it isn't at all clear that the effort is actually worth it.

A computer that can be programmed to create and visualise through computer graphics what the human eye can never hope to see—a crystal of ice from the inside or the fusion of hydrogen atoms—probably has practical applications in helping scientists understand certain processes or design hardware to cope with them. Its handiwork, molecules of water dancing on a giant hemispheric screen forming themselves into hexagonal ice crystals as the temperature drops, is breathtaking seen in 3-D through tinted glasses. But the computer has taken a year to make the film.

The giant television screen is another dubious merit. Sony, its makers, acknowledge that they haven't actually found a use for their jumbotron, as it is called, though the same principles could yield smaller screens for advertising purposes. But the jumbotron is slated for the trash can: it is too big to store and too expensive to move. And though several tens of crore rupees have been spent on making it, come September, the screen will simply be torn down.

So will all the pavilions, all the buildings, the 250-acre site, the amusement park with the world's tallest Ferris wheel—85 metres tall ("because it is Expo '85"). If that seems a bit of a waste, nobody is shedding any tears over it in Tsukuba, for by the time the Expo is over, it will have served its other major objective directing attention to what Tsukuba really is, a self-contained science city like





A giant TV screen and (below) a prototype high-speed surface vehicle

which there is only one other, in the Soviet Union.

Expo officials are prone to admit that it all boils down to a massive promotion job for Tsukuba Science City. Tsukuba, like Chandigarh, was built from green fields to be a sort of science capital of Japan. The first land was bought in 1969 and the first research institute opened its doors in 1972. Since then another 45 government-funded research institutes and two universities have shifted to the city whose population is now 143,000.

Among them are national centres for a whole range of the sciences, construction research institutes including one for disaster prevention, engineering institutes, environment research centres, biological and agricultural research. It hasn't come cheap: the Government has poured in 1.2 trillion yen (Rs 6,000 crore) and it now feels that it was time that the Japanese private sector started picking up the tab.

More than half the spending on Expo'85 has been aimed at bringing the city closer to Tokyo. A new 400 billion yen (Rs 2,000 crore) expressway, which must be the most expensive road in the world with its high steel baffles on either side to protect the surrounding areas from the noise of the traffic, cuts city centre travel time to just an hour. New hotels built for Expo'85 will now cater to Science City visitors. And, above all, the Expo grounds will form the nucleus of an industrial estate to give the private sector what it needs: factories to give birth to industrial R & D.

But a more serious question is worrying some Japanese who have leaped from ruin to riches in the space of just four decades, and now lead the world not only in industry and business, but in several fields of technology. For, as Tsukuba's Director of Planning, Hideo Nakanishi says: "For us to create a good 21st century, we have to ask ourselves questions about science and technology." What kind of questions? Is the heady pursuit of technological excellence not creating a rootless society? Is Japan, which is so conformist in its personal relationships and has such a highly developed sense of harmony in its patterns of life, in danger of cutting itself off from its traditions?

No visitor to Japan can fail to notice the physical absence of the ancient Japan. There are museums and art collections, yes, but apart from Kyoto and Nara, and areas like the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, Japan is almost wholly post-War, a country rebuilt from the most widespread destruction that any nation has experienced. The concern for traditions is understandable, given this past, but perhaps the destruction also explains why Japan's adaptation to the world of science and technology has been so remarkable and why it is so appropriate that if there had to be a science and technology exposition, it should be held in Japan.

—SUMAN DUBEY in Tsukuba

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SRI LANKA

PARADISE LOST

"IN SRI LANKA one learns to expect the unexpected" is the catchy advertising slogan emblazoned across the Indian Ocean island's glossy tourist brochures. A better example of tongue-in-cheek copywriting would be difficult to find. The sad and inescapable truth is that the slogan applies more to the island's currently irascible population of 15 million than it does to the dismayingly dwindling number of tourists, baulked by the Frankenstein-like dimensions of Sri Lanka's rapidly escalating ethnic strife.

Tourism is merely the most visible victim of the unfolding tragedy. In the past three years, the battle between the Government's trigger-happy security forces and obdurate Tamil separatists, though largely confined to the north-east, has gouged deep and painfully permanent scars across the island's once-idyllic socio-economic face, in physical as well as psychological terms. To assess the overall impact of the trauma, largely overlooked by the media so far, Associate Editor DILIP BOBB *talked to a wide cross-section of Sinhalese society including businessmen, top-rung professionals, politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats and ordinary people during a visit to the island last fortnight. His report:*

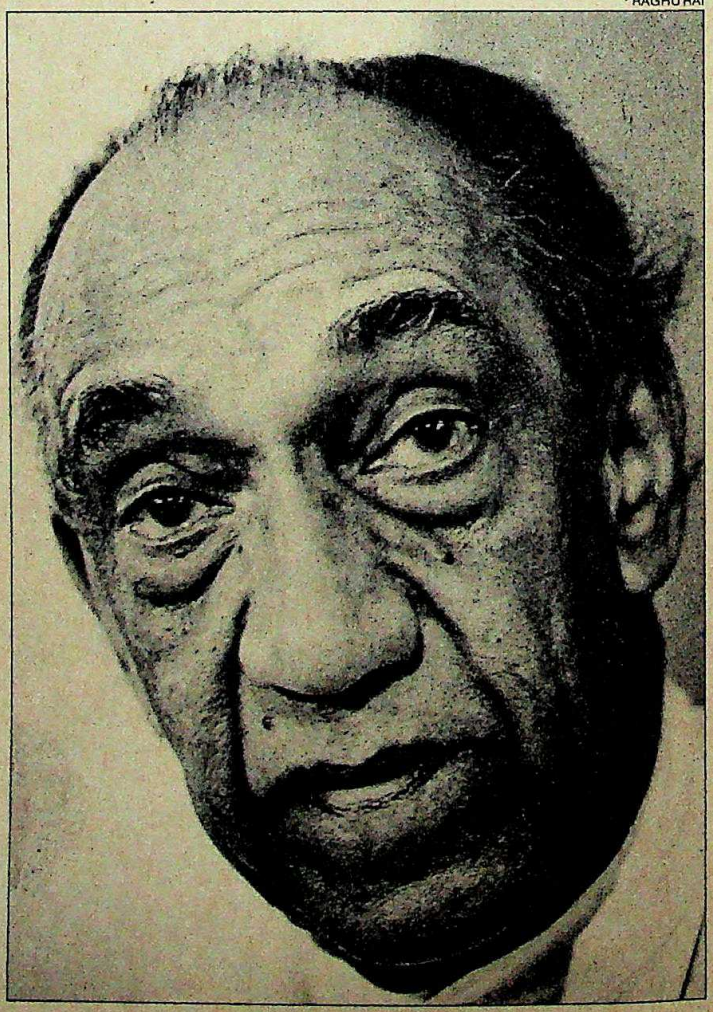
AT TIMES, he resembles a professional mourner or even an undertaker with his perpetually melancholic mien and severe raiment. Add a sinister-looking cowl and he could be straight out of the Inquisition, an image reinforced by the priest-like robes he favours. Even his smile is slow and sad, forming new and enigmatic patterns in the deep wrinkles on his elongated face. He had made the acronym 'JR' famous long before the American soap opera, *Dallas*, gave it dubious immortality.

The symbolism is, if anything, increasingly sepulchral. At an age when most politicians are haltingly dictating their memoirs, Junius Richard Jayewardene, 78, is quite literally, riding a tiger into an unknown sunset. Eight years ago, when he first wrested power from his arch-rival Sirimavo Bandaranaike, he boldly steered Sri Lanka onto a tack intended to transport the 25,000 square mile island to a modern-day Garden of Eden. Proclaiming, *sotto voce*, the war cry "Let the robber barons come", Jayewardene joyfully jettisoned Bandaranaike's "era of controls, ration cards and queues" and instead put Sri Lanka firmly on an open, free market highway modelled on some of the more prosperous and western-oriented, South-East Asian economies.

Today, his dreams seem as mockingly empty as the hotels strung out like modern museum pieces on Colombo's Galle Face Esplanade, the stretch of prime real estate made immortal by writers like Somerset Maugham. The latest five-star showpiece, the Meridian Galadari, had a total of 15 guests in the third week of December, normally the peak of the tourist season. Rooms originally priced at US $80 are currently negotiable at $30 or less and so cut-throat is the competition that the Meridian is now reduced to carefully noting birthdates on guests' passports and then sending them greeting cards anywhere in the world to try and lure them back. The venerable Galle Face Hotel, known for its olde worlde charm and its enviable sea front location, is the only hotel in Colombo that has stubbornly refused to slash prices. It has been averaging an occupancy rate of less than 5 per cent in the current tourist season and a ratio of about 20 employees to each guest. "Tourism is a very sensitive industry and it's been hit the hardest by the ethnic problem," says Ken Balendra, the affable managing director of Walker Tours, the leading tour operators in the island.

Jayewardene: caught in a cleft stick

RAGHU RAI



Just how hard is reflected somewhat in the latest statistics of the Ceylon Tourist Board. Tourist arrivals dropped by 17 per cent in 1983, the year when the July ethnic riots engulfed the island. In 1984, the figures registered a further drop of 5.9 per cent. Overall occupancy rate in graded hotels dropped to 35.9 per cent in 1983 and 1984 has been even worse. "Hotels are a disaster area," says Askar Moosajee, one of the biggest and best-known businessmen in the country, "you are losing money every minute."

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DILIP BOBB

Colombo's Galle Face hotel: deserted

Tourism is necessarily the most high-profile sign of the times but it also symbolizes the sudden and traumatic turnaround in almost every aspect of the island's economic life. The crunch has come just when the industry was poised on the crest of a boom and new hotels, including the impressive Taj Samudra and the neighbouring Oberoi Lanka, were just opening their gleaming glass doors. Room capacity in graded hotels had jumped by 17.4 per cent in 1983, the year when disaster dawned and occupancy rates plummeted. In an ironic twist of fate, Indians have now toppled the West Germans from their traditional spot as number one generators of tourist traffic to Sri Lanka for the second year running.

Outside Colombo, the smaller hotels are already reversing the high staff to client ratio by retrenching personnel with a resultant drop in standards and service. The hardest hit have been the handicraft and batik shops catering exclusively for the tourist trade, many of which have downed shutters or merely gone bust. Once the second largest foreign exchange earner, tourism has now dropped to fourth place after tea, foreign remittances and garments.

The Government, having enjoyed the fruits of the boom—an abnormally high 20 per cent business turnover tax on hotels and crippling electricity charges—has now been forced to hastily revise its policies. The turnover tax has been slashed to 5 per cent and other conscience-salving concessions introduced like rescheduling of debts and lowering of interest rates. But even that is a case of too little too late. All development plans for tourism have been put on the backburner and investment has come to a screeching halt. The future seems as bleak and forlorn as the weather-beaten Sheraton Hotel hoarding above an empty plot of prime land on Galle Road.

THAT depressing scenario is being duplicated much beyond the tasselled borders of the tourism industry and the shockwaves are just beginning to be heard and felt. "It's like playing Russian roulette", says Moosaji, "no expansion is taking place and people are just not prepared to commit any money on new investments. It's a very small island and any breakdown in communications and supply lines sends everything out of synch." Moosaji, a highly respected businessman with an extensive range of business interests, illustrates his point with a personal example. Ten months ago, he imported 500 tonnes of urad dal from India.The consignment was cleared in January, nine months later, when the interest alone has turned the venture into an unacceptable loss.

Moosaji typifies the dedicated breed of Sinhalese whose business savvy, honed by Harvard and other educational points West, have allowed them to strike it rich in Sri Lanka's relaxed, laid back and somewhat protective business ambience. They also have no qualms about showing it. His huge mansion in the heart of the city is artfully furnished with valuable antiques and the gleaming waters of the large swimming pool in the backyard offsets the quiet elegance of the cultured Muslim atmosphere. But the real ripples are below the surface. "I am trying to convince my son to set up something abroad. Opportunities here have now become severely limited," he says gloomily.

For Sri Lanka's fragile local business infrastructure, the crunch could not have come at a worse time. Not only have ethnic jitters stopped expansion and diversification plans, but, more serious, the internal structure of most large com-

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panies and business houses has experienced a major and debilitating upheaval. The root cause is the panicked exodus of a large and growing number of Tamils from Sri Lanka, specially after the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots that overnight left hundreds of Tamil businessmen and entrepreneurs bankrupt. According to official statistics, 122 industrial establishments suffered an estimated US $70 million worth of damage. Over 30 production units were totally destroyed and 15,000 manufacturing jobs were lost.

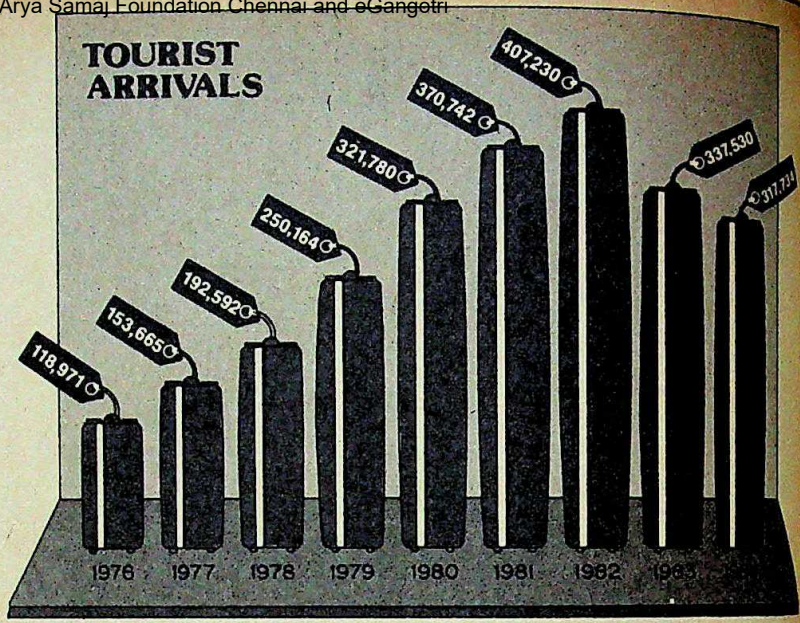
The negative results from that have been double-edged. The more widely-felt shock wave has been the sudden loss of what represented the backbone of Sri Lanka's business infrastructure—Tamil professionals. "It's been an accelerated brain drain," laments C.P. de Silva, chairman and managing director of Aitken Spence & Co, one of the largest business houses in the island.

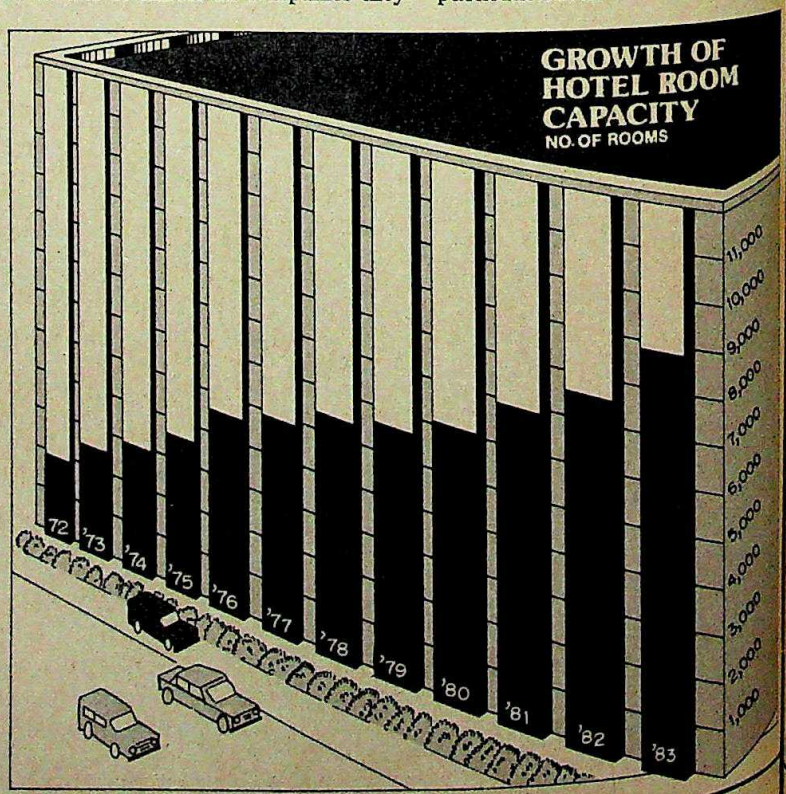
Tamils occupied the top rungs of the corporate ladder in numbers quite disproportionate to their 12 per cent share of the island's total population. More important, they were prominent in key sectors like accountancy and engineering as well as forming the bedrock of the clerical staff in almost all Sri Lankan companies, and their sudden departure has left many businesses in disarray. "The sudden dislocation of the staff has been traumatic. We have lost some excellent people who will be difficult to replace. It could be disastrous if the situation continues," says D.S. Jayasundera, chairman and chief executive of the many-tentacled Hayleys Group. Jayasundera, who also doubles as chairman of the Sri Lankan chamber of commerce, says that many of Hayleys site operations have been delayed or even stopped because of key Tamil engineers who have upped and left.

In the wider context of the ethnic effect, Hayleys, like its competitors, has been also hit by the dislocation of distribution channels for durables and the bottlenecks in the movement of funds. "All our salesmen who were operating in the north are all sitting on their hands in Colombo," he says. The north is also where all the island's cement factories are which is one reason why construction activity in Sri Lanka has been stagnant for the third year running.

The corporate sector is not the only one affected. Last fortnight Health Minister Ranjith Attaputu, speaking at a wild-life preservation meeting, quipped that it was the country's medical profession that was "close to extinction" at the rate doctors and nurses were leaving the country. But for the ones who have opted or been forced to stay, the future is bleak. The mental pressures they are being forced to work under has seriously affected their output. Most of the middle and lower level Tamils working in Colombo have their families in Jaffna and the constant tension is crippling their aptitude for work. Says Moosaji: "From the backbone of almost all companies they have now become marginal entities. Their loyalty is suspect and their insecurity has drastically reduced their productivity level. I, for one, have stopped employing Tamils."

The overall economic picture is also looking through a glass, darkly. The contents of the Central Bank of Ceylon report for 1983, the most authoritative official publication available, is like perusing the





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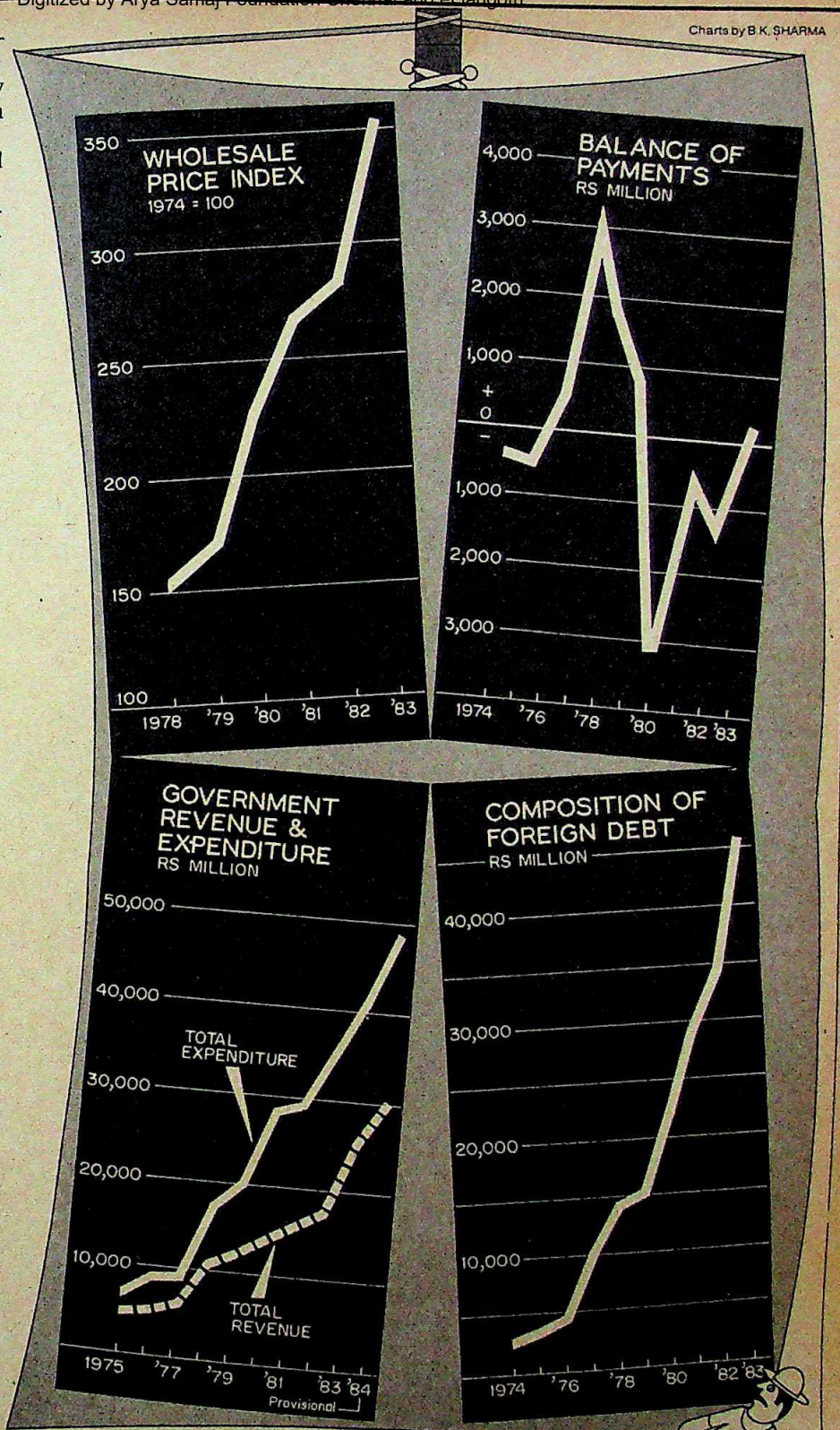
obituary columns of the island's combative newspapers. Some excerpts:

- Factory industry and small industry showed a dismal 2.2 per cent growth against 9 per cent the previous year.
- The manufacturing sector registered a growth rate of 0.8 per cent.
- Private sector activity in construction registered decline for the third consecutive year.
- Public sector production, which accounts for 60 per cent of total industrial output, declined in real terms by 15 per cent. Says the report: "Some of the industries in the state sector showed stagnation and were seemingly lacking in growth potential." A third of all state-owned industries ran at a loss.
- Outlays on imports, which have been growing steadily in recent years, declined in 1983, bringing the level of imports to double that of exports. As the report warns: "The underlying trends are unfavourable for the Balance of Payments".
- Real capita income registered a decrease from 3.3 per cent in 1982 to 2.5 per cent in 1983.

MUCH of the blame must necessarily be attributed to the Government's policies, now almost totally centred around the ethnic problem and the current search for a military solution. Crucially-needed funds for development and other economic targets have been diverted into other areas, mainly defence. From some 50 million Sri Lankan rupees (Indian Rs 25 million) a decade ago, Sri Lanka's defence budget has soared to an incredible Rs 4 billion (Indian Rs 2 billion) currently. Only recently, the Sri Lankan parliament rubber-stamped another Rs 100 million (Indian Rs 50 million) for the army over and above the budget, an act that is becoming increasingly frequent. Other scarce resources have been inexplicably diverted for subsidising unprofitable areas. At the country's only urea fertilisation plant, production costs were $240 a tonne when the world market price was $140 a tonne. Commented the *Financial Times* in a recent report on Sri Lanka: "About 25 per cent of government capital spending consists of transfers to the state corporations which require twice the capital per employee to achieve half the labour productivity of the private sector." Such policies have only introduced a further drag on overall economic growth. In its latest report on the Sri Lankan economy, the World Bank sternly noted that: "the Government's budgetary management has been the major source of instability in the economy in the

Charts by B.K. SHARMA



SRI LANKA'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

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past few years." Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have expressed deep concern at the high rate of public spending. The country's Finance Minister, Cambridge-educated Ronnie de Mel, agrees. "If this sort of thing continues, the economy can't come back," he stated. Except he was referring to the Tamil problem rather than the Government's financial policies over which, at this moment, he has little control.

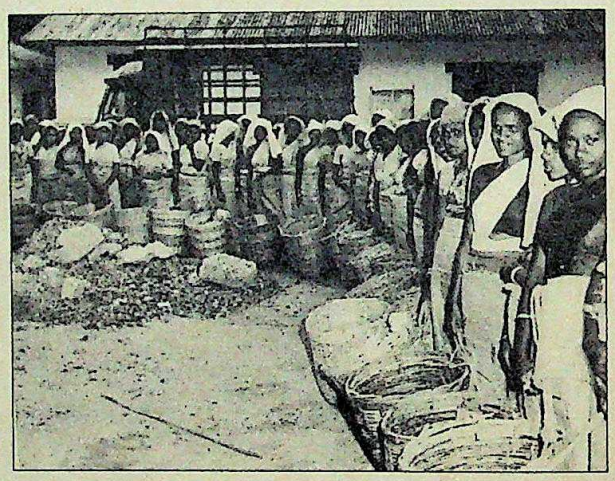
In that sense, the outward prosperity of Colombo is illusive, and extremely symbolic. Flashy Toyotas and Mercedes jostle for parking space with 1950 vintage Austins, the only cars allowed as public taxis. Shops overflow with the latest in electronics, home entertainment and clothes but there is a paucity of customers. Inflation has been running at around 17 per cent on a year to year basis and the Colombo Consumers Cost of Living Index registered an increased of 21 per cent, this despite a major reduction in oil prices in 1983.

In the larger context, the crunch could not have come at a worse time—just when foreign investment and foreign exchange was desperately needed to help pay for massive public expenditure on the controversially ambitious $2 billion (Rs 26 billion) Mahaweli hydro power and irrigation scheme, ironically touted as a major boost for the economy. In fact, Sri Lanka's economic planners have blissfully operated in the belief that soaring capital expenditures and the resultant large budget deficits would simply be financed by aid, concessional borrowings and commercial loans. Sri Lanka is currently the most aid-dependant country in the world—aid accounted for almost 60 per cent of government expenditure in 1983, resulting in a dangerously high debt service ratio of 20 per cent.

The price is being paid now. Sri Lanka's failure to solve its ethnic crisis and the economic instability has turned the country into a high-risk investment as far as aid donors and banks are concerned. Warned the Central Bank: "The prospects for concessional aid are uncertain and further large-scale borrowing is imprudent in view of the dire consequences of debt servicing. The volume of exports has stagnated and pressures will mount for increasing reliance on foreign savings or curtailment of government and private sector investment."

In fact, Sri Lanka's economy has been riding out this year on a tide of tea. The sharp hike in tea prices, up by almost 70 per cent in 1984 and helped further by the Indian Government's ban on export of CTC teas, has saved Colombo the embarrassment of having to go hat in hand to the IMF for a standby loan. Says Jayasundera, wearing his chairman, chamber of commerce cap: "If tea prices were not what they are, the economy would be in serious trouble."

But even the island's tea kettle could boil over. Despite the record prices, tea production in 1983-84 at 179 million kgs was the lowest recorded since 1956. Though this was largely the result of unfavourable weather conditions there were obviously other factors at work. Says the *Financial Times*: "Traditionally the strongest element in the economy has been the tree estate crops, tea, rubber and coconut. But 15 years of poor management and lack of foresight in replanting has led to a deterioration in quality and output." Even the Central Bank report states that: "inadequacies in management in the state plantations sector continued to afflict the tea and rubber industries."



Tea plantation workers: keeping the economy afloat

Industrial prospects also suffer from a legacy of the Mrs Bandaranaike government—protectionism, a policy faithfully followed by former industry minister Cyril Mathews before he was sacked by Jayewardene late last year. One prime example is that of Union Carbide, the US multinational, which was asked by the Government to cut back production of electric batteries last year by 25 per cent to allow a local company to increase its sales. Remarked the *Financial Times*: "There is a vital need to reduce protectionism and encourage a diversified and faster growing export sector to offset the trade imbalance."

It could, however, be too late. The protectionist attitude has ensured, for one, that foreign and private investors have confined their investments to quick-return ventures like hotels, garments, real estate and trading, all of which have now reached saturation point. To find new areas of investment will be doubly difficult because of the higher risk entailed and longer term payback involved.

Since 1977, foreign companies have invested about $240 million in Sri Lanka in something like 300 ventures, more than half in the free trade zone outside Colombo. Since 1983, the process has gone into reverse gear. Agrico, a US agricultural chemicals company has abandoned its $300 million superphosphate plant project estimated to earn $100 million a year in foreign exchange. Two other US companies involved in electronics, Motorola and Harris Electronics, have also reportedly backed out of earlier commitments.

To add to the island's woes is the fact that the Sri Lankan rupee is pegged to the US dollar. With the dollar having become abnormally strong, the local currency is at a distinct disadvantage in terms of exchange rates. European travellers, for instance, find their marks and pounds drastically reduced in purchasing power, affecting not just tourism but a wide range of export activity. "The local industry is fragile and easily hit", says C.P. de Silva, "and with exchange rates unfavourable, it's become impossible to plan your next move." The greater problem, however, is the nervousness of foreign investors because of the ethnic problems. "The impression outside is that it's a civil war going on here. Foreign clients and investors think it's not a safe place to be and it takes a lot of convincing on our part to reassure them," says Jayasundera.

Reassurance, unfortunately, is at a premium at the moment. The ethnic problem has completely thrown the Sinhalese onto the defensive psychologically, to an extent where, in the words of a veteran diplomat, "they have started

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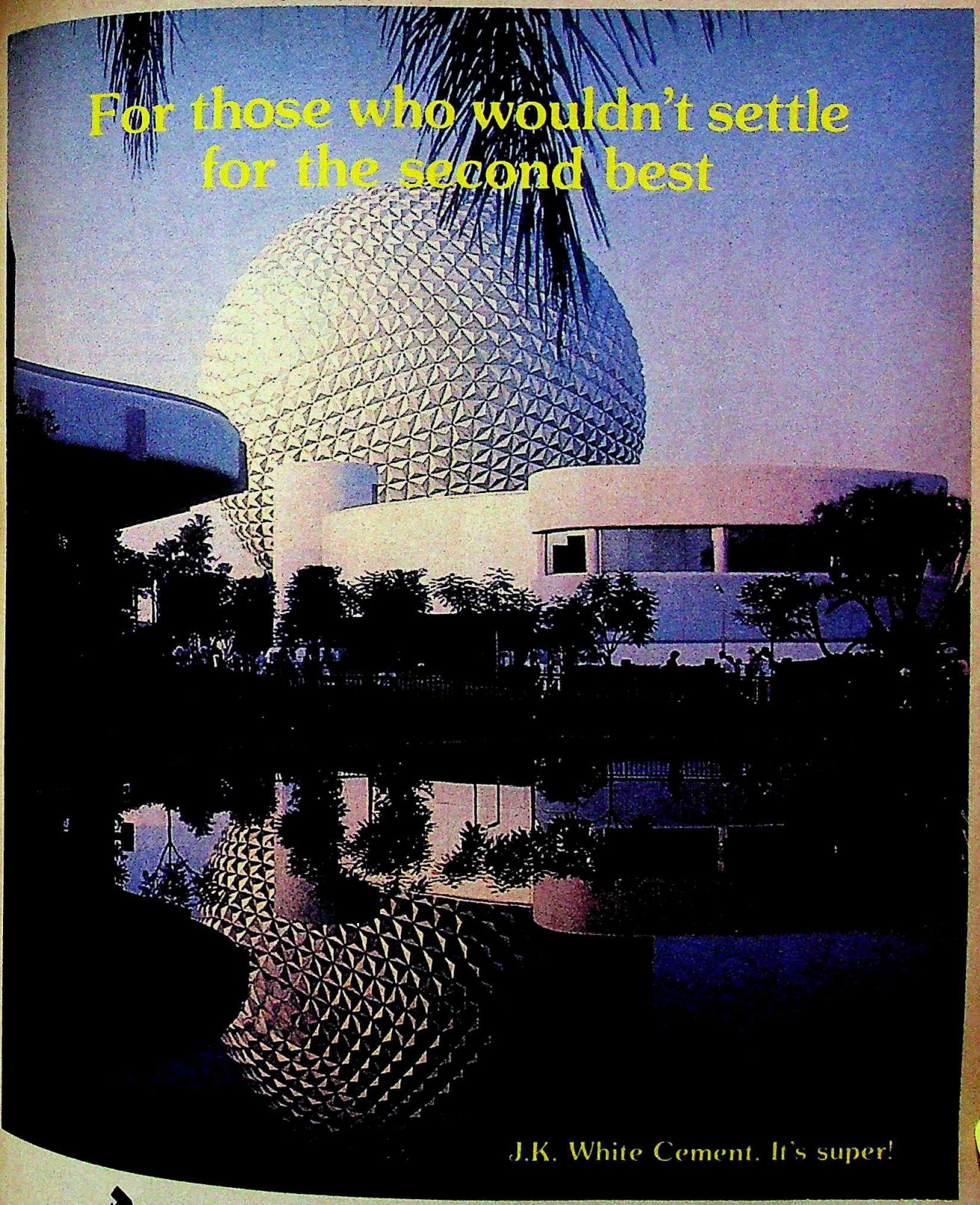

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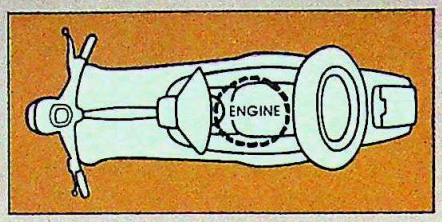

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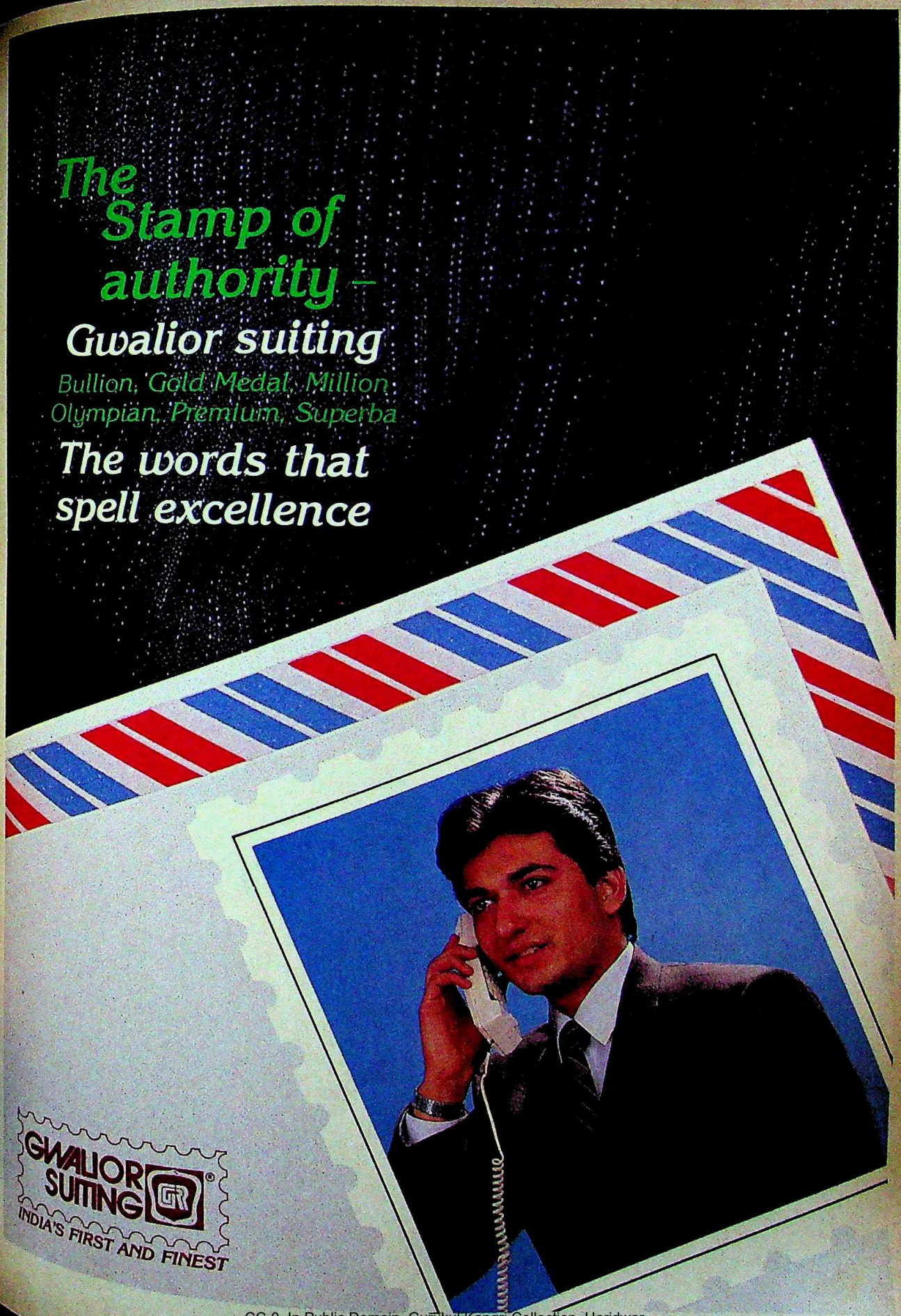

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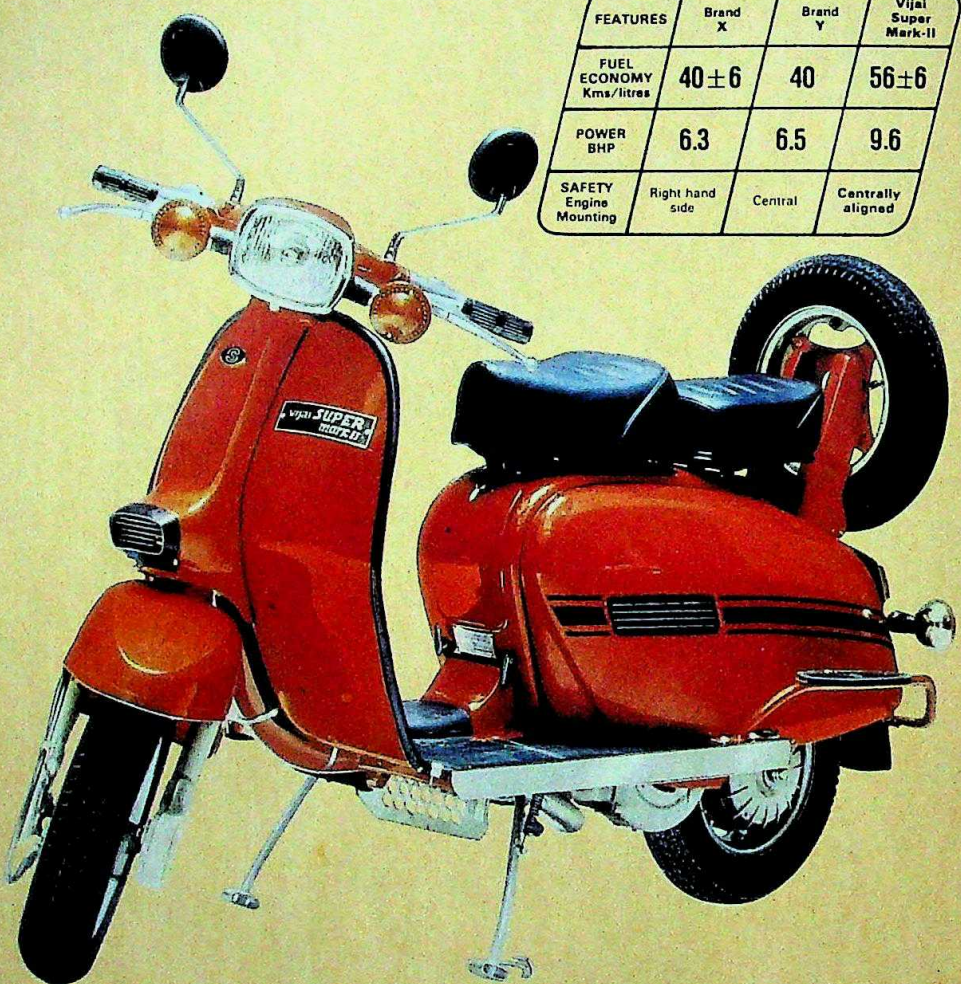

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behaving like a minority, trotting out long lists of grievances at the drop of a hat". The resultant atmosphere is a complex and sometimes comic concoction of chauvinism, nationalism and militarism, all dangerously new to the island's traditionally easy-going, entertainment-oriented population.

The signs were overly evident last fortnight as Sri Lanka prepared to celebrate 38 years of independence. The day before, Prime Minister Premadasa had issued a public appeal asking all vehicles to sport the Sri Lankan flag. Those that didn't would be hauled up by traffic patrols. Even the parade itself was markedly different. Traditionally, it has been dominated by the army. This year, there was no signs of soldiers except for the heavy security around the VIP's, a symbol of the changing times and the military's preoccupation with the fractious war in the north.

But if all this represents new and unfamiliar elements in Sinhalese life, it has been embraced with surprising fierceness and militancy. Almost every day, blood donation camps and fund-raising benefits are held for the benefit of "our gallant soldiers in the north". Till a few years ago, they were merely rusty cogs in what was a largely ceremonial army, trotted out on independence day parades and never forced to fire a shot except at the practice range. Today, they dominate Sinhala life to an exaggerated and dangerous degree. One shot fired in Jaffna is a thunderclap in Colombo.

All that is welcome grist to the political mill. The Tamil problem is the first and biggest crisis Sri Lanka has faced and the resulting xenophobia has perforce painted the Indian Government as the villain of the piece. The anti-Indian feeling, even in the gay environs of Colombo, is irrationally high. "Don't tell the taxi-driver you are an Indian," warns a solicitous Sinhala journalist, while the taxi-driver himself prattles on about the holiday he had in Madras two years ago and how much better he found the roads.

The xenophobia obviously hasn't tarred all Sinhalese. In the roof-top restaurant of the Intercontinental Hotel, P.C.S. Fernando, a gentle, soft-spoken man, shrugs philosophically. "We've had a good innings. But nobody can stay insulated from outside influences forever." Fernando, former chairman of Shaw Wallace and of the Sri Lanka Tourist Association, represents the well-educated upper and upper middle class of Sinhala society that is genuinely concerned about the crisis and its effects and also realises that much of the rhetoric, the 'war' psychosis and the India-baiting bears more relation to myth than reality. In a Colombo bar, a bent old man, recognising an Indian, introduces himself and insists on paying for the drinks. It turns out he is an old schoolmate of Jayewardene and, in fact, still keeps in touch. "Ah that old fox," he says sipping his Black Label, "he's the same age as me but the difference is he's a hundred times fitter and he's still got his wits about him."

The sentiments are expressed in admiration, echoes of which are found in conversations with almost all Sinhalese, whatever their political or professional hue. That, unfortunately, seems to be also part of the problem. In the art of politics, JR is streets ahead of anybody else on Sri Lanka's political stage. In terms of personal political stability, he is probably the most secure leader in the entire region. In the eyes of the Sinhalese, who constitute 74 per cent of the population, he has acquired political sainthood. "Whatever happens, none of the dirt ever rubs off on JR. He sits on a different pedestal," says a journalist."

Political opposition is virtually non-existent, both inside and outside his dominant United National Party (UNP). It is common knowledge in Colombo that Jayewardene has the undated resignations of every cabinet minister in his voluminous pocket. Last December, when he sacked anti-Tamil hardliner and industry minister Cyril Mathew, nothing more than the occasional eyebrow was raised.

The once-formidable Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) of Bandaranaike is discredited and in complete disarray and, as a reflection of the somewhat quixotic nature of Sri Lankan politics, the new opposition hope is a breakaway faction led by Bandaranaike's daughter Chandrika and film star son-in-law, Vijay Kumaratunge.

Kumaratunge is the Amitabh Bachchan of Sri Lanka in cinematic terms and like Bachchan uses his film star appeal to good effect. His rallies are always well-attended, though that is no indication of popular political support, and his oratory is effectively histrionic. At one recent meeting, he told the crowd: "If Gautama Buddha were to come to Sri Lanka tomorrow he would be asked for his identity card. As an Indian, he wouldn't have one and would then be hauled off to the nearest police station and remanded as a terrorist." As a whole, however, the opposition parties are riven with factional quarrels and a proclivity for meaningless debates.

Float at Independence Day parade last fortnight: a new militancy

In that context, there is a widespread belief, shared by the Indian Government, that Jayewardene can solve the Tamil issue if he really wants. He has no election to fight and his presidential term lasts till 1989. The 1979 "Gaullist" constitution which replaced the Westminster model, centralised power in an executive presidency and the 1982 violence-marred referendum, described by the SLFP as a "dubious exercise", gave the present UNP-dominated parliament another six years of life.

Neither does there seem to be any truth in the oft-quoted theory that he is under pressure from the hardliners and the Buddhist clergy. His peremptory dismissal of Mathew is clear proof that he can handle the hardliners if he is of a mind to. The faction-ridden Buddhist clergy have debased much of their own credibility by indulgence in widespread and blatant corruption. "The Mercedes Benz Bhikkus" is how they are scornful-

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ly described. Nor, for that matter is there any political truth in Jayewardene's own plaintive stand that to grant any level of autonomy to the north would require amending the constitution. "He had no hesitation in amending the constitution when it came to pitching the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) out of parliament," observes a diplomat.

The theory floating around in the musty corridors of the Indian High Commission is that Jayewardene feels that any concessions he makes will be construed as a sign of weakness in the eyes of the highly-politicised electorate. "Weakness and federalism have become synonymous", says an Indian High Commission source, "but only a strong man can delegate power and not a weak one."

But Jayewardene also has to play out his own political games by the rules of current compulsions. The present rivalry between Premadasa and National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali has led to a polarisation of UNP politics with both camps jockeying for power in the event of Jayewardene's departure—at 78 he isn't expected to last the presidential course till 1989. This suits Jayewardene admirably. His political strategy has always been to pick up people, usually in pairs, and project them as likely successors, but making sure they are people with no power base like Athulathmudali and Premadasa. He then steps backstage and lets them do all the running and foaming at the mouth while forming their respective camps. Then, as abruptly as he elevated them, he drops subtle hints that one or both are no longer in favour. The entire polity hangs on to his every word to catch a hint of who the next star will be while frenetically trying to regroup.

Political analysts in Colombo harbour a sneaking suspicion that 'JR' has acquired an Indira Gandhi-type obsession with the belief that only a member of the Jayewardene family can rule the island effectively. His son Ravi Jayewardene has displayed his disinterest in politics and his avidness for wheeling and dealing as a middle man, and a highly successful one at that, for getting government deals, including arms sales.

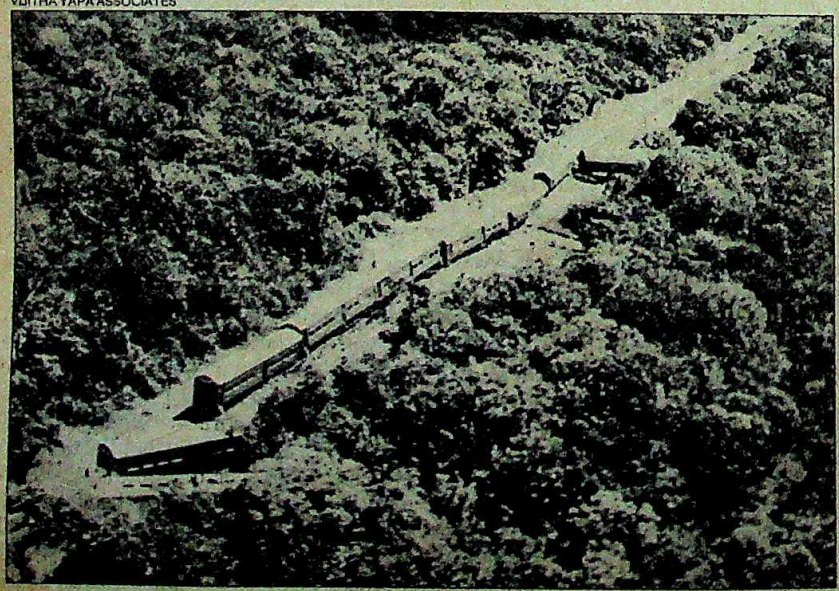
THEY see a possible successor in the young and presentable Ranil Vikramasinghe, currently minister for education who has married into the Jayewardene family. Vikramasinghe has a reputation as a hardliner and the publicity he gets is hardly in keeping with his official position. Whatever Jayewardene's plans, Vikramasinghe is being touted as the new political star on Sri Lanka's picture postcard horizon. At the moment, however, he seems to be drifting with prevailing winds. Phrases like "The TULF cannot be trusted to keep their word; statements by India are subject to a different interpretation here; the Indian Government's constant identification with the TULF and the instant access they are allowed is of concern to us; this is not an ethnic conflict, it is something much wider" trip off his tongue with practised ease. But he has a sharp and incisive mind and, were conditions different, Vikramasinghe would singh a different song.

An anti-Indian stance is currently very *de rigeur* in political circles. Much of the "big bad wolf" image that India is saddled with, however, is unfortunately the creation of the media that is currently, with a few glaring exceptions, locked in tune with the rambunctious rhetoric of the political leadership. Nobody can testify to that more agonisingly than S.S. Chatwal, the harassed Indian high commissioner in Colombo. His must be the most unenviable job going in Sri Lanka at the moment, considering the kind of disadvantage he is forced to operate at. His last meeting with President Jayewardene was on January 31 when he passed on India's renewed suggestion that he resume the aborted dialogue with the TULF. The meeting was confidential and private with just the two of them present. On February 6, the entire contents of the meeting was the subject of a lead story in the *Island*, a paper generally acknowledged to be under the influence of Premadasa. As a deliberate leak it could not have been more clumsily done but it had the desired effect of once again putting the Indian side at an embarrassing disadvantage. Twice before, verbatim reports of his confidential meetings with Foreign Minister Hameed have figured prominently in the *Island*. The overall effect is like a chess game with one player blindfolded.

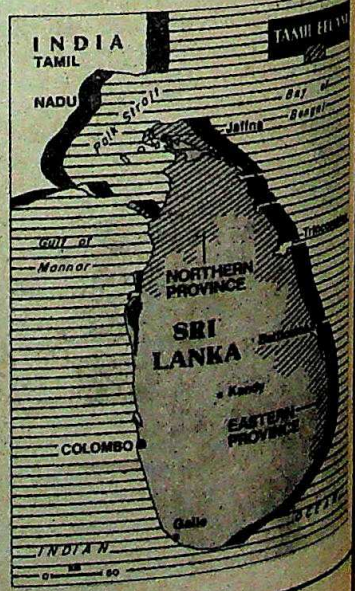
There are disquieting signs that Jayewardene is in no mood to resume the dialogue with the TULF in the near future, a situation that has pushed hopes for a solution to the ethnic crisis further into the background. In any event, Colombo is firmly convinced that the TULF, the most moderate of the groups demanding

Train blown up by Tamil rebels in the north and (right) their concept of Eelam

VIJITHA YAPA ASSOCIATES



Map by B.K. Sharma



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Eelam, or a separate Tamil state, no longer has any control over the separatists.

Colombo is equally convinced that India is still providing sanctuary and training to Tamil rebels in Tamil Nadu-based camps, a charge repeated once again last week by Jayewardene. The Indian Government is still pushing for an early meeting between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene in the hope that a face-to-face encounter will convince the latter of India's urgent desire to stop the brutal killings and the influx of Tamil refugees into India, now approaching close to a mind-boggling 50,000.

In certain quarters of the Sri Lankan leadership there is an obvious and growing realisation that Rajiv Gandhi is unencumbered by the political compulsions that guided his mother's policies vis a vis Sri Lanka. But growing realisation is a far cry from conviction and, in any event, Jayewardene himself has political compulsions that compel him to opt for a military solution at the present. That will hardly be easy. In spite of British and Israeli help, Sri Lanka's fighting forces are in no position to stamp out the rebel movement. The rebel forces in the north are giving as good as they get and seem determined to obtain Eelam at any cost.

In that stalemated no-win situation what price the solution to the Tamil crisis? The suspicion in Colombo's socially-hyperactive diplomatic circles is that Jayewardene, having fancied himself all along as a world statesman, has finally been given the chance to prove it. Colombo-watching is a new word in the international media's lexicon but it seems here to stay and indicates the high profile the island now enjoys in the eyes of the watching world. Jayewardene has been dispatching envoys with almost indecent frequency to western capitals to drum up support both moral and physical while his trigger-happy soldiers continue to massacre Tamils with unbridled abandon. Though the latter have had more success than the former, there is a growing feeling that Jayewardene is determined to milk the crisis for everything it is worth before finally, and dramatically, coming up with a diplomatic compromise acceptable to the Tamils, many of whom are wearied of the constant harassment.

BUT THEREIN lies the rub. The kind of international attention Sri Lanka is attracting could boomerang badly. The well-stocked bar at Colombo's popular Supper Club nightspot is currently frequented with the new kind of tourist the island has been attracting lately—arms dealers. With their arrival has emerged from the panelled woodwork the ubiquitous Coomar Narains of Colombo, influential middle men with cash registers where their hearts should be. In the current situation, with Israeli Mossad and British Special Air Services (SAS) personnel engaged in training and equipping Sri Lanka's unruly armed forces, there is not much that is secret about Sri Lanka's defence or diplomatic plans. In an interview to a Colombo journalist last year, an Israeli spokesman frankly admitted that "this marks our return to Asia". The insecurity has opened other negative avenues. Under an agreement with the US, a transmitter has been erected ostensibly for the use of the Voice of America. Significantly, Colombo has no editorial control on the programmes and even more significantly it happens to be the most powerful VOA transmitter anywhere outside the US. Defence analysts view it as a possible communication relay facility between Diego Garcia and the Pine Gap communication centre in Australia and deem it capable of jamming Indian defence communication systems.

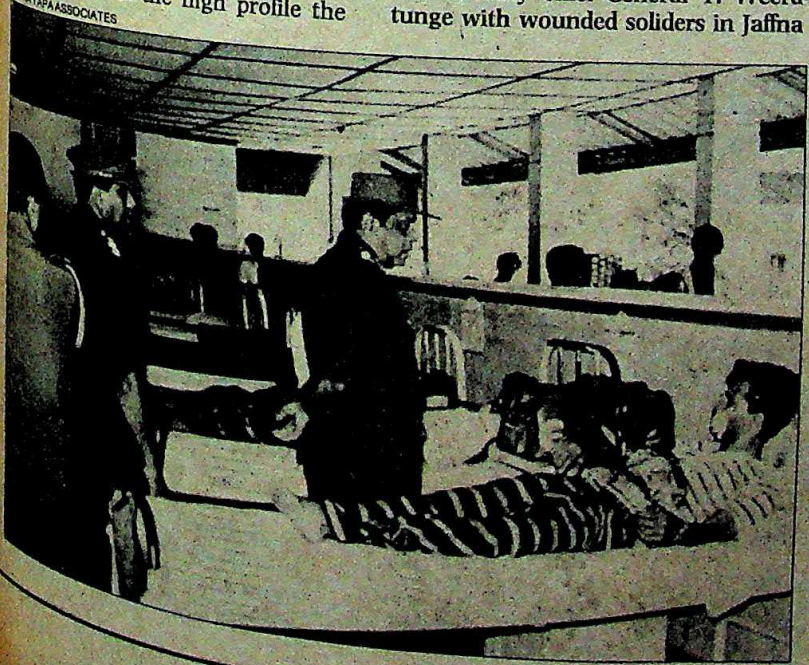
The greater danger is of course, one that normally confronts tinpot dictators of banana republics—the possibility of an army coup. There is little likelihood of that happening while Jayewardene is alive and kicking but the moment he bows out would make for a different ball game altogether. The Sri Lankan army is universally acknowledged as one of the worst and the most indisciplined in the world. After having been confined to the parade ground for the last 30 years, they are now suddenly the focus of international attention. In many Sri Lankan minds, they have already acquired the image of knights in burnished armour, saving their daughters from a fate worse than death from the savage and marauding Tamil Huns. More significant, the top brass, who have so far exercised little control over their men, are becoming alarmingly ambitious. Already, they have been given a blank cheque in running the north and north-east and under the emergency regulations, extended once again last week, are accountable to nobody. More important, their numbers are rapidly increasing. In 1982, the total strength of the armed forces was slightly over 16,000. Within two years, it has almost doubled and recent recruitment drives have received enthusiastic response.

All that makes the situation fertile for an eventual army take-over, specially since Jayewardene's absence will be the signal for a bruising and possibly bloody succession battle. Any politician of any worth in Sri Lanka has private goon squads which have come to represent a political status symbol. If the post-Jayewardene situation gets out of control, it will offer the army the perfect excuse to step in and take over. But whatever the future, Sri Lanka currently symbolises a classic case of Paradise Lost. And Jayewardene, the man who holds the key to success or disaster, only seems to be getting increasingly trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea that has, till now, enfolded Sri Lanka in profitable embrace.

—DILIP BOBB in Colombo

Former army chief General T. Weeratunge with wounded soliders in Jaffna

KRISHNA YAPA ASSOCIATES



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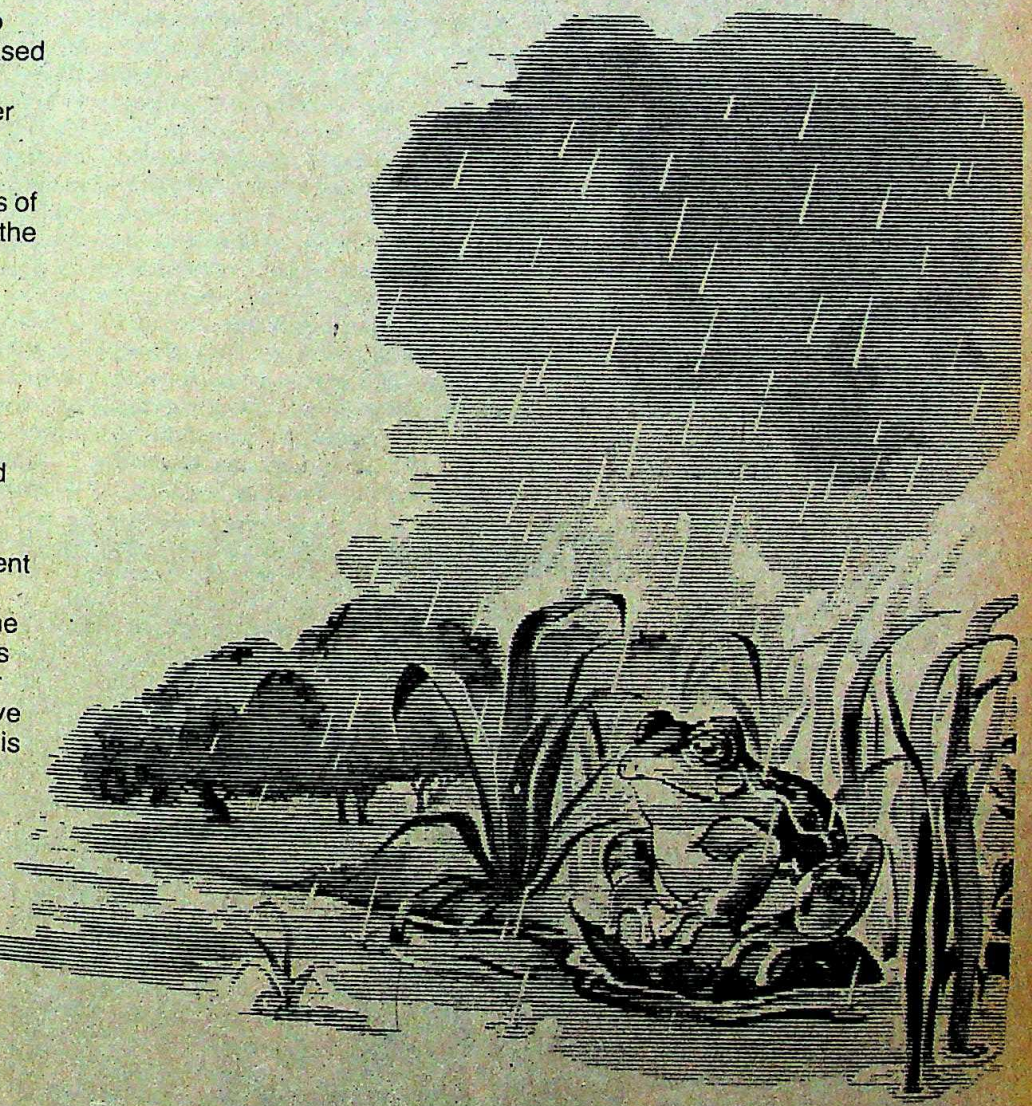

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SALARIES

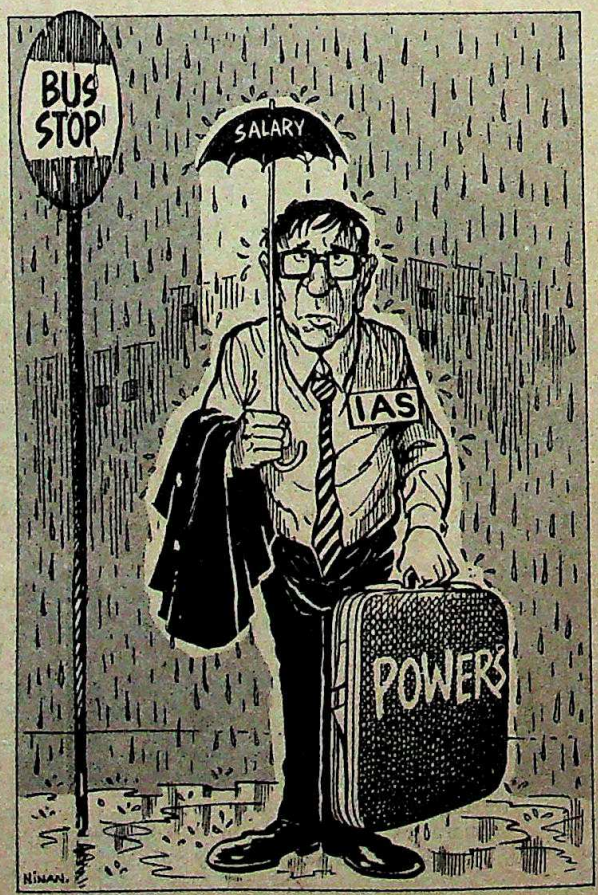
Timely Demands

INDIAN civil servants may have reason to thank Coomar Narain. By implicating many of their number in his alleged treachery, Narain has inadvertently highlighted the sorry condition of the nation's bureaucracy. The message is loud and clear: lowly-paid middle and senior level bureaucrats are increasingly susceptible to monetary temptation. And the Government seems to have heeded the warning. Last month Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi directed Minister of State for Personnel and Administrative Reforms K.P. Singhdeo to look into the pay and perks of government servants and see if they were commensurate with their jobs.

"The whole exercise," admitted a senior Home Ministry official, "is aimed at insulating our bright and experienced administrators and planners from any external pressures—monetary or political." Singhdeo did not have to go far to begin his investigations. His own department was chock-full of memorandums and reports on the subject compiled by the Union Government. Only two furlongs away, the office of the Fourth Pay Commission at Vigyan Bhavan was flooded with representations from over 50 organisations representing government servants, all asking for more.

The Pay Commission's report is expected only at the end of this year, but the Central Government has already begun to look at the salary structure and promotional avenues open to Indian Administrative Service (IAS) personnel who occupy key positions both at the Centre and in the states. The findings are thought-provoking. Over the years, while other services such as the defence forces have been given a 20 to 30 per cent hike in their salaries and perks, IAS officials have found their spending power shrinking. "My personal secretary takes home only Rs 200 less than me and is under no obligation to maintain the same social status," says a senior official in the Commerce Ministry. When he began his career, he earned three times as much as his secretary.

Nor are IAS personnel the only ones pressing for pay hikes. Many representations with the Pay Commission come from other organisations on behalf of 1.5 crore Central and state government employees. While middle level officials recruited through the Central Secretariat Service (CSS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and the Provincial Civil Services (PCS) in the states have sought parity of pay with the IAS after the first promotion, junior employees like stenographers, clerks, typists and assistants—who constitute over 70 per cent of the bureaucracy—have demanded merger of dearness allowance with basic pay, higher house-rent allowance (HRA), more promotional avenues and higher increments. Says B.L. Sharma, general secretary of the National Organisation of Government Employees: "Since the Government depends on the bureaucracy to implement its policies, it must look after their minimum needs of housing and medical facilities."



At present clerks are entitled to the ridiculously low annual increment of Rs 10, and over 90 per cent of them retire as they started out: as clerks. Though most senior officials are provided government accommodation, less than 10 per cent of all government employees live in official housing. For those not provided housing the average HRA is Rs 50 to Rs 100 per month. Says a clerk in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi: "With Rs 50 I cannot even live in a jhuggi."

But the most detailed argument in favour of better pay and facilities is the 100-page memorandum presented to the Pay Commission recently by the IAS (Central) Association. The 4,000-member strong IAS lobby has not only demanded an approximately 100 per cent hike in pay and other benefits but has also asked that its supervisory and elitist character be maintained. The association has demanded a minimum basic pay of Rs 2,000 for an under-secretary as against Rs 700 now and Rs 8,500 for a secretary to the Central Government or chief secretary to a state, both of whom now earn a basic salary of only Rs 3,500 per month.

Low salaries have served to draw the cream of talent away from the once-prestigious IAS to the more lucrative private sector. In fact the number of candidates appearing for the all-India services has declined by about 20 per cent during the last five years. The IAS memorandum points out: "The pay and emoluments of the officers who take important decisions affecting the interests of the people, disburse large sums of money, give largesse from the state exchequer to trade, industry and commerce should not be kept at such low levels as may draw away all talent from the public service."

Indeed, the irony is that highly paid officials of the private sector are frequent supplicants of low paid government officials who wield vast powers over them. And the bureaucracy's case for higher salaries is based on the contrast in benefits available not only to comparable officials in the private sector but also those in state-owned public sector corporations and even the defence services. A joint secretary in the Commerce or Finance ministry who has the power to grant an import licence or allow loans from foreign banks is

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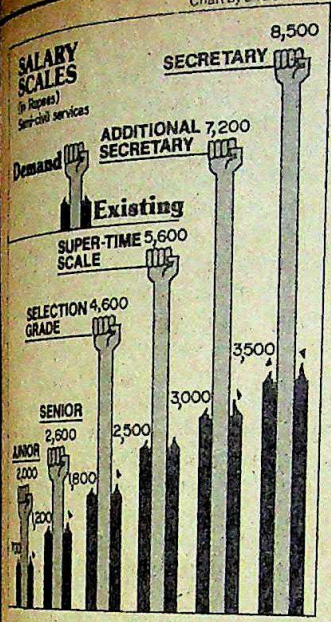
Chart by B.K. SHARMA



member entitled to an entertainment allowance or an official car, and takes home Rs 1,500 a month. Says a senior Finance Ministry official: "In the present scale of salaries, the sharply visible privation of a senior government functionary places him manifestly at a disadvantage in dealing with functionaries of non-governmental organisations whose well-being is so often the outcome of government actions and decisions."

MANY government officials admit they are prone to occasionally bend the rules as they feel obliged to reciprocate the hospitality extended to them by officials in other organisations or their counterparts abroad. With their skimpy budgets, however, they cannot afford to spend their own money. As a result it is not uncommon to see secretaries, additional secretaries and other officials force the various public sector undertakings under their administrative control to organise entertainment for them in five-star hotels. These corporations even put fleets of cars at the officials' disposal because no official is entitled to a car for his exclusive use.

Further, no official, not even a secretary, can be dropped home in an official car if he is leaving his office on time. J.S. Deswal, former director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) used to hitch a lift home in a friend's car. To avoid this kind of embarrassment, the IAS Association has demanded Rs 400 per month as transport allowance for car-owning officials and a loan of Rs 50,000 with which to buy a car. At present no government official receives a transport allowance.

Complains a deputy secretary in the Department of Energy: "It is ridiculous to expect a senior official holding sensitive posts to travel either by public transport or in a vehicle provided by a friend."

The housing problem for IAS officials is especially acute. With their services transferable from state to state and the Centre, finding a house in a new city is a recurring nightmare. In states like Punjab and Haryana officials returning from deputation to the Centre have to wait a year before they are given official accommodation. During this period they are given only 15 per cent of their salary as HRA, or about Rs 375 for a joint secretary.

But as befits a group who have run the machinery of the country since Independence, the most significant demand of the IAS Association has less to do with material benefits and more with power and its exercise. By defining an IAS official's role as that of captain and coordinator of a team, the association has pleaded for both higher grades for its members as well as allocation to them of all the important posts of departmental heads in the state and Central governments.

The association feels that its members joined the service attracted by its elitist character. Says its memorandum: "This element of elitism—based solely on merit—has enabled the IAS to play an invaluable role not only in the usually recognised spheres of public life but also in certain other spheres which are not always appreciated. It may therefore not be an exaggeration to say that the IAS is one of the most effective links between the state and the citizen." A superior status for IAS men is justified on the grounds that the IAS has succeeded in "maintaining the integrity of the country, ensuring a political administration, and the continuity of the decision-making process."

Concomitant with the appeal for a superior status, the memorandum also reflects the generalist-specialist conflict and makes a strong plea that specialists like engineers and scientists be kept under the control of IAS officers. The bureaucracy also certainly seems determined to frustrate any attempt to give more independence to the uniformed forces, including the police. "The supremacy of the civic officials over uniformed personnel is an integral part of the democratic system," says an official in the Home Ministry. Whether or not that is acceptable to the higher reaches of government, the bureaucracy's need to redefine its role and its rewards has never been greater.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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INDO-US RELATIONS

Changing Images

IN NO COUNTRY in the world are images made and unmade more quickly than in the United States of America. In the months since the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Americans have discarded most of their decades-old ideals of India and sculpted a new image that is part soap opera, part celluloid technicolor and part wonder at the sudden metamorphosis of the Indian political scene. The soap opera elements come from the drama of the assassination, the succession and its rapid electoral legitimacy. The technicolor is provided by nostalgia about the once-immortal "jewel" in the British crown, brought home again to audiences by films of Anglo-India—*A Passage to India*, *The Far Pavilions*, *Heat and Dust*, and *Kim*, an extravagant recreation of the make-believe romance and adventure of sanitised, gentrified imperialism that is as far from historical realities as El Dorado is from the Sahara. India has indeed become a sudden rage in the United States—but which India is it, whose India?

A lot of Americans have, however, been truly impressed by the inner strength and vitality of Indian democracy, of its extraordinary ability to haul out a generational change in politics through the non-revolutionary electoral process. Many Americans articulate a sense of wonder that India could so easily absorb the shock of the murder of Indira Gandhi, and that the assassination should unite rather than divide the country, and that Indians should hand over the destiny of their ancient nation to a 40-year-old while America itself remained mesmerised by the charisma of a 74-year-old warrior!

The American image of the new Indian regime is a collage of romance, Americanism, and anti-Soviet gall. Romance comes from the youthful telegenic visage of Rajiv Gandhi, his Italian wife, his background as a pilot, his public school upbringing. Americanism sees the new regime as one comprising technocrats and managerial experts who should prefer computer technology to political ideology, and whose modernism must somehow open their minds to the technological power of the United States. Many Americans therefore expect India's new prime minister to be less beholden to Moscow than his mother had been. Isn't he young and modern? Doesn't he represent the post-Independence generation? Isn't his first priority to modernise India? How then can he remain an ally of the Soviet Union?

This great expectation has triggered an all-round American enterprise to woo the India of Rajiv Gandhi. The enterprise has mobilised Congressional leaders, corporate chieftains and academic specialists to look at the new India and tell Washington how to cultivate it. Since November, seven senators, four of them Democrats, a Congressman, a former secretary of state and a former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 60 presidents, vice-presidents or senior executives of multinational corporations, and two dozen academicians have been to India. The American delegation that came to the funeral of Mrs Gandhi had four former ambassadors to India—Daniel Patrick Moynihan, John K. Galbraith, Robert Goheen and John Sherman Cooper. Each of them met with friends and contacts in the Indian Government, political parties and the intellectual community to explore how Indo-US relations could be improved. Secretary of State George Shultz who led the team of mourners, later despatched no less a personage than Henry Kissinger to Delhi to prepare the "philosophical ground" for a possible shift in America's South Asia policy.

Americans derived some strength from reports involving the Soviet Union, Poland and East Germany in the spy supermarket run in New Delhi for years by an Indian entrepreneur with the help of an army of stenographers and personal assistants employed in sensitive offices of the Indian Government. Almost every report of the espionage scandal printed in the American press took care to repeat the alleged involvement of the three communist powers (and France), and to mention that none of the arrested persons had openly implicated the CIA. Americans hoped that sooner or later the disclosures would throw a certain chill on Indo-Soviet relations.

At the same time, it is clear that the US is not willing to change its South Asia policy in order to move closer to India. General Zia-ul-Haq will continue to be in control of the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan. To keep him on its side, the United States must go on supplying Pakistan all or most of the arms and weapons General Zia would ask for. There are powerful elements in the Pentagon and the White House who regard Pakistan as being a far more important ally than India in the Persian Gulf region and who openly oppose the State Department's "soft" stance on India. Overall, Americans are waiting for Rajiv Gandhi to go over to them.

But some do see the folly of this attitude. "We lost the first generation of Indians to the Soviet Union by pursuing a pro-Pakistan policy. Must we lose the second generation of Indians too?" asked one of the few friends of India in Washington. He was not entirely without hope that Washington's policy might change, especially due to the fact that in the corridors of power there are now loud whispers of a superpower trade-off on Afghanistan. Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, has suggested a Soviet role in the Middle East in return for withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Others have suggested a lowering of US military presence in the Indian Ocean region.

Meanwhile, the Indian rage is being raised to a high pitch; its culmination will be the Festival of India. Coinciding as it will with the prime minister's visit to the United States, Americans are determined to make the festival one of the great media events of the Reagan Administration. The greatest American enterprise to woo India is on. Its political result will bear close watching.

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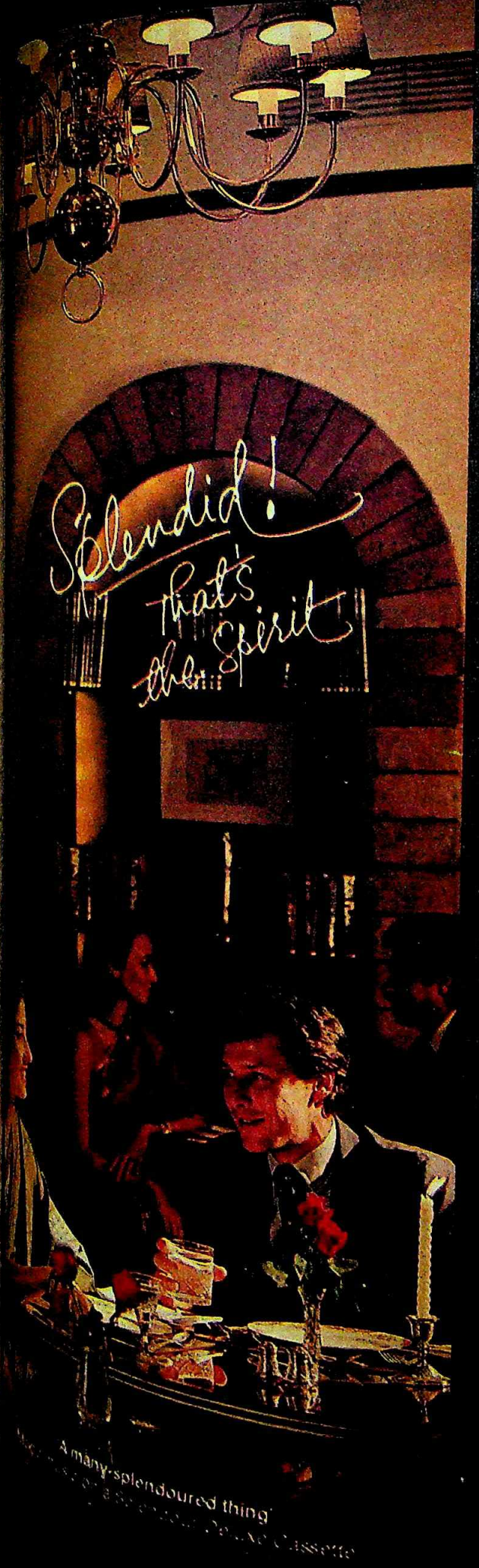

Splendour

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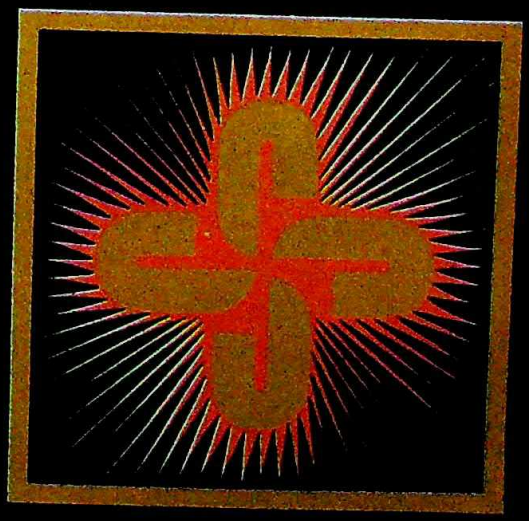

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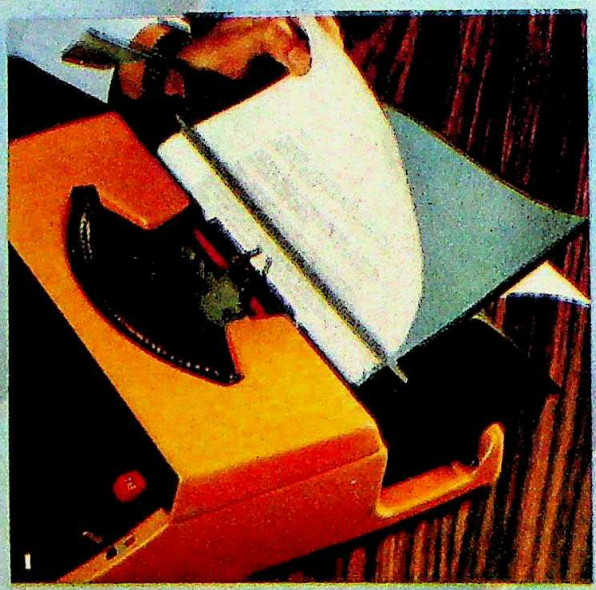

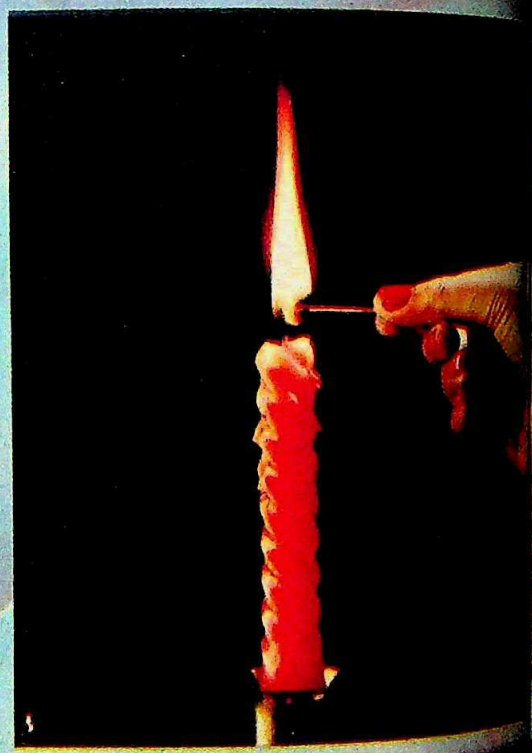

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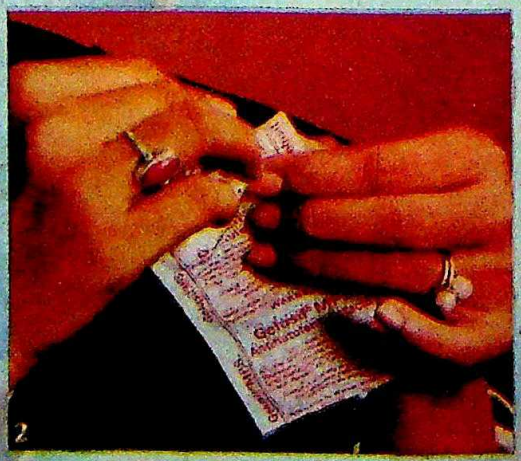

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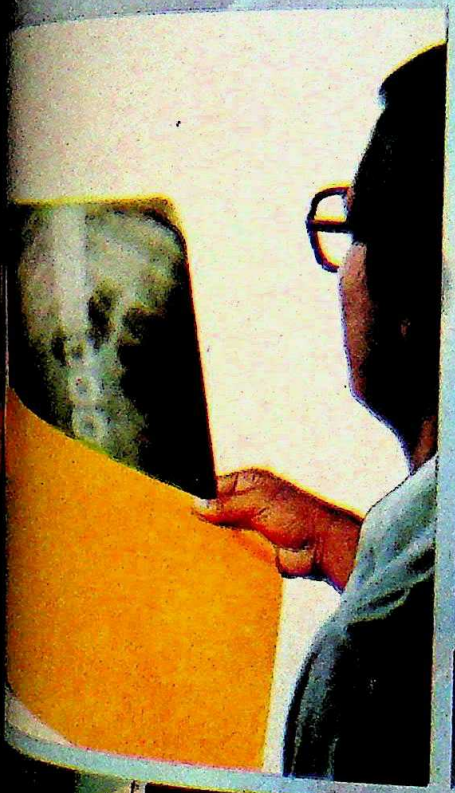

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INDIAN ARMY

Polishing the Brass

FOR OVER three months, it was the subject of intense mess and barrack gossip and guesswork in army establishments spread all over the country. But last fortnight, when the vital army appointments were finally announced after unprecedented hedging, the package was not without its surprises, a quick round of musical chairs which also amounted to being a step forward in the direction of choosing a new army chief when General Arun Shridhar Vaidya retires on January 31 next year.

Round one had been widely anticipated. Lt-General K. Sundarji, GOC-in-C Western Command, was moved to South Block as the new vice-chief of army staff, filling up the vacancy following the retirement of Lt-General G.S. Rawat on December 31 last year. Another longstanding vacancy, caused by the retirement of Lt-General Tirath Singh Oberoi on November 30 was filled with the elevation of Lt-General Ranjit Singh Dyal, Sundarji's deputy at the Western Command, as the new southern army commander. But the interest in the package was concentrated on the transfer of Lt-General Hridaya Kaul, the deputy chief in Delhi, to take over the Western Command. For long considered a contender for the next chief's post, along with Sundarji, the one qualification Kaul continued to lack so far was the command of an army. He will now have almost a full year at the head of Western Command by the time the final crunch comes.

If seniority were to be the criterion Sundarji, an entrant through the Officers Training School (OTS) would be the most obvious choice. By January 31 all the generals senior to him would have retired and he would still have six months to go. On appointment as the chief, an officer serves up to the age of 60 instead of the usual 58. Kaul, in fact, happens to be a course junior to him. Sources point out that both have had brilliant careers and have commanded key formations. But there are other factors. Sundarji is reputed to be an innovating type, one with a yen for mechanised warfare and modernisation. Kaul is a tank-man and there are doubts as to the wisdom of having two armoured corps officers as successive chiefs. Yet again, Sundarji has the disadvantage of having commanded Operation Bluestar, which the Sikhs do not exactly remember with relish. Yet, on the face of it, it would be difficult for the Government to apply the merit or combat experience criterion and supersede Sundarji.

Sundarji, Dyal and Kaul: moving up the ladder

Superseded Generals Balaram and Tuli

The recent changes have, however, proved that the Government is no longer bashful about supersessions. But it tends to hedge its bets as shown by the elevation last week of two principal staff officers to the status of vice-chief after they had been superseded. The Government's explanation for the supersession was that the two, Lt-General K. Balaram, who is the adjutant-general and Lt-General M.L. Tuli, the master-general of ordnance, have less than a year to go in service and that they would hardly have time to become familiar with the new, vital jobs. Granting them the vice-chief's status is a symbolic sop, though it will add marginally to their salary and pension. Significantly, no similar gesture has been made to the other officers who have been similarly superseded, including Lt-General Surjit Singh Brar, at present chief of staff Eastern Command, Lt-General Niranjan Singh Cheema, chief of staff Northern Command and Lt-General K. Gowrishankar, GOC XI Corps at Jalandhar.

Sources in South Block point out that after the long delay the Government has finally decided to follow the same merit-cum-seniority principle as was decided for the bureaucracy when P.K. Kaul superseded 17 officers on his way to the cabinet secretary's post. And they are keeping their fingers crossed with the two more posts of army commanders—central and northern—falling vacant later this year. Besides the deputy chief's post remains to be filled up. Said a Defence Ministry officer: "If the new regime really wants to restore the dignity of vital institutions and the right kind of conventions, it should announce the name of the army chief-designate at least three months before the appointment so that he gets the chance of familiarising himself with the job and also of projecting his personality."

While such speculation continued, last fortnight the interest in defence circles was not entirely confined to the new appointments. There were also the whispers of the departure of two lieutenant-generals and a major-general facing enquiries. Significantly, this happened much before the new prime minister's clean-up operation. Major-General Satish Rai, who last held the post of the chief instructor at Defence services staff college left nearly six months back. Lt-General Matthew Thomas, GOC 10 Corps at Bhatinda, had put in his papers for premature retirement over six months ago and Lt-General Nirmal Puri, GOC 2 Corps at Ambala left in mid-November. Sources point out that none of them faced a major charge but sought retirement when confronted with evidence of relatively minor indiscretions.

But the belated and exaggerated exposure of the cases now caught the armymen with a bit of surprise, a state from which they had hardly got the time to recover in the appointments melee.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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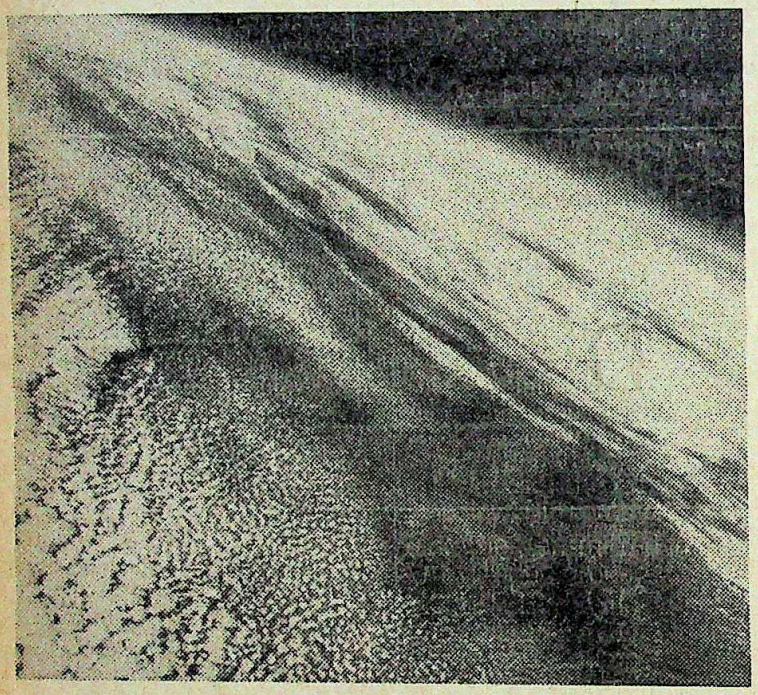
This is as pretty a picture as any we've ever made. This time, from 38,000 km up.



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COMPUTER INVASION

THE COMPUTER giants of the world seem to be making a beeline for India, attracted by the Government's open-door policy on electronics and the promise of further incentives in the near future. At least two US computer giants have decided to set up major software development centres in the country. Texas Instruments, for instance, is setting up a centre in Bangalore that will be linked by satellite to computer data banks in the US — permission for the satellite link-up being given by the Post & Telegraphs authorities after much badgering.

Hardware deals are also being clinched by various computer giants in the West. Hewlett Packard, for instance, is trying to set up a major manufacturing facility in India for mini-computers, and is talking to Indian companies like Wipro because of the Government's stipulation that 60 per cent of any venture's equity must be in Indian hands. Data General has already tied up with a local computer company, and DCM is also in the market for a computer manufacturing tie-up.

CHANGING CONCESSIONS

THE GOVERNMENT is planning to change the system of fiscal incentives for small-scale industrial units, perhaps in the coming Budget. At the moment, all small units are given excise concessions, which are fully withdrawn if they graduate to medium unit size. This, the Government has realised, acts as a deterrent to growth, while at the same time the exchequer gets little or no revenue from the burgeoning small-scale sector. As a corrective step, the proposal now is to introduce a graded system of fiscal incentives that will gradually reduce the concessions on offer as a unit grows in size. On the one hand, some of the larger small units will thus have to start paying more revenue, and on the other they can make the transition to medium unit size without taking a sledgehammer tax blow.

TECHNOLOGY TALK

THE TATAS have set their goals for the future, and aim to get into as many technology-intensive areas as possible. The fields identified so far are oil drilling (for which a joint venture is being set up with Forex Neptune), telecommunications (two joint ventures are proposed in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh), super-computers (talks are on for a suitable collaboration), bio-technology (ways of increasing the yields of crops like tea) and perhaps cars. The grapevine reports that negotiations are under way with Honda.

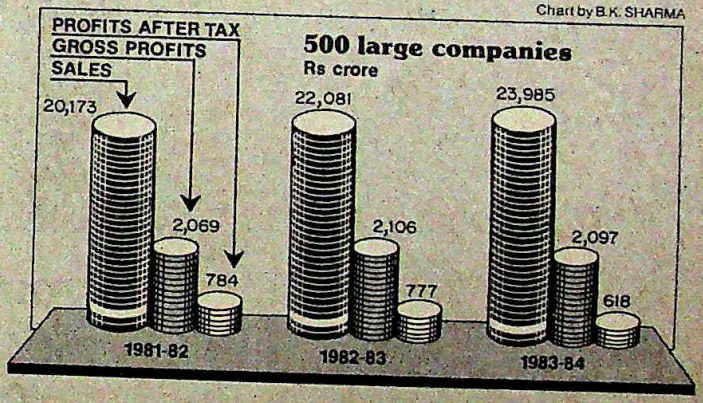
POSITIVE PUBLICITY

THE NEW government seems to have changed its negative attitude to the advertising industry. In sharp contrast to the series of measures taken in the recent past in order to discourage expenditure on advertising (the 20 per cent tax disallowance being a case in point), the Government itself now intends making use of the services of the advertising industry. The railways, for instance, have invited some of the leading advertising agencies to suggest publicity campaigns. The agencies that have shown an interest include such giants as Hindustan Thompson and Ulka. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Women's and Social Welfare has contracted Interads to launch a series of advertising campaigns against social evils like drinking and dowry. Interads is launching a Rs 12.5 lakh campaign this year.

TAXING TACTICS

DEPRECIATION seems to provide the latest tax shelter for companies, judging by the widespread resort to a revaluing of corporate assets and the consequent sharp increase in provisions for depreciation. In 1983-84, for instance, according to the Reserve Bank, 500 large companies increased their depreciation provision by a hefty 36.3 per cent despite gross profits actually dropping by 0.4 per cent to Rs 2,097 crore. The capitalisation of interest was another widespread trend. Operating profits dropped by 14 per cent, post-tax profits by 20.5 per cent, and retained earnings by no less than 35.3 per cent.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



BUSINESS BOOM

THE ARAB-owned Pakistani-managed Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) is a bank with a difference, both in its record of rapid growth and in the style of its operations. The bank, which opened a branch in Bombay two years ago, now plans to set up socially-oriented projects in rural areas, and then to turn them over to the Government. In the pipeline are a school, a dairy and other schemes spread over Maharashtra, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. In addition, the bank has a practice of giving to charity or good causes. This year's charity bill in the country is between Rs 1 crore and Rs 2 crore. But then the bank can afford that kind of giveaways. In its very first year of operation, BCCI's Nariman Point branch in Bombay collected deposits of Rs 58 crore. In comparison, the public sector Bank of India's Nariman Point branch has reached only Rs 55 crore after 12 years.

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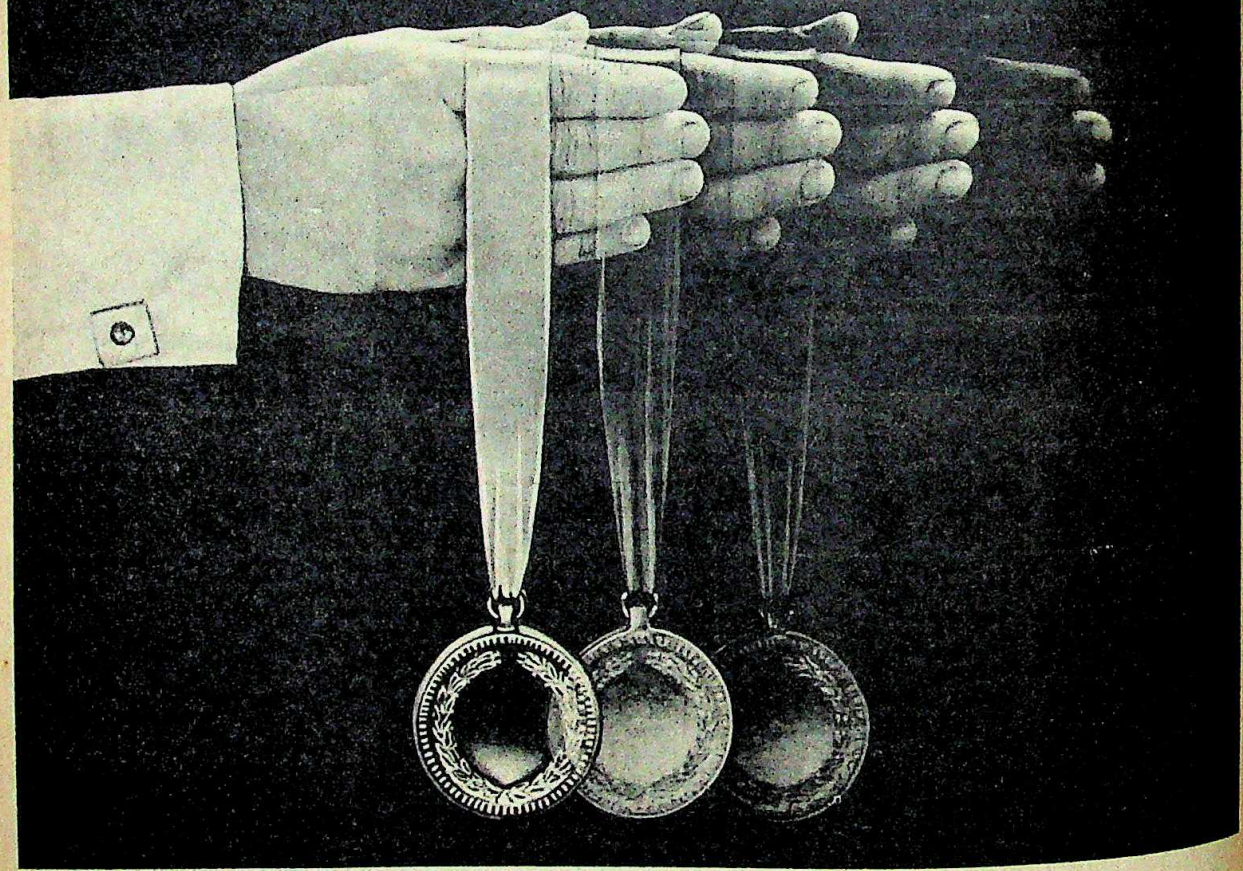
Aplab's Corporate Convictions 1

Outstanding achievement comes from seeking challenge.



Aplab entered the electronics field when it was an ideal sellers' market. No competition worth the name and generous Government incentives for the asking. In the near-monopoly situation, we could have made large profits. But we enforced a discipline on ourselves. To stand on our own legs and make only top quality products.

This served us well when we entered the West German and other European markets. Competing against high standards and advanced technology kept us perennially on our toes and raised our own standards.

In this constant striving to better our quality we achieved many 'firsts' and made signal contributions to the development of professional electronics.

Today we continue to hold our own in highly competitive markets making a name for ourselves and for the nation in the exciting international sphere of professional electronics.

Aplab • Bombay • Bangalore • Calcutta • New Delhi • Secunderabad

Aplab - Leadership through technology

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BUDGET

The Balancing Act

FINANCE Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh must be a worried man. As he pores over the figures of his coming budget—the first budget of the new administration and one that will set the pace for the Seventh Five-Year Plan—he must be juggling with the suggestions he has been swamped with, as all finance ministers are at this time of the year, wondering what to do with people who complain that they are being taxed almost out of existence while the other fellow is getting away scot-free. Businessmen have called for a tax on rich farmers, thereby allying themselves with academics who have been pressing for such a tax for years. Trade union leaders would like all wage-earners to be taken off the tax rack even though they often earn more than white-collar workers. Industrialists have also tried to make out a case for zero import duties on capital goods as well as basic raw materials, light duties on intermediates and a very high rate of duty on finished products. And then there are of course myriad suggestions for flushing out black money, from hanging black marketeers to demonetisation of high-value currency notes, though the biggest such note, the hundred-rupee one, is now worth no more than Rs 15 at 1960 prices.

At such times, it pays to stand conventional wisdom on its head. Is taxation the only way, or even the best way, of garnering resources? The finance minister was recently asked this question, and his reply is significant:

"Take resource raising as two things: first, resource raising in the sense of what goes into the Government kitty. The second is tapping savings for investments which may not necessarily be in the Government's purview but which certainly go to promote economic activity and thereby employment and the gross domestic product goes up. That is one way also of mobilising total resources of the country. When you are thinking of the country, it is not only the Government you are thinking of. It is the total economic activity in the country."

It is refreshing to find government spokesmen talking about 'total economic activity' and not just government revenues. This is a big change and hopefully it is reflected in the coming budget. Once the Government accepts the fact that it is not the sole repository of the nation's resources, it will have moved towards freeing the planning process from the constraints of centralisation.

Take the seventh plan which is now expected to be ready by June or July this year, though, going by press reports, it may not be markedly different from the earlier version. In that version, there was an uncovered deficit of Rs 39,000 crore, which was more than 20 per cent of the total outlay of Rs 180,000 crore. It has been said that the outlay will not be changed, no matter what happens. Will the deficit also remain unchanged at Rs 39,000 crore or will it be brought down to Rs 10,000 crore, the figure mentioned in one of the notes hurriedly circulated last year? This question is important, because most estimates of deficit finance have been exceeded in the past and there is no reason to believe that things will be different this time.

> **It is refreshing to find government spokesmen talking about 'total economic activity' and not just government revenues.**

In the 1980-85 plan, the deficit envisaged was Rs 5,000 crore. However, the actual figure is likely to be in excess of Rs 13,000 crore. If the seventh plan goes the way of the sixth, the deficit may turn out to be more than Rs 25,000 crore, or Rs 5,000 crore a year, for every year of the plan beginning with 1985-86. If, however, the finance minister takes the view that what matters is the total activity and not just government finances, he can stay his hand and go slow on the deficit business.

The income generated from agriculture, which is still our largest single sector, more than twice as large as industry, and in terms of savings perhaps equally as resourceful, is around Rs 60,000 crore a year. Even if a small portion of this is recycled for productive purposes, it should be possible to mobilise between Rs 4,000 crore and Rs 5,000 crore a year. Mobilisation does not mean taxing farmers but by providing them with incentives to invest in equity shares and debentures of companies, as also in government bonds and saving certificates. Our equity market is, however, centred almost entirely on cities. There are no sharebrokers in villages and no facilities for the purchase of such simple things as share transfer forms. Farmers consequently prefer to purchase gold rather than shares, which must be a big fillip to smuggling and waste their savings on lavish social ceremonies.

They can't really be blamed, for as soon as they buy a few shares, they find themselves trapped in the income tax net. As the system stands at present, the company paying the dividend deducts at source a tax at the flat rate of 22 per cent (if the dividend is less than Rs 1,000), and the recipient has to submit an income tax return either to get himself taxed at a lower rate applicable to him or claim a refund. For this, he has to undergo a cumbersome procedure to maintain account books, file income tax returns, engage income tax consultants and appear before income tax authorities. And all this for a few thousand rupees a year which he can make anyway by speculating on commodities, no questions asked, or by other means which contribute next to nothing to economic development.

It is not known how much the Government collects from taxes on dividends, but it cannot be a big amount. Actually, the dividends are taxed after taxing profits, which is a kind of double taxation and therefore unfair. The whole taxation business in this country is unfair, with a salaried man paying his taxes on the dot every month, while doctors and others who make ten times his kind of money get away with murder. The finance minister must do everything to scotch the belief that what goes into the government kitty is resources with a capital R, while money left with those who earn it with the sweat of their brow and who are as much concerned with economic development as the next man, is not. It could even be argued that those who earn money are best qualified to spend it and the Government's job is to help them spend it or invest it in the most fruitful manner. Unfortunately, the roles have been reversed and that is why we are in trouble.

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SHAW WALLACE

The Acquisition Enigma

THE SECRECY shrouding the takeover of the Calcutta-based liquor giant was lifted last fortnight with the Dubai-based non-resident Indian M.R. Chabbria's announcement that he had bought the company's majority shareholding (about 38.7 per cent) from its Malaysian parent, Sime Darby Behard. What remained unexplained, however, was the initial secrecy surrounding the deal which is reported to have been effected sometime in December last year. Shaw Wallace bosses, after formally announcing last month that their majority shares had indeed changed hands, have lapsed into catatonic silence, leaving corporate watchers guessing as to who the new buyer could possibly be.

The company's tight-lipped bosses had been refusing to either confirm or deny press reports sugggesting that the south Indian liquor king, Vijay Mallya, and Chabbria had jointly purchased Shaw Wallace's foreign holdings. "We have no idea who has actually taken over the company since we have not been officially notified," company secretary Aloke De had been insisting. Chabbria however, made it quite clear that the Shaw Wallace management had all along known about him but had instead chosen to maintain an air of mystery over the takeover, perhaps to convince the Government that something underhand was afoot. On the other hand, why Chabbria had remained equally silent all this while is also not clear.

Shaw Wallace would have been a prize catch for Mallya not only because it is one of the largest liquor companies in the country but also for its excellent financial performance in recent years. At present, liquor constitutes just a fraction of the company's operations. Liquor, wines, and beer contributed 40 per cent to the total turnover of Rs 263.1 crore in 1983-84. Fertilisers and pesticides are fast becoming major money-earners for the company and contributed Rs 101.6 crore during the last financial year, not to speak of a thriving consumer products division.

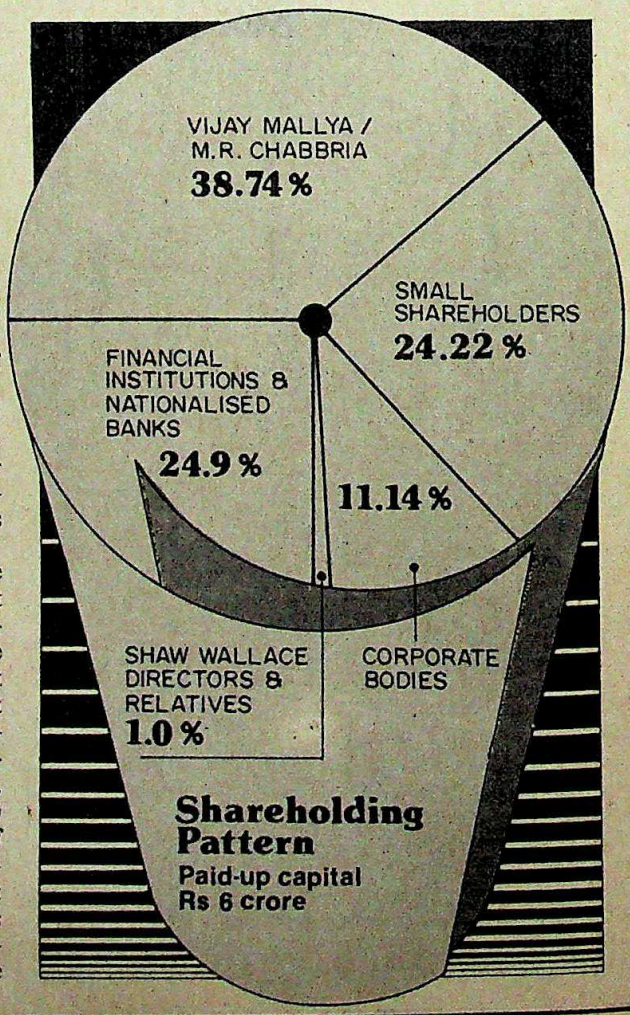
The flurry of activity in the Shaw Wallace headquarters in Calcutta, the recent trips of top company officials, including Chairman S.P. Acharya, to Delhi and Madras, the sudden and secretive unofficial board meeting in New Delhi, did not, however, suggest any bewilderment on the part of the management. By last fortnight it was clear that the company's management, led by its chairman, were gearing up for a showdown. They knew who the new buyers were but were not admitting it as part of their strategy.

Acharya: personal stakes

Investigations revealed that the present management's battle against the acquisition move was not new. Sometime early last year, Acharya came to know that Vijay Mallya was angling for the company. Sime Darby did not appear to have divulged any details of their negotiations with any prospective buyer and did not even publicly announce their intentions of disposing of their holdings in their Indian subsidiary. Acharya, who has considerable personal stake in the company, did however assume everything was hunky-dory. Drastic changes obviously in the offing were to be resisted.

To maintain majority support among the company's shareholders, Acharya is reported to have enlisted the aid of, among others, a south Indian businessman, G. Venkateshwaran, and four of his investment companies—Aruna International, Sujata Producers, Sujata Estates and Sujata Films, all private limited companies. During September-November last year, Venkateshwaran lapped up approximately 2.7 per cent of the company's shares from the market, sending Shaw Wallace equity prices skyrocketing. However, the buying had been so reckless that recently the Income Tax Department cracked down and seized the transfer documents, putting the Shaw Wallace management in a bit of a spot.

Top Shaw Wallace managers have also floated a number of miniscule investment companies, with paid up capitals, in some cases as low as Rs 100, which were used for acquiring shares of different companies including those of Shaw Wallace. Investigations at the company law board revealed that companies like Dakhineswar Investments Pvt Ltd, and Paganas Investment Pvt Ltd owned by Shaw Wallace employees, despite having paid up capitals of only Rs 100 each



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have investments to the tune of Rs 50 lakh and more. Interestingly, another such company called Pakshiraj Investments has four directors, out of which three are senior Shaw Wallace managers: finance manager, marketing manager and financial controller. Moreover, Acharya personally holds at least 36,000 Shaw Wallace shares (0.6 per cent of the total equity) and has steadily been acquiring more shares.

These attempts to stave off a new buyer were nevertheless desperate since the financial institutions and banks with their 24.9 per cent stake were the key. Mallya presumed that the financial institutions would bend over backwards to suit him. And this happened to be a crucial mistake.

When Mallya bought the four UK-based Shell companies (J.C. Shaw and Company (22.2 per cent), Shaw Darby and Company (5.87 per cent), Shaw Scott and Company (6 per cent) and Thomas Rice Milling Company (5.7 per cent) from Sime Darby Malaysia, he did not bother to specify in the sales clause that the former would be responsible for the registration of Mallya's shares with Shaw Wallace. Neither did Mallya ensure Sime Darby's responsibility in putting through his nominees on the Shaw Wallace board. The moment the sale was concluded Sime Darby disclaimed all further responsibility.

The unexpected stumbling block to Mallya's plans proved to be the newly-elected Government, which declared it was serious about preventing concentration of economic power. Mallya already controls a commanding share of the Indian liquor market. Through his numerous companies, like the well-known United Breweries, Cavendis and Shaw Wallace in his hand Mallya would have an estimated 80 per cent of the Indian liquor industry under his control. The financial institutions decided they would not support the Mallya takeover.

While it is not entirely clear precisely what stage M.R. Chabbria was dragged into the deal by Mallya, what is obvious is that Chabbria, with his well-publicised international financial standing, could serve as a proxy. Mallya henceforth withdrew from the official picture, pushing Chabbria to the forefront. Chabbria came to Calcutta in the middle of February to try and persuade the Shaw Wallace chairman to relent. R.P. Goenka who was among the few people who met the Dubai-based tycoon in Calcutta told INDIA TODAY: "I asked Chabbria point blank whether he had taken over Shaw Wallace and he replied that he had not done so yet."

Acharya knew he had Mallya and Chabbria at a disadvantage, especially after last fortnight's unscheduled board meeting in New Delhi where the nominees of the financial institutions were present and assured their support. Acharya, who was due to retire in June this year was subsequently allowed a further extension of two years. Presently the management is quickly trying to plug all loopholes in their defence. Recently, several senior barristers of Calcutta High Court were also requested by the company to accept retainerships so that they would not take up briefs on someone else's behalf against them.

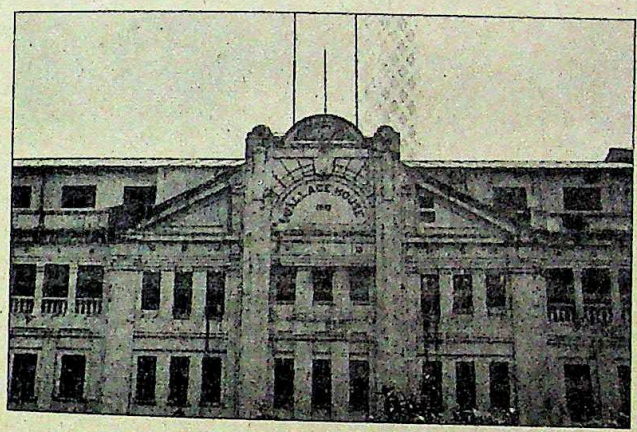
Apart from being prepared to take on Mallya and Chabbria in the Calcutta High Court, the Shaw Wallace management is also reported to have decided to seek governmental intervention as a last resort. The Companies Act allows the top executive of a company to complain to the Government if a change in ownership threatens to "affect prejudicially the affairs of the company". While it is unlikely that the Government will be able to dismiss Mallya and Chabbria as incompetent, it can always concur if Acharya argues that Mallya might hurt the company because it competes with his other liquor units.

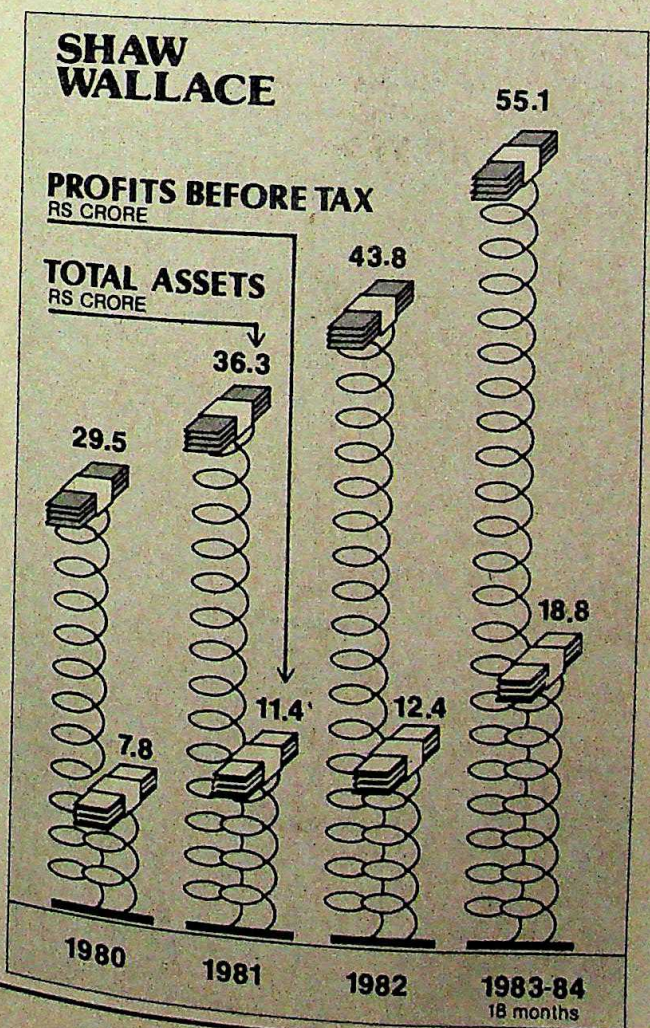
Unfortunately, the top management's optimism was not shared by other employees including junior and middle-level executives. Unconfirmed rumours about the take-over and the new owner's intention of selling off most Shaw Wallace divisions cast a pall of gloom in its Calcutta headquarters. Even the normally vocal union members were strangely reticent. "We have only been told that Sime Darby has sold its four UK-based subsidiaries that held about 39 per cent of our shares. Not a word more," a middle-level manager confided.

The Shaw Wallace management was holding all the trumps till Chabbria's announcement. Hence their deliberate silence on the change of ownership. The impasse has been broken but the final denouement is yet to come.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

Shaw Wallace: secret sale





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BANKING

The Head Hunt

THE WORLD of bankers is a staid and proper world, where practices inspire confidence and change is wrought by evolution, not revolution. Right? Wrong! That is, if a series of changes ordered in the boardrooms of the nationalised banks is any indication. By its actions, the Government has at last indicated that it intends to act seriously to put right the rapidly deteriorating performance of the banking system (INDIA TODAY, December 15, 1983).

In an unprecedented move last fortnight, the Finance Ministry gave three chief executives marching orders before their time was up. S.V. Sonalkar, chairman and managing director of the Central Bank of India has been fired 20 months short of his three-year term. S.L. Baluja, chairman and managing director of the Punjab National Bank (PNB) was ordered out 16 months before his term expired and S.S. Master, executive director of the Bank of Baroda was sacked though he was to retire after 10 years.

The decision came after a thorough scrutiny of these banks' operations which showed up what Finance Ministry sources describe as "unsound decisions". Said Finance Minister V.P. Singh: "These changes are a part of the Government's efforts to tune the banking system in the country and put people with proven credibility and efficiency at the top level."

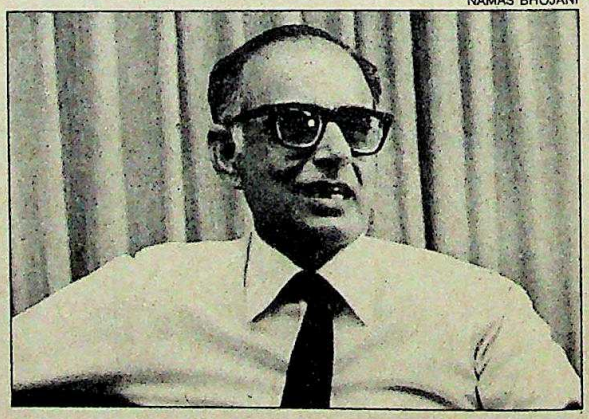
Singh had, in fact, first wielded his axe soon after he moved to the Finance Ministry two months ago. Among his early decisions was one ordering the removal from the boards of nationalised banks those directors whose term had expired. Directors were earlier usually allowed to continue in office till alternative appointments were made. Since selections were often delayed, many directors remained on the boards far beyond their usual three-year terms.

Not any longer, the new orders said, even if no new appointees were readily available. In one well publicised fell swoop, 92 bank directors were removed from 12 nationalised banks, and according to banking sources, the decision was swiftly implemented to frustrate possible manoeuvring by some incumbents to secure extensions.

But there has never before been anything like the dismissal of the three top executives carried out last fortnight. And while banking circles are buzzing with speculation about the reasons, it is clear that the three removed from their jobs are being taken to task for not acting with appropriate firmness and despatch when lapses and irregularities in their banks were brought to their notice by various agencies including the Reserve Bank of India. As a result of this dubious business, the PNB and Central banks lost some Rs 150 crore in business done abroad, according to a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe concluded last November.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

NAMAS BHOJANI



Bank executives Baluja (top) and Sonalkar: marching orders

Sonalkar is believed to have lost his job largely on account of his bank's involvement with the now bankrupt Britain-based Esal group of industries. The Central Bank is owed over Rs 45 crore by the Esal group which is owned by expatriate Indian businessman Rajinder Sethia. The Central Bank's London branch gave the group loans worth Rs 51.7 crore, over 60 per cent unsecured, in spite of adverse comments made by the bank's internal auditors and the RBI (INDIA TODAY, March 15, 1984).

The CBI later reported that the securities offered by the group were unsound and when Esal lost heavily in highly speculative business dealings with Nigeria, the Central Bank lost as well. Sonalkar, whose term was renewed for three years in December 1983 in the middle of this controversy, recently sought to convince Singh that the bank's money was fully secured and that it would recover its dues. But the Government was reportedly unconvinced, pointing out that additional loans had been given to Esal at a time when it was obviously sinking.

Baluja's bank not only advanced over Rs 100 crore to Esal in similar circumstances, it was responsible for channelling Rs 13 crore into India from Swraj Paul's Britain-based Caparo group. Paul's attempted buying of the shares of two Delhi-based companies, DCM and Escorts, has been highly controversial and there have been allegations that the rules were flouted.

In the Esal case, Baluja headed a rescue team made up of his bank, Sonalkar's and the Union Bank of India, and recommended a package deal worth Rs 30 crore to bale out the Sethias. The rescue shot down this attempt, and the battle was lost last month when a London court declared Esal insolvent and allowed a creditor bank to recover its dues. The judgment made no mention of the PNB and Central Bank dues, and with Esal in liquidation, the two banks stand to lose some 60 per cent of the advances they made. Esal is not the only black mark against Baluja: the Punjab National Bank, according to the latest estimates, may not be able to recover some Rs 300 crore given to the group in loans.

In comparison with these numbers, Master is being held morally responsible for a far smaller sum. According to a

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PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS

Sorry State

IN THE last five years, the public sector banks have become the veritable pork-barrel of political patronage. Not only have the chief executives been chosen on political considerations, but an overwhelming majority of the 160 non-official directors of the 20 nationalised banks have been drawn from the ranks of the ruling party. Though the Banking Registration Act stipulates the appointment of the nominees of depositors, artisans, industry and farmers on the boards, these interests have all too often been represented by Congress(I) workers, pro-party journalists and industrialists, ministers' relatives, defeated Congress(I) MP's and MLA's (INDIA TODAY March 15, 1982).

The political appointees acquired greater political clout after 1982 when the Union Government decided to give liberal loans totalling over Rs 500 crore under Indira Gandhi's new 20-point programme. Even earlier, individual applications for loans worth over Rs 25 lakh were approved by the boards of banks and this enabled the non-official directors to build up considerable lobbies. Many a director's name was linked with controversial deals. In 1981, the Parliament was rocked by the then union finance minister R. Venkataraman's admission that his officials were looking into allegations that the directors of various banks were obliging each other with loans totalling over Rs 20 crore. The Reserve Bank too was flooded with complaints about directors misusing their positions to benefit firms run by their relatives. Last year, the RBI received a complaint about Andhra Bank whose Hyderabad branch had allegedly sanctioned loans worth Rs 3.92 crore to a construction company owned by relatives of K. Sambasiva Rao, a non-official director on the board of the bank. The loans were allegedly given on the inflated value of the assets pledged as securities to the bank.

Fraud is the other major malady that has afflicted the nationalised banks. Between May and June 1984, the Reserve Bank's special investigation cell launched inquiries into 12 major frauds and four serious complaints including those relating to the Punjab National Bank and Central Bank's operations in London. The cell found that various banks had been duped to the tune of over Rs 21 crore in the first nine months of 1983—by the bank's own employees including senior executives enjoying powerful patronage. The Parliament's Estimates Committee passed adverse remarks about the functioning of the Bank of India and the Syndicate Bank and called for a thorough probe into the alleged misuse of position by the then chairman of the Syndicate Bank.

The latest frauds to have come to light relate to the Indian Overseas Bank (IOB). The bank advanced loans of Rs 120 crore to companies in Indonesia, Singapore and Hong Kong owned by non-resident Indians. These have now become either bad debts or stagnant accounts. Interestingly, the advances were given despite adverse reports from financial experts on the feasibility of these industrial ventures. For example, in late 1980 when it was found that Texmaco Industries in Indonesia was not doing quite as well as expected, a management expert, Professor Paul Masspally of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, was asked to look into the company's operations. Masspally and other experts reportedly found serious lapses and observed that Texmaco was siphoning off the bank's funds into other subsidiaries. Due to adverse economic conditions and unsoundness of the project, the bank could not recover over Rs 25 crore in time.

The bank also lost over Rs 5 crore in its dealings with certain non-banking financial institutions operating in the Gulf.

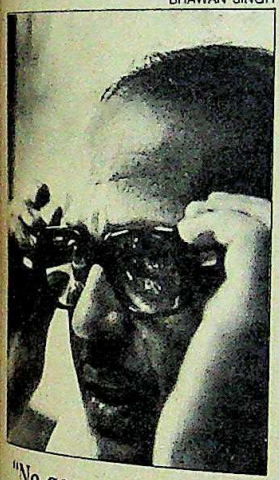
The bank's Hong Kong branch lost over Rs 2.5 crore in the purchase of an unstable currency. While the bank has long given up all hope of recovering any of its losses abroad, hardly any senior official has been hauled up. The story is none too different at the Punjab and Sind Bank (PSB) where officials indicted by the Reserve Bank for lapses in operations both overseas and in India have either been actually promoted or gone scot-free. According to the Reserve Bank sources, over Rs 50 crore of PSB are locked up in sticky accounts or bad debts given to either relatives of bank officials or politicians connected with the ruling party.

report, some of the Bank of Baroda's Calcutta branches have been cheated of Rs 6 crore by a private company conniving with certain officials in the branches. The modus operandi was simple: the private party opened 19 current accounts —all but one benami—in three branches and the officials went ahead and sanctioned credit limits, issued cheques and permitted overdrafts without the proper assessments, as the CBI put it, of "creditworthiness and ownership of assets, and market reputation".

If the Government intended to stir up the normally placid waters of the banking system, it certainly has succeeded. More such action may be forthcoming if the controlling agencies, such as the RBI and Finance Ministry step up their vigil, expedite investigations into bank frauds and recommend directors and chief executives with greater circumspection. Said Singh: "No government can allow the credibility of the banking system to suffer. Honest bankers will be encouraged, the corrupt and inefficient will have to go sooner or later."

The ministry's banking department is now preparing a new set of guidelines for the appointment of non-official directors to bank boards, and hopes that only pro-

BHAWAN SINGH



"No government can allow the credibility of the banking system to suffer. Honest bankers will be encouraged, the corrupt and inefficient will have to go sooner or later."

V.P. SINGH,
finance minister

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fessionals or those genuinely representative of client interests, and not mere politicians, will find their way to them. The search is on for over 200 professionals, industrialists, artisans and agriculturists to fill the vacancies caused by the recent changes on the boards.

Not everyone has greeted the new broom with equal enthusiasm. There are some officials who don't believe that hiring and firing is the answer to better banking: it might just serve to inhibit decision-making which usually involves a certain amount of risk taking. Moreover, it doesn't tackle the strong nexus that exists between the nationalised banks and certain political interests which have contributed to the immense increase in the number of bank fraud cases. Of some 100 criminal cases registered by the CBI against public bank officials, only about five ended in convictions. A proposal was mooted recently to amend the banking service rules to hold chief executives personally responsible for bank frauds, but it has not found favour. Perhaps it would be an unfair measure, but unless frauds and ineptitude are immediately followed up by criminal or other proceedings, the latest clean-up drive may end up as nothing more than an exercise in futility.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

TOILET SOAPS

Frothing Over

RAINDROP, Ria, Oasis, Bubbles, Thrill, Wave, Piyu: this may sound like a list of soft drinks or dancers at a seedy nightclub, but it is not. It is a list of new brands of toilet soaps which have appeared on the shelves in the last few months. In 1984 nearly 20 new brands were launched and this year will see another dozen, which means that by the end of 1985 there will be over 50 brands hustling for attention. Says Shunu Sen, vice-chairman, marketing, Hindustan Lever, which commands an overwhelming two-thirds of the market: "I have lost track of the number of people in soaps."

Most of the rush is in the premium category of toilet soaps priced at Rs 3 and above which is about a fifth of the total market of Rs 300 crore and about 20,000 tonnes of soap annually. From 1981 to 1984, 28 new brands appeared in the shops in the premium segment as compared to 14 new entrants in the popular category. The most successful of the newcomers is undoubtedly the Ponds pair of Dreamflower and Cold Cream launched last year which has already grossed a market share of 5 per cent.

The Ponds success could be one of the reasons why Lever has revamped their star and market leader, the scene-stealing Liril with a brand new wrapper and a new perfume and is bringing out another luxury soap called Sunsilk. Of the others, Tomco's Raindrop, a July 1984 offering is holding its own with a market share of about 3 per cent and the trade's response to Lakme's new bath soap launched just over a month ago in the south is reported to be good.

Alas, for every success there are a dozen failures. Godrej's Nimin, a neem-based soap which was launched in April has sunk without trace. So has Ranbaxy's Naturelle Herbal and Swastik's Blush. In fact all the top five premium brands which hog 57 per cent of the market cake are stalwarts of long standing: Liril, Pears, Mysore Sandal, Cinthol and Shikakai. Quips B. Kumar, marketing controller, Swastik Household and Industrial Products: "The soap market is a slippery one and with so many people in the bathroom there are likely to be many casualties."

Newcomers have little choice but to try and make it in the premium segment because the popular segment is virtually impregnable. Hindustan Lever's Hama, Lux, Rexona and Lifebuoy have almost 80 per cent of this segment. Tomco is a distant second with Hamam, OK Bath and New Ria. Oswal Agro's Oasis and Kalpa have taken about 5 per cent of the market.

The other reason why the premium segment is seething with so much activity is that only limited quantities need to be produced and thus entrepreneurs can farm out actual production. For instance about two-thirds of Godrej's production is composed of guest brands like Dreamflower and Cold Cream, Nicholas Laboratories' Clear-tone and Johnson and Johnson's Baby Soap. In a madly competitive effort, manufactures are moving into specialised categories like baby soaps and clinical soaps: Wipro's Bubles, Swastik's Desire and Reckitt and Colman's Dettol. However these are yet to make their mark.

The next few months are going to see more activity on the soap scene. Oswal, flush with the reasonable success of their popular brands is moving into the big time with an offering hopefully titled 24 Carats. Ponds is trying to take on the Karnataka sandal monopoly with a sandal soap and Godrej is toying with a premium brand. It's the old familiar situation of hordes of cooks stirring the froth.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

Bath soaps: a slippery race

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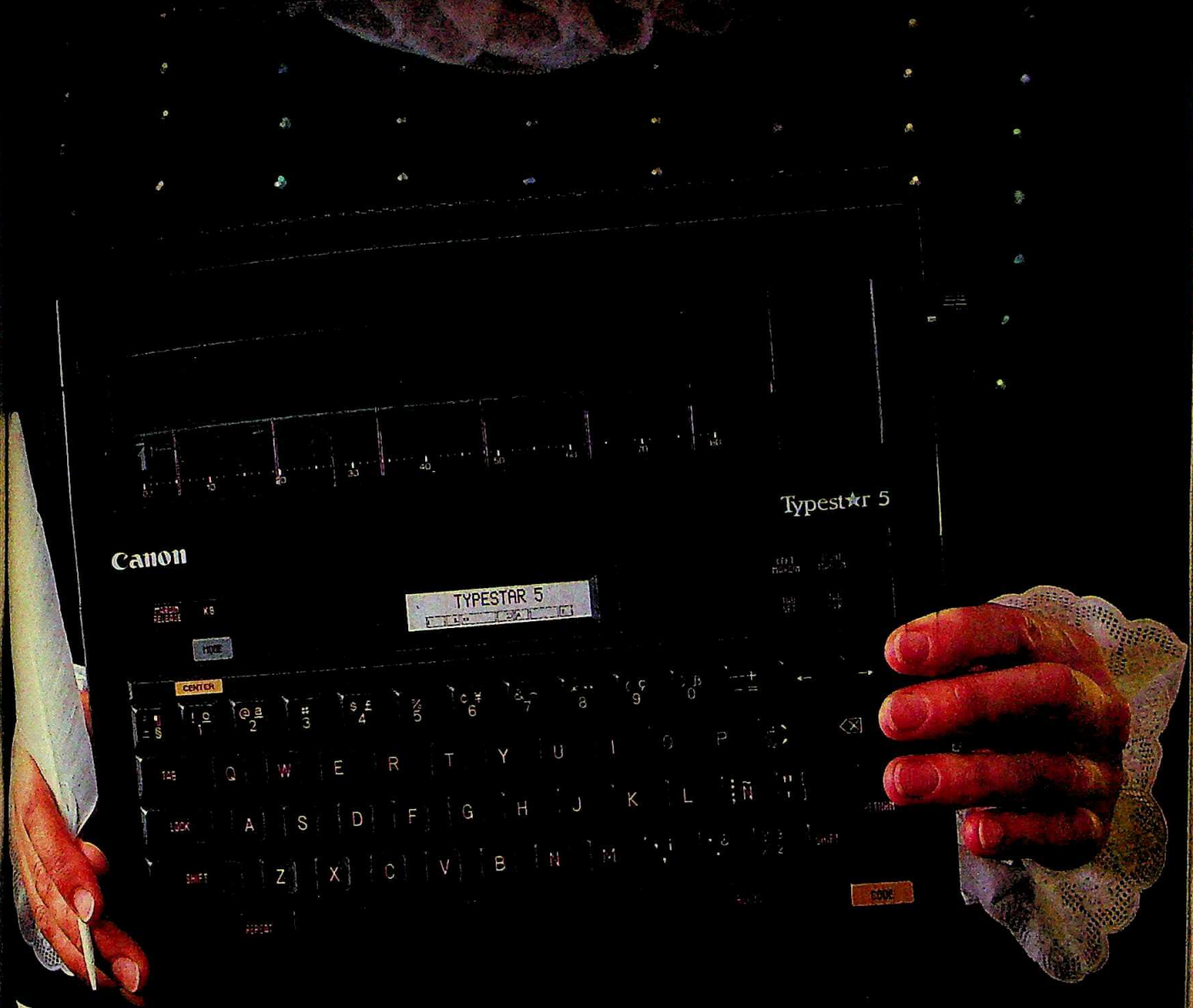

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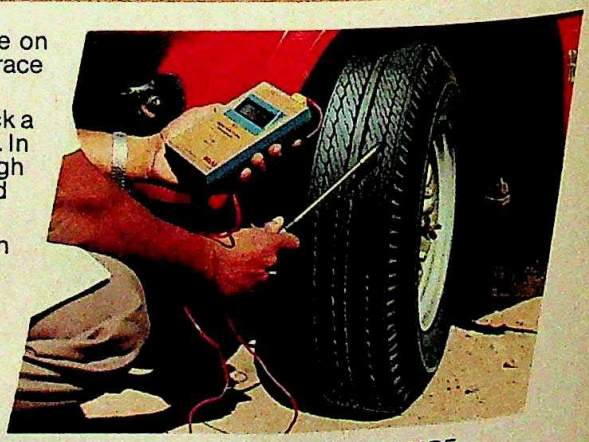

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BSEC

The Reward Racket

WHEN the 10-year-old Bihar State Export Corporation (BSEC) decided to award all its 60-member staff, including Chairman and Managing Director R.R. Prasad, IAS, handsome bonuses a few months ago because the company had turned in a profit, the state's bureaucracy sat up startled at this unusual gesture of self-congratulation. Last month, in what Prasad described disgustedly as "government's unnecessary interference and one of the constraints in (BSEC's) functioning", the state Government ordered the employees to return their bonuses. To shed light on how it all might have occurred Senior Editor T.N. NINAN and Patna Correspondent FARZAND AHMED reconstruct an improbable conversation between a bureaucrat and BSEC manager.

Bihar Government Official: I called you today because I have heard about some funny decisions being taken in your company.

Manager of Bihar State Export Corporation (owned by the Bihar Government): What funny decisions?

Official: What is this I hear that your chairman-cum-managing director has gifted to himself Rs 10,000 as a good performance award?

Manager: If you will excuse me, that is the wrong way of putting it. The company did well last year, and therefore it was decided that all the 60 workers and managers should be given an ex gratia-cum-good performance award. The Chairman, Mr R.R. Prasad, got Rs 10,000, but everyone got the equivalent of three months' salary.

Official: What is this good performance you are talking about?

Manager: The company made a profit of Rs 3.25 lakh last year, on sales of Rs 6 crore.

Official: And how much have you given to yourselves as a good performance award?

Manager: It comes to a total of Rs 2.20 lakh.

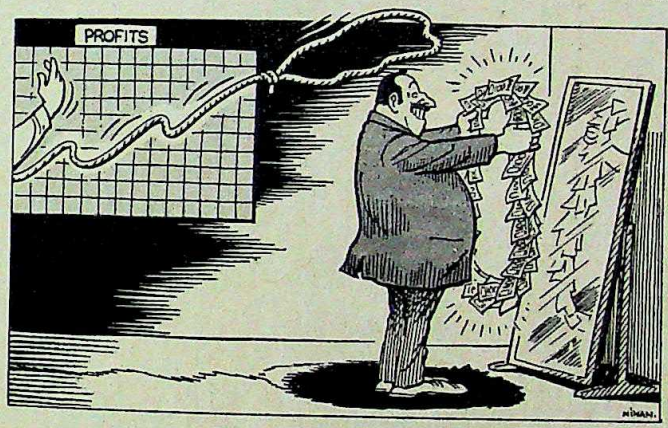
Official: Do you mean that you have eaten up two-thirds of your company's profits? Don't you call that a pretty funny decision?

Manager: If I may say so, other companies owned by the Bihar Government do the same thing.

Official: Which?

Manager: The Bihar State Financial Corporation shows profits only on paper, and it gives good performance awards to its staff almost every year. And nobody has objected.

Official: I will look into that. But let me ask you about your own performance. The profit figure of Rs 3.25 lakh is before tax. After tax, it may be lower than Rs 2.20 lakh. In that case, the company staff will have eaten up the full year's profits. Second, your company's accounts have not been audited for the last four years. So your profits too may be only on paper, just like the Bihar State Financial Corporation's.



Manager: I think our company's performance is better. In fact, we have no debts of any kind, we have taken no loans from either the Government or our bank, and in fact we now have a Rs 1 crore bank balance. We are the only people who pay our suppliers promptly and in full. I think the performance awards were well earned.

Official: Don't divert the issue. Let us talk of hard finances. Your profits of Rs 3.5 lakh are on a share capital of Rs 72 lakh. That is a return of less than 5 per cent on the Government's investment, and is low by any commercial standard. Second, your profit of Rs 3.5 lakh is on a turnover of Rs 6 crore. So your profit margin is about half per cent of your sales. That is in fact dangerously low. So no good performance award was called for.

Manager: With all respect, our company has performed a very good role in developing the efforts of cottage and small-scale industries. We have helped create the carpet industry in Bihar, and we have found an export market for the traditional products of poor tribals. This is a very good record.

Official: Again you are diverting the issue from finance. Even by the normal yardstick, the bonus ceiling is 20 per cent of your pay, but you have given three months' pay, which is equal to 25 per cent of your annual pay. Second, the bonus ceiling is Rs 1,800. But your chairman has taken Rs 10,000. How can you do such a thing? You are treating the whole thing as "Sarkar ka paisa".

Manager: If you don't mind my saying so, it is Sarkar ka paisa.

Official: Then why are you taking the Government's money? Did you ask the Government's permission?

Manager: I don't know. The chairman may have taken permission.

Official: In any case, I don't think your performance is very good. In financial terms, it is barely passable. And even in terms of developing activity in the state, the garments that you export are not made in Bihar. You are exporting garments made in other states.

Manager: I think we have submitted a note on this to the Government. We have pointed out that most of the registered small-scale industries in Bihar exist only on paper, so it is difficult to procure items locally.

Official: I am also told that a lot of appointments are made on a caste basis.

Manager: Some disgruntled employees and politicians are spreading this false rumour. And in any case, this is not relevant to the issue. The company has been doing well and our profits have been going up. In fact, this year our profits are going to be Rs 12 lakh, almost four times last year's figure.

Official: Does that mean you will take four times the amount as good performance award? Will your chairman take Rs 40,000?

Manager: Well,..

Official: I am issuing a government order asking you and everyone in your company to give back the performance awards. That includes Rs 10,000 from your chairman. When performance awards are due, the Government will give them.

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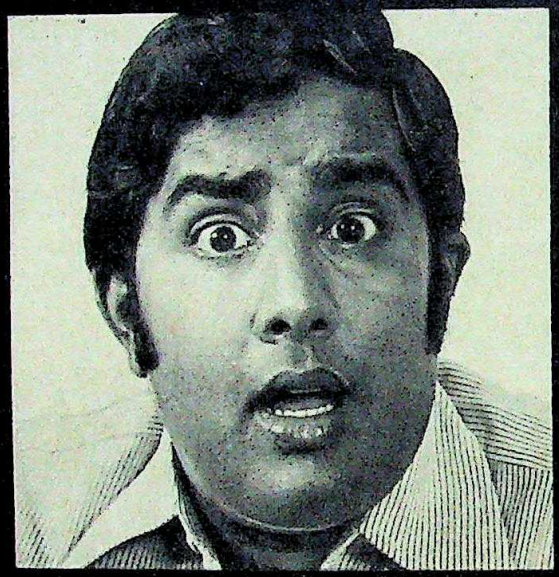
"I'm supposed to watch my cholesterol level—at 34 ?! Does this mean I have to change my whole lifestyle ?"



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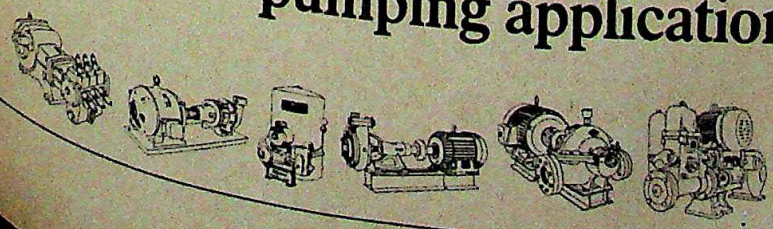

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TOURISM

Welcome Advances

FOR AN activity which earns the country over Rs 1,100 crore annually in foreign exchange, tourism has surprisingly never featured in the honour roll of top revenue earning industries. It has not even been dignified with the description of "industry", an omission which has deprived tourism units of concessional finance and subsidies to which other recognised industries are entitled. All that looks like changing now.

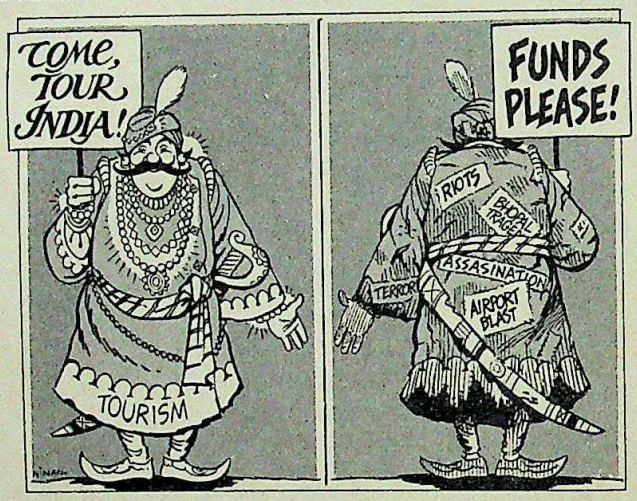
For a start, the Planning Commission in its approach paper to the Seventh Five-Year Plan has clearly recommended that "tourism should be accorded the status of an industry", because "private sector investment will have to be encouraged in developing tourism, and public sector investment should be focused only on development of support infrastructure".

Step two in the rehabilitation of tourism is the assurance by the commission to increase the Department of Tourism's budget for 1985–86 from last year's Rs 6 crore to Rs 16 crore for the next financial year. This will enable the ministry to beef up its foreign publicity budget, which in effect was only Rs 75 lakh last year, and should now go up to Rs 2 crore.

The rest of the money is going into:

- setting up a Rs 1 crore Institute of Water Sports at Goa, Kovalam or Puri;
- provision of facilities for scuba diving in the Andaman Islands;
- providing water sports facilities at the lakes at Badkhal, Srinagar, Hyderabad, Bhopal and Jaipur;
- building budget accommodation at the wildlife sanctuaries at Simlipal (Orissa), Kanha and Bandhavgarh (Madhya Pradesh), Sasangir (Gujarat), Tadoba Park (Maharashtra) and Bandipur (Karnataka);
- provision of cheap accommodation at national heritage centres such as Kushinagar and Bodh Gaya;
- printing of high quality publicity literature for distribution abroad.

This vital infusion of sorely needed funds could not have come at a more opportune time. The industry is in a bad shape, struggling to overcome the fateful after-effects of 1984. "Tourism is in the doldrums unless something happens in a big way," says Ramesh Chandra, additional director-general of tourism. Tourist arrivals in the first half of 1984 had grown by 10.4 per cent over the corresponding period of the previous year, but a series of events starting with Operation Bluestar, which got India adverse publicity abroad, reversed this trend. Ramesh Chandra said Bluestar, followed by the dismissal of the governments in Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh, the blast at Madras airport, Mrs Gandhi's assassination and the subsequent killings, culminating in the Bhopal tragedy, must have convinced all intending visitors that India was an eminently avoidable destination. No part of the country had it so bad as Jammu & Kashmir, a state whose economy subsists on tourism. The Government had to intervene and disburse a Rs 200 monthly maintenance allowance to every houseboat owner in Srinagar, and order the Jammu & Kashmir Handicrafts Corporation to buy up handicrafts, carpets and shawls worth Rs 1.5 crore to Rs 2 crore which would otherwise have been purchased by tourists.



To add to the difficulties were the amended visa regulations imposed last year which, says a travel agent, "serve as a hindrance to tourists," adding: "The Home Ministry has only passed on the visa buck to the Ministry of External Affairs whose missions abroad are just not equipped to handle visa requests expeditiously." The Travel Agents Association of India plans to take up the matter with the prime minister. Since the prime minister is also minister of tourism, "this is the only ray of hope".

Hopes have also been raised by the recent appointment of a common secretary for tourism and civil aviation. The previous practice of having a full-fledged secretary heading each department had created coordination problems. On one occasion Air-India, which is a partner in the overseas tourism publicity programme, refused to carry the Department of Tourism's publicity brochures to its foreign offices. The bundles of brochures lay gathering dust in New Delhi while tourism offices abroad complained. Ultimately the then minister Khursheed Alam Khan had to step in and sort out the tiff between the two secretaries.

In keeping with the new guidelines, the Department of Tourism is taking a second look at the necessity of maintaining so many tourism offices abroad, especially the one-man offices in areas which have not generated enough traffic to India.

A similar cost consciousness appears to have infected the public sector India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC). Managing Director Rajan Jetley says that the giant hotel chain no longer plans to build five-star hotel properties, a job that will in future be left to the private sector. ITDC will, apart from completing ongoing schemes and joint sector hotel projects, only loan consultancy and managerial expertise to builders. Two such agreements have already been signed, one in supervising the construction of a Rs 15-crore beach resort at Goa's Kanacona beach and the other to design and finally manage a 250-room five-star hotel at Hyderabad's Banjara Hills. Both hotels will be run as part of the ITDC's Ashok chain. Such deals apart, the chain plans to spend its resources in renovating and upgrading its other major properties in India, and build Yatri Niwas-type hotels at pilgrimage centres like Rishikesh, Hardwar, Ajmer, Shirdi and Dwarka.

But, as officials well know, none of this will revolutionise the industry, and Indian tourism will be no different until the setbacks of 1984 have sorted themselves out.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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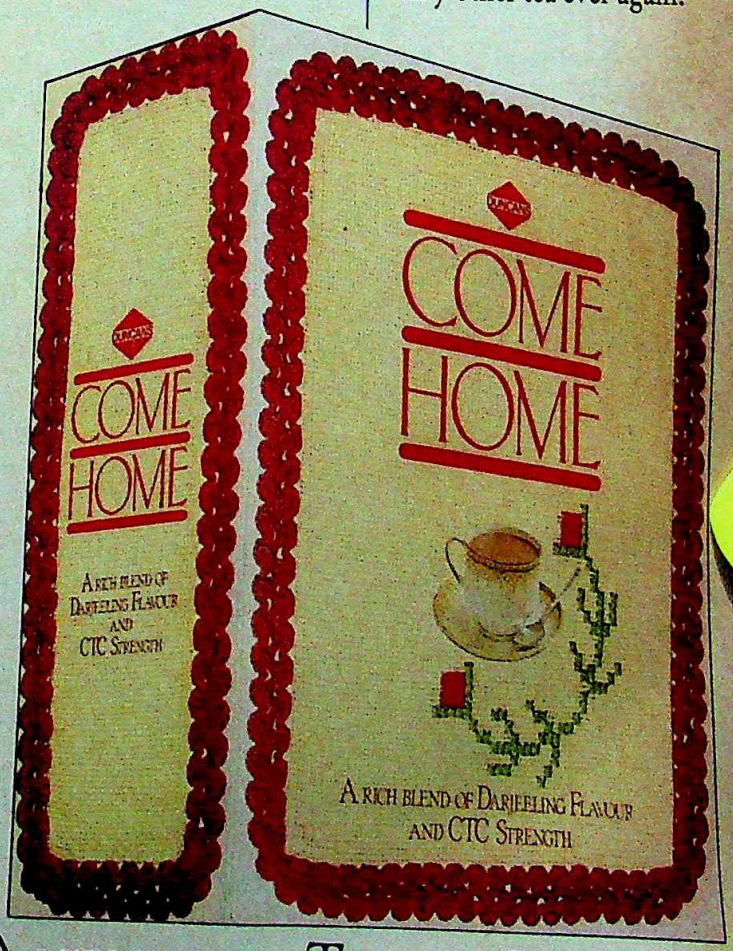

A RICH BLEND OF TEA WITH DARJEELING FLAVOUR AND CTC STRENGTH

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But like everywhere else the saying is true for Palam Vihar too; ***the sooner the better!*** Because Palam Vihar is still reasonably inexpensive and with the fast-paced development taking place the prices may not remain the same for long. In fact, a few kms away from Palam Vihar land prices are already ten times higher.

So consider what you've got going for you at Palam Vihar. And now, reconsider what you always thought about rising land prices and owning a house.

You can contact, or write to Ansals at:

Ansal Properties & Industries (P) Ltd.,
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Please tick the box for detailed literature on the free-hold property of your choice.

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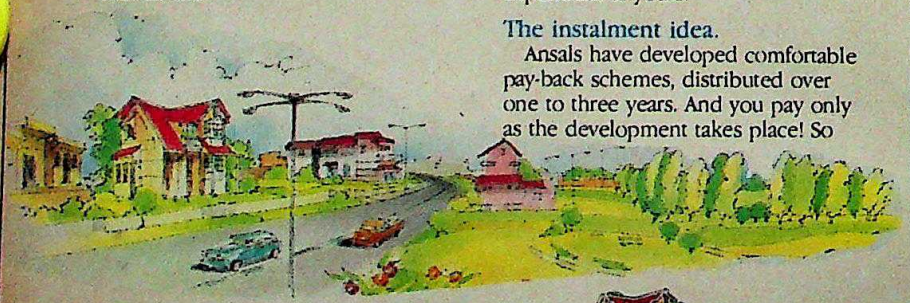

ANSALS
PALAM VIHAR

The elite neighbourhood of Delhi

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IMC

Top Spin

DECORUM has always been the hallmark of the Indian Merchants Chamber (IMC), the 77-year-old institution headquartered in a lovely old building near Churchgate in Bombay. Last month, however, the calm of its stately velvet-draped boardroom was shattered by an ugly and increasingly strident controversy when industrialist Ashok Birla abruptly withdrew his nomination after being elected unopposed as IMC president. The immediate provocation was the fact that he was not allowed to choose his own vice-president and had to accept another.

Birla: sudden backout

Birla didn't put it quite that way, of course. He said that the democratic process in decision-making was not being followed and that the IMC should stop being "a closed club of a few senior members." The "few senior members" that Birla refers to are Pravinchandra Gandhi, former chairman of Dena Bank and IMC president in 1962, Himat J. Doshi of Amar Dye Chem Ltd and Pratapsinh Mathuradas of Wallace Flour Mills, and it is an open secret that the powerful coterie headed by Gandhi has been running chamber affairs for almost two decades now. Gandhi admits as much when he says that "in every institution there are people who take more interest in its working than others."

Birla should know this better than anyone else: with the blessings of the powers-that-be he was chosen vice-president last year—traditionally the vice-president automatically becomes president the following year—and has also been a member of the powerful managing committee for 17 years. In that context why he chose this year of all years to revolt is the crux of the current controversy.

The Birla backout coincided with the second most important event in IMC affairs: the elections to the 12-member managing committee. In an unprecedented happening a group of nine led by Shantilal K. Somaiya, another former president said to have Birla's tacit backing, contested the elections against the IMC's 12 and were soundly defeated. Comments paper magnate Rohit Patel who received the largest number of votes "tradition has triumphed".

The other camp grumbled about rigged elections in private but Somaiya issued a statesmanlike statement which said injuredly: "I am amazed and surprised at the tenor and poor taste and the quality of debate. There is only one issue of principle and that is how to make the chamber more democratic and participative in nature." Retorts current IMC President Pranlal Bhogilal: "The allegation that a few people are running chamber affairs is nonsense. The chamber has always been democratic in its functioning. I suspect that the present controversy has been provoked to try and destabilise the institution."

The "foreign hand" in this case is reported to be the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), which was said to have backed Somaiya in his so-called destabilisation attempt. Everybody involved in the current squabble loudly denies any such involvement but the rumours refuse to fade away. Matters were not helped by an article front-paged by a leading city daily which pointed to the issue of bogus membership which bedevils Indian industry's apex organisation. At a press conference held earlier by the rebellious nine they said, "It is entirely mischievous to suggest that a FICCI lobby is trying to swallow the IMC".

Of more immediate importance is the trade-industry split which characterised the managing committee election. Says Chandrakant Thakker, defeated candidate and boss of the powerful Federation of Associations of Maharashtra, the state's apex trade body: "In spite of the fact that 55 per cent of the chamber's 2,000-odd members are traders, we usually have only two or three people on the committee. This imbalance must be redressed."

Nearly a month after the controversy began, neither side appears to be in any mood for compromise. Technically speaking the IMC is without a president although it does have a vice-president. The procedure to elect a new president was restarted last week and a fascinated business community is waiting with bated breath for round two.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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SWADESHI POLYTEX

Changed Fare

HE HAS every reason to walk tall. With three legal wins under his belt and the Government backing him to the hilt, Rajaram Jaipuria, the dimunitive chairman and managing director of Swadeshi Cotton Mills Company, is poised for a stunning victory over foster brother Sitaram Jaipuria, who heads Swadeshi Polytex Ltd. An end to the over nine-year brawl to control the Rs 65-crore turnover Swadeshi Polytex is in sight. A new board, which includes Rajaram, for the moment, sits in the company's board room and brother Sitaram has been stripped of all power—at least for the next two and a half months. Said a triumphant Rajaram before sailing into the first of two Swadeshi Polytex board meetings held last fortnight: "Lord Rama had a 14-year exile. My exile was for nine years."

That exile was enforced by the financial institutions which had backed Sitaram. Swadeshi Polytex was promoted by Swadeshi Cotton, and Rajaram now has 39 per cent of the staple fibre company's total equity of 39 lakh. Sitaram controls only about 9 per cent but was supported by the institutions with a crucial 16 per cent, and Mahendra Swarup, managing director of Paharpur Cooling Towers (P) Ltd and his friends who hold a 16 per cent block of shares. Last year the institutions switched support, only Swarup supporting Sitaram.

The dramatic turnabout in Rajaram's fortunes flows from a series of legal and government decisions. First, the Supreme Court shot down the claim of five small petitioners that 10 lakh Swadeshi Polytex shares owned by Swadeshi Cotton Mills carried no voting rights since the Government had taken over six Swadeshi Cotton mills in 1978. Last fortnight, the court upheld the Swadeshi management stand and an earlier Allahabad High Court verdict that only the mills, and not the company itself, had been taken over. That paves the way for Rajaram to fully flex his 39 per cent equity muscle.

Second, government officials stated in court some months ago that the Government would back the 51-year-old industrialist, and the financial institutions filed an affidavit that they had voted for him at the Swadeshi Polytex annual general meeting last year. The 16 per cent stake of the institutions together with his 39 per cent equity should pitchfork Rajaram into the saddle at Swadeshi Polytex and ease out Sitaram, the company's 59-year-old chairman and managing director, when the two brothers meet at the Swadeshi Polytex annual general meeting on May 15.

Third, the Supreme Court handed down an order last month after hearing lawyers for the institutions and Swadeshi Cotton on the one hand, and the existing Swadeshi Polytex management on the other.

Rajaram Jaipuria: dramatic change

The court said that the Swadeshi Polytex board would be recast to include four representatives of the institutions, and four each of the two camps. The two sides would each nominate one director as executive director to run the company. Any difference of opinion would be referred to the board. Sitaram would stay on as figurehead chairman and managing director till May 15, and preside over board meetings but would not have power to exercise a casting vote. The next annual general meeting would be held on May 15 "notwithstanding any order, direction or injunction of any other court in India".

The court went a step further and reserved the right to appoint the chairman of the May 15 meeting. At the last annual general meeting the scrutineers rejected the votes of the financial institutions. The institutions and Rajaram Jaipuria cried foul and went to court.

Expectedly, the Supreme Court's extraordinary compromise package satisfied no one fully. Nevertheless, a new 12-member board met on February 11 with Rajaram Jaipuria and Ashok Jaipuria, Sitaram's son, as executive directors. Two of the four Swadeshi Cotton nominees are Lohia Machines men (industrialist Sitaram Singhania, whose daughter is married to Rajaram Jaipuria's son, and Vinay Kumar Jain, the company's chief executive).

The big question that continues to dog Rajaram's ride to victory is the somersault of the institutions. A Swadeshi Cotton spokesman explains away the switch by pointing to Swadeshi Polytex's mounting tax dues (nearly Rs 6 crore, including interest, most of which is contested by the company) and to its "unprofessional management".

For all that, Rajaram Jaipuria is not taking institutional support for granted. To sew up public (and institutional) opinion, the Swadeshi Cotton camp is briefing press correspondents almost every day. The latest in a series of charges zeroes in on company profit: Swadeshi Polytex makes a profit of Rs. 4.5 crore, but profit should touch Rs 12 crore a year; staple fibre, the company's main product, is in shortage in the country and the staple fibre industry is protected from imports by high tariffs. Jain of Lohia says the company sells staple fibre at Rs 5 per kg, less than the market price.

Ashok Jaipuria disputes Jain's charges. The company sells its product for Rs 90, the same price charged by its competitors, the company's track record is excellent and the results speak for themselves. Adds Ashok: "Swadeshi Polyex has been a leader in the industry. It was the first to introduce the continuous process of polymerisation, the first to introduce polyester khadi. The credit for good management shouldn't go to an individual but an individual can ruin a company."

The company is rightly described as a goldmine and is making a foray into the lucrative ferrites field—buttressing the belief that Sitaram Jaipuria will not give up his company easily. In addition to his 9 per cent of Swadeshi Polytex's equity, small shareholders own about 18 per cent and may back him (the company has paid 15 to 20 per cent dividend in the last few years), as may Swarup. Swarup has lined up behind Sitaram Jaipuria in the past and may do so again.

The story may change course in the long run. The institutions which switched sides once could do so again or unload their shares if the price is right. Rajaram Jaipuria may have won this round, but the war to control Swadeshi Polytex may not quite end on May 15.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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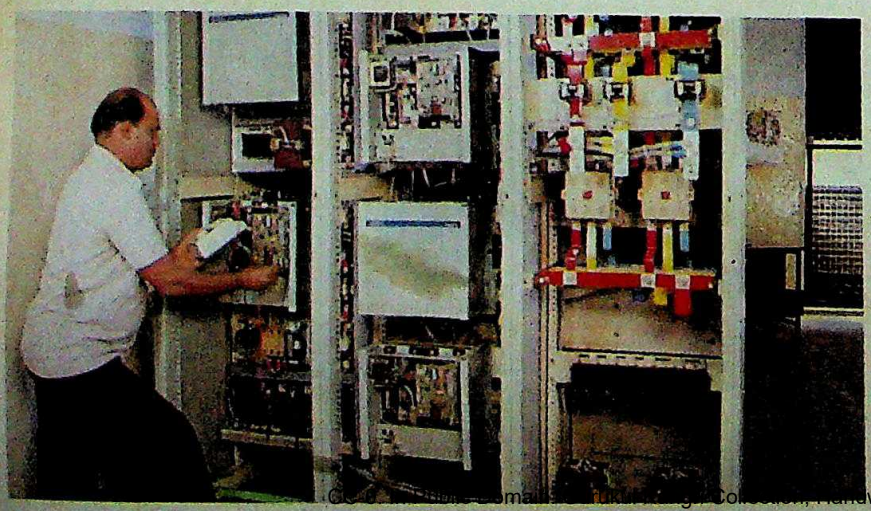

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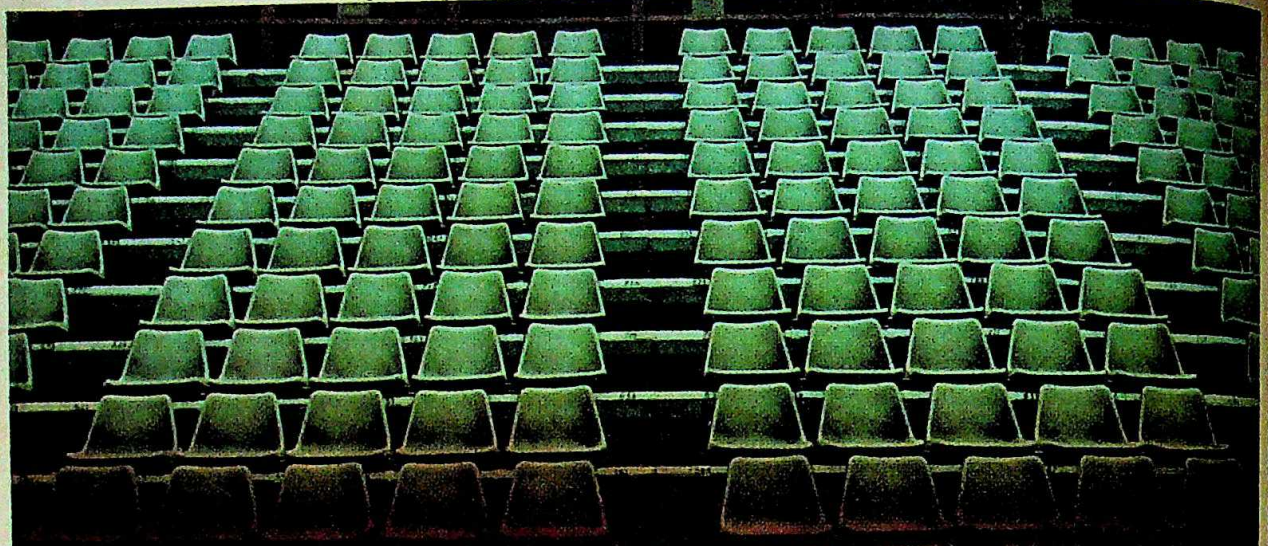

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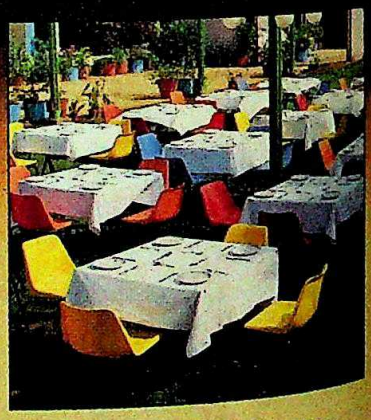

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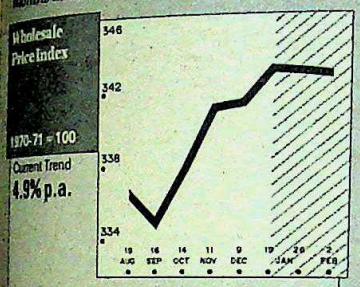
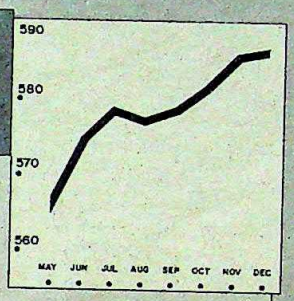
WHILE INFLATION appears to have been contained for the moment with both wholesale and consumer prices stationary, credit expansion has led to sharp increases in money supply with possible long term effects on prices. Both the share and bullion markets have been bullish. Foreign exchange reserves are down sharply, and the trade gap has widened with imports exceeding exports by about 250 crore.

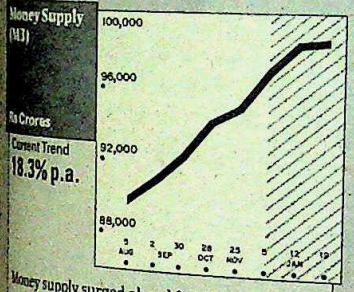
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.



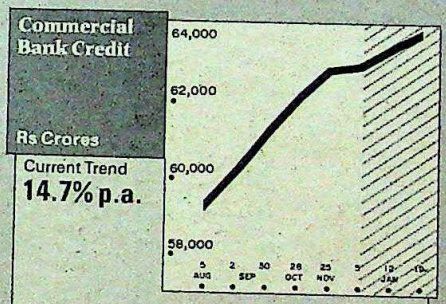
For the first time in many months, the wholesale price index dipped marginally by 0.1 per cent due to a fall in prices of food products.



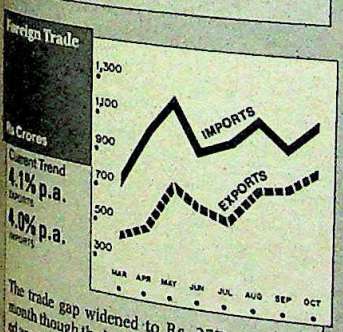
Consumer prices were almost stationary last month, increasing only marginally by about 0.1 per cent, well below the long term trend.



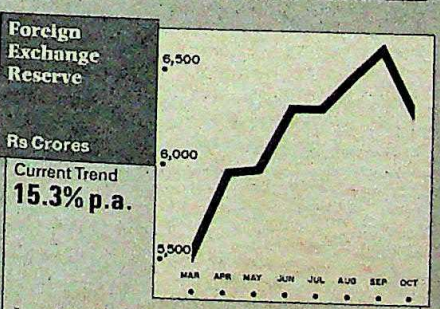
Money supply surged ahead for the second successive fortnight up by 1.7 per cent due chiefly to credit expansion by commercial banks.



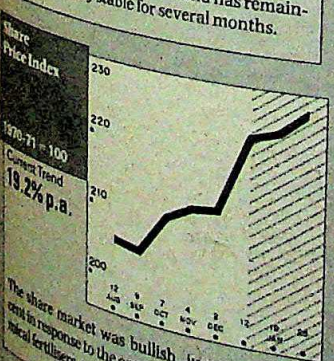
A sharp 1.4 per cent increase in bank credit to firms reversed the austerity indicated in the previous fortnight.



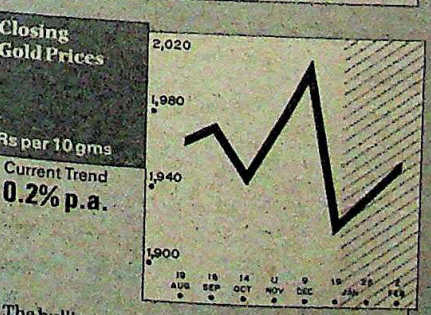
The trade gap widened to Rs 257 crore last month though the long term trend has remained approximately stable for several months.



In a disturbing development, foreign exchange reserves were down 5 per cent last month, sharply at variance with the long term trend.



The share market was bullish, jumping 2 per cent in response to the optimistic outlook in chemical fertilisers, transport equipment and paper.



The bullion market was up 1.7 per cent last fortnight following relatively stable conditions in the previous month.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with maximum growth in January 1985

	% Growth
Khandsari	10.31
Gingelly Seed	8.81
Oranges	7.97
Cashew-nuts	7.31
Gur	5.72
Coir Yarn	5.24
Cement	4.58
Ball-bearings	4.53
Zinc	4.50
Hides Raw	3.78
Electrical Motors	3.38
Atta	3.29
Meat	2.90
Power-driven Pumps	2.88
Tubes	2.86
Groundnut Oil Cake	2.46
Bajra	2.44
Gingelly Oil	2.29
Logs & Bamboo	2.23
Mining Machinery	1.99
Rice	1.87
Urad	1.86
Barley	1.75
Fish	1.69
Milk	1.55
Tyres	1.48
Eggs	1.36
Gram	1.29
Moong	1.24
Transformers	1.23
Utensils	1.07
Betel-nuts	0.98
Sugar	0.98
Bars and Rods	0.96
Pig Iron	0.95
Rails	0.93
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	0.86
Semis Billets	0.86
Camel Black	0.85
Aluminium	0.84
Tractors	0.82
Pesticides & Insecticides	0.80
Coal	0.78
Boilers	0.78
Steel Structurals	0.78
Industrial Instruments	0.77
Machine Tools	0.74

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Coal Thousand tonnes, January	14755	13966
Electricity Generated Million kwh, January	13784	12646
Saleable Steel Thousand tonnes, January	697.5	639.0
Cement Thousand tonnes, January	2646	2488
Thermal Plant Load Factor Percentage, January	53.1	54.5

—Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP/ICIM

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The world of fine furniture

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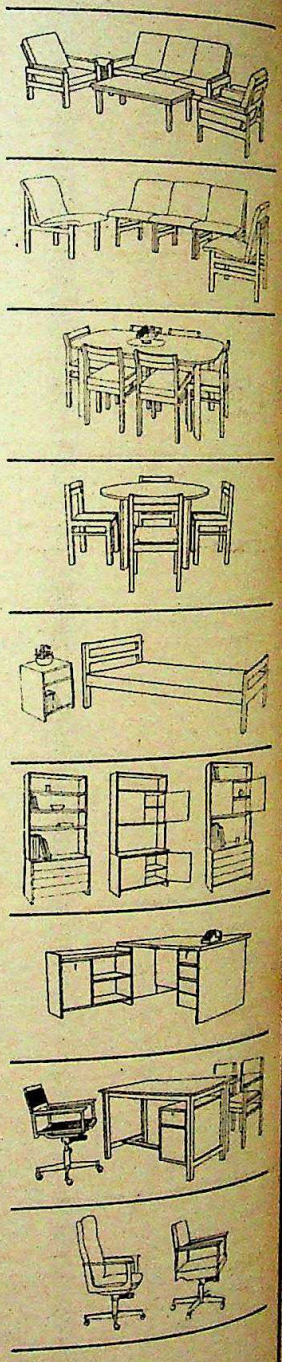

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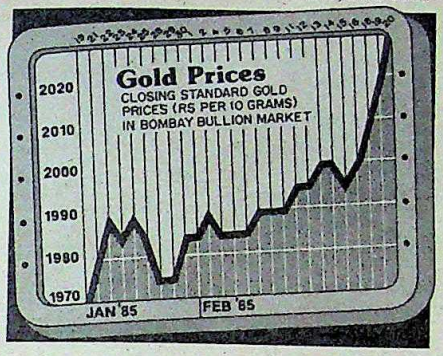
THE MARKETS

Mixed Fortunes

WIN SOME, lose some. Operators on Dalal Street, as also elsewhere, were cautious throughout the fortnight but that did not prevent them from pushing up some shares and pulling down others, with the result that the market as a whole remained more or less in its listless state, with the index stuck in the same position. Some scrips were marked up and some others were marked down but neither the bulls nor the bears wished to make a fight of it.

However, some shares had everything going for them. Tata Engineering (TELCO) touched 500 on reports that the company was planning to take up the manufacture of passenger cars in collaboration with some foreign companies. Premier Automobiles moved up on bonus expectations. Century Spinning and Associated Cement have also recovered but with the budget less than a month away few marketmen are in a mood to take chances. The market has duly noted the prime minister's remarks about black money and taxation but it doesn't know which way to jump. Will the Government come down heavily on black money hoarders or will they be taken to the nearest tree and hanged, as Nehru used to threaten?

Chart by B.K SHARMA



Corporate news is mixed. Herdillia Chemicals has reported a 29 per cent rise in sales during the six months ended December 1984 and prospects for the other half of the year are said to be promising. Glaxo has commissioned its second basic drug plant in Gujarat. Synthetics and Chemicals, once a bright star in Dalal Street, has returned to dividend list. Fifty-six companies, a record, were granted permission to raise capital in January 1985, including Vulcan-Laval, Tata Fertiliser (Rs 20 crore), Bharat Gears and Ponds. Most new issues were oversubscribed.

Some doubts remain, however. If the market is so high now, what will it be like after the budget which is now expected around the middle of March? The finance minister has said nothing to his visitors who have been crowding his office for pre-budget discussions, but those who have broken bread with him say that the minister is worried about the resources position, what with a new big plan on the cards and all those high expectations which the prime minister has described as 'scary'. Add to this the casual remark of the new chief of the Planning Commission to the effect that deficit financing is not all that harmful, provided you go about it in a quiet way. During the current plan, deficit finance has exceeded the estimate by 50 per cent, and we all know what has happened to prices. We also know what has happened to share prices, for a little deficit goes a long way in pulling share prices with it, so what you lose on the swings you gain on the roundabouts. As we said, win some, lose some.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1985 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 18.2.85	Change on Fortnight
Asian Paints	124.00	87.00	94.00	2.00 –
Ashok Leyland	37.50	29.00	32.00	4.50 –
Associated Cement	484.00	382.00	400.00	9.00 –
Atlas Copco	41.00	37.50	38.00	1.00 –
Bajaj Auto	970.00	855.00	880.00	65.00 –
Balarpur	46.25	44.50	44.75	1.15 –
Baroda Rayon	309.00	281.00	301.00	8.00 –
Bata India	50.25	48.00	49.65	0.35 –
Bayer (India)	395.00	317.50	375.00	20.00 –
Best & Crompton	72.50	61.00	70.50	2.50 +
Birla Jute	55.70	51.70	55.60	nil
Blow Plast	55.00	39.00	50.00	5.00 –
Blue Star	40.50	32.50	37.50	2.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	78.50	63.00	68.50	2.50 –
Bellamnla Industries	54.00	46.50	54.00	5.80 +
Brooke Bond	54.70	47.50	52.50	2.00 +
Century Spinning	920.00	815.00	825.00	30.00 –
Chloride India	61.50	56.90	61.50	2.10 +
Colgate	179.00	143.50	177.00	1.50 –
DCM	51.50	45.00	51.00	5.75 +
Dunlop	24.40	22.30	24.20	0.20 –
East India Hotels	28.00	25.50	26.50	nil
Escorts	64.00	55.00	58.00	4.50 –
Eveready	53.50	49.87	53.50	0.38 +
Finolex	111.00	86.00	111.00	19.00 +
Gaurav Nylon	27.50	24.50	26.25	0.25 –
Great Keen Williams	20.80	18.70	20.50	0.20 +
Gwalior Rayon	58.00	53.75	56.75	1.25 –
Hico Products	30.50	26.50	27.50	1.50 –
Hindustan Aluminium	55.00	51.00	53.75	0.95 +
Hindustan Cocoa	80.00	54.00	56.50	2.00 +
Hindustan Lever	67.00	50.75	67.00	5.00 +
Hindustan Motors	43.50	38.00	38.00	2.10 –

	1985 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 18.2.85	Change on Fortnight
Indian Aluminium	26.70	25.50	26.60	0.35 +
Indian Explosives	44.10	33.00	44.10	8.10 +
Indian Hotels	88.00	78.00	80.00	2.00 +
Indian Organic	61.00	50.25	61.00	2.00 +
Indian Oxygen	45.15	43.50	43.80	0.20 –
Indian Rayon	71.00	65.00	66.50	0.50 –
J.K. Synthetics	59.80	52.20	59.80	4.05 +
Kelvinator	65.00	49.00	64.00	6.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	145.00	127.00	136.00	6.00 –
Kothari Industrial	22.00	20.00	21.25	1.25 +
Larsen & Toubro	96.50	72.00	91.50	4.50 –
Lipton	30.50	26.50	30.50	3.00 +
Lohia Machines	52.87	42.00	52.87	2.87 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	63.00	47.50	54.00	1.00 –
Modi Rubber	24.00	19.50	23.75	1.88 +
National Organic	287.50	240.00	285.00	2.50 +
Nirlon	48.50	37.00	46.50	2.00 –
Otis Elevator	99.00	86.00	95.00	4.00 +
Peico Electronics	46.60	38.40	46.60	1.00 +
Premier Automobiles	353.00	310.00	341.00	17.50 +
Ranbaxy	75.00	49.00	67.00	1.00 +
Raymond Woollen	70.00	59.00	69.00	nil
Reliance Textiles	143.50	120.00	142.50	2.50 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	35.00	35.75	0.25 –
Siemens	46.50	42.50	42.50	2.00 –
SPIC	56.75	43.50	56.75	6.88 +
Sylvania & Laxman	29.75	27.00	29.00	1.00 +
Tata Chemicals	72.50	64.50	72.00	4.50 +
Tata Steel	400.00	373.50	397.00	1.00 –
Telco	515.00	406.00	515.00	48.00 +
Texmaco	63.00	60.00	60.25	1.35 –
Union Carbide	18.80	17.10	17.75	0.55 –
Usha Martin	29.00	23.50	29.00	0.50 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.9598	8.7427
Austria	Schilling	100	56.1664	55.0839
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.6962	34.0798
Bangladesh	Taka	1	0.51	0.50
Canada	Dollar	1	9.7324	9.5581
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1045	1.0833
Egypt	Pound	1	15.44	15.11
France	Franc	1	1.2911	1.2674
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6797	1.6490
Indonesia	Rupiah	1	0.12	0.11
Iran	Rial	1	0.1350	0.1300
Italy	Lira	100	0.6394	0.6270
Japan	Yen	100	5.0347	4.9417
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.806	0.79
Kuwait	Dinar	1	42.3916	41.6149
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1201	5.0146
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.81	0.79
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.76	0.75
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.4827	3.4191
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8473	0.8187
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.8074	5.6857
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0715	0.0702
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4940	0.4808
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.4031	1.3758
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.6628	4.5780
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.70	0.69
Thailand	Baht	100	0.4743	0.4735
UK	Pound	1	14.2775	14.0409
USA	Dollar	1	13.1250	12.8450
UAE	Dirham	1	3.51	3.49
USSR	Rouble	1	14.00	13.69
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.9462	3.8754

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd. New Delhi and quoted on 22.2.85.

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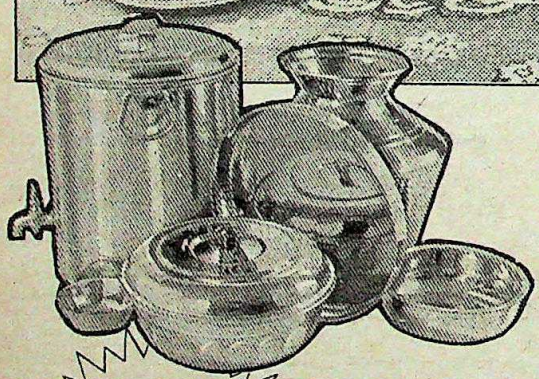

Vessels made out of Salem Stainless Steel are available at all leading vessel stores.

"It's always a good feeling when there's a marriage in the family.
This time, it's our third daughter's.
Being the last one, she's a bit of a pet at home.
Asking, and getting most of the time, what she wanted. Whether it's a pet dog, her own veena or dancing lessons.
Now that she's getting married, we've been shopping around a lot.
Silk sarees all the way from Kanchipuram. Diamond-studded ornaments from the best jewellers. A long list of household appliances and other things to set up a comfortable home.
Deciding on the right things for our daughter wasn't easy.
The only easy part was when we had to buy her vessels.
Vessels made out of Salem Stainless.
Vessels that don't pit, corrode or stain. Keep their shine even after years of daily use. And strong enough to last a lifetime.
After all, we want our daughter to have a lifetime gift. And in vessels, it's Salem Stainless.

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Salem Steel Plant
Salem 636 013, Tamilnadu

Salem Stainless. Takes the guessing out of buying vessels.

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UDAYAM

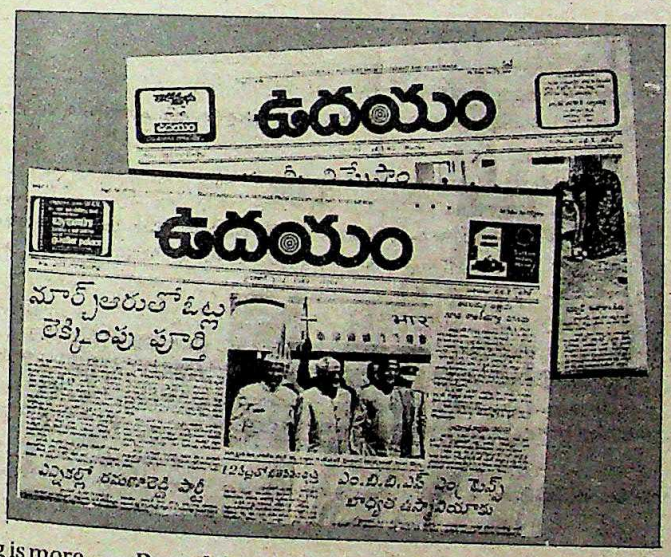
A Remarkable Rise

FEW NEWSPAPERS have soared so high so quickly. Only month after it first rolled off the presses, Telugu daily *Udayam* (dawn) touched the remarkable circulation figure of 224,000 and was well entrenched in the number two spot among the dailies in Andhra Pradesh. Reacting to this runaway success, the 38-year-old publisher, Dasari Narayana Rao, the Telugu actor-director, ordered more printing machines and unable to meet the demand for another 50,000 copies from vendors, abandoned his ongoing sales promotion campaign.

"This is due to my popularity and is expected from the people," crowed the exultant Rao. His image certainly had a big part to play in *Udayam*'s success, but at least some of it must be attributed to its editor, A.B.K. Prasad, 49, who was in fact largely responsible for editorial innovations that some years ago made *Udayam*'s competitor *Eenadu* the largest-selling Telugu daily. Prasad introduced horizontal make-up of pages, sports photos on the front page and a racy style, which had catapulted *Eenadu* to a circulation of 3,35,000.

Udayam may not be marketed as aggressively as *Eenadu*, whose editor Ramoji Rao makes sure that his paper is distributed to the farthest corners of the state. But what *Udayam* loses in marketing is more than compensated for by its modern printing facilities. The paper has 16 phototsetting terminals with a script devised and programmed by P. Narasimham of the Hyderabad-based Computer Maintenance Corporation. The spacing gives the script a distinct look when printed and the paper's ability to introduce colour in some of the 10-page weekday editions and a four-page colour magazine section in the 16-page Sunday edition have added to its advantages. This visual appeal is backed by a wide variety and range of writing to interest the entire family that include serialised fiction, film news, comic strips and puzzles. Sports gets more than half a page, unusual in Telugu dailies. Analysis and critical comments on different issues carry pictures.

For its news coverage *Udayam* has a large editorial team: 49 reporters, including six roving correspondents for clusters of districts, 40 part-timers and 180 stringers (another 120 are being selected) all filing in through a teleprinter network linking all district headquarters in the state and Delhi with the publishing centres at Hyderabad and Vijayawada. However, says Telugu media watcher and author-journalist G. Krishna: "*Udayam* may inspire and be the hallmark of new Telugu journalism only if its writing quality and variety in coverage improves. Otherwise, the rise in circulation may be short-lived."



Prasad (top left), Rao and his daily (below): runaway success

Udayam's real test will come after the March assembly elections when much of the political excitement and campaigning is over. Narayana Rao, however, is not worried. He says confidently: "There must be a few gimmicks always to draw people's interest and some of it comes from my fans." His 850 film fan associations throughout the state bring him up to date with the views of film-goers. But he denies film fan support is one of his reasons for entering the publishing industry. The prolific film-maker with 83 films, including the national award-winning *Meghasandesham*, has had a chequered career. After passing out of school at Palacole, then a tiny village in the Godavari delta, he worked for a while as a typist in Hyderabad only to go back to his books and get a commerce degree before he joined Hindustan Aeronautics as an accounts assistant. But in 1968 he migrated to Madras and joined films as a scriptwriter and ultimately became an actor-director. Early in his film career Rao also ran a film-fortnightly *Cine Prapancham* for 18 months.

With an interest in both films and journalism, Rao has brought the two media together. He has lofty visions for his paper. Says he: "A newspaper is of great service as a link between people and the Government. You can educate people through newspapers but films need not necessarily educate. They may only entertain." The circulation charts had made Rao choose Tirupati as the location for the third edition to be launched before the year-end. The *Udayam* weekly is also to be launched by that time. Other journals being planned are *Sivaranjani*, a film weekly, and *Thatha Manavadu*, a children's monthly. Both are titles of his films. Rao says: "I want to break all records in circulation. I want to be more popular. Narayana Rao works hard for success."

However, he denies that all this is for an eventual entry into politics. "I have no plans at present," he says evasively. Discerning media watchers though point to the fact that his name as chairman appears in one corner and his picture as a film advertisement in the prime solus position at the other corner of the front page on most days in the week. This is not viewed as a sales gimmick for the film *Lanchavataram* (the avatar of corruption) to be released this month. And one interesting blurb has Narayana Rao saying, "Do you want to convert black money into white? Come I will tell you how."

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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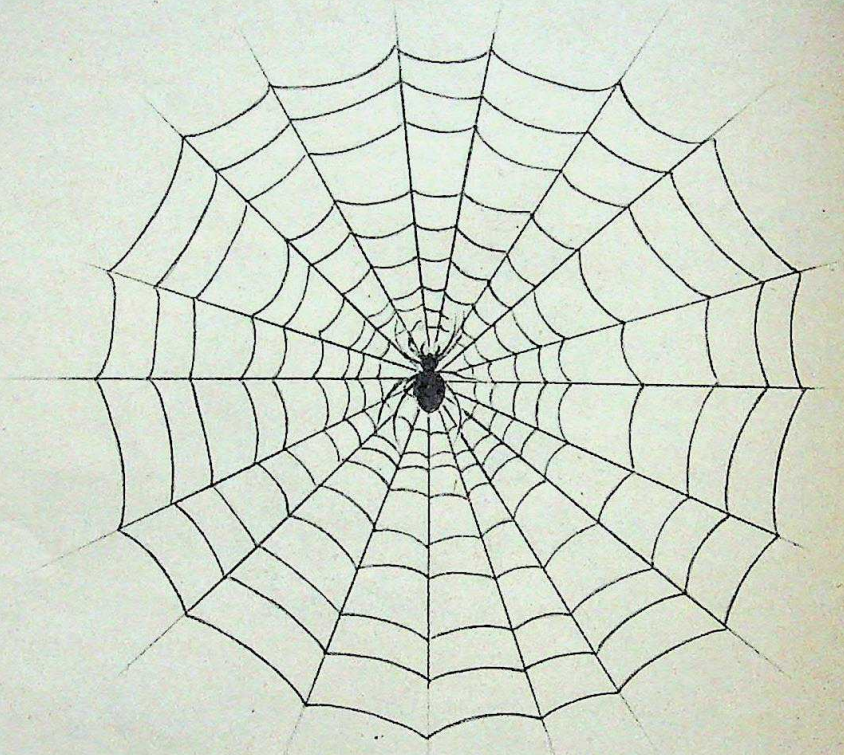
Now, let our network take your product across the length and breadth of the country's richest agro land.



400 field sales staff, 740 deale distribution power

Punjab buys more agro products than any other state.

Which means that if you make agro and agro related products, this is the biggest market in the country for you.

It is also the richest. And the most profitable for you.

Take fertilisers for instance.

Punjab bought 13% of the country's total sale. Take tractors. The state bought 25% of all tractors sold in the country last year.

And if that's not enough, look at the per capita income. It is 75% higher than the national average. As much as Rs.3164 per year.

A rich market to develop. Punjab has had another record crop this year. So the rural areas are even more flush with funds than they were last year. Which means that Punjab will buy more. Lots more. More agro chemicals. More farm equipment. More agro related products. If you can reach the markets, you can get rich quick.

That's where we come in.

We can get your product to every market in the state. Every consumer. We have the network. We have the experience. We have the knowledge. Over 18 years of it. Gained through selling basic agricultural inputs to the Punjabi farmer. One of the smartest, most discerning agro product buyers in the land.

Is this the right time? Yes. Punjab has had its problems lately. Business slowed down for a while. But things are fast returning to normal. The markets are throbbing with activity. Just waiting to invest in new agro related products.

So now is the right time for you to push your product in Punjab.

We'll get your product to every corner of the state. From day one, our vast distribution network will rush your products into every of the state. From large towns like Ludhiana Amritsar to remote villages like Kothi and Mali.

From day to day we will monitor and distribution tightly through our 4 regional and 12 area offices. With constant feedback consumer reactions to your product and consumer needs too. So you can realign if you need to. Quickly and accurately. And plan on new products.

After 18 years we know our market inside out. 18 years of in-depth marketing given us a pretty clear idea of our consumer

Punjab Agro will distribute your product to the large

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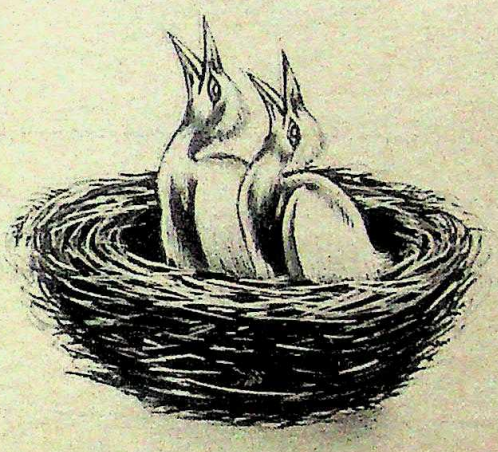
Or languish within narrow boundaries.



Own retail outlets will give you e can help but envy.

product. It has given our team of senior ing professionals specialised ability in keting. And a lot of respect for their se. They will help you plan successful ing programmes. They'll also use for you mation we have from a major market study. A sample of 3000 farmer ks in 6 representative districts in Punjab ing remote villages and cities. An extensive with an excellent accuracy factor.

Marketing options. Here are the optional ments you could make with us:

- Total marketing for Punjab: From product development to packaging to pricing to promotion and monitoring.
- Distribution: We will provide the distribution support to your existing, established brand. Which will give your product far greater depth of distribution.
- Segment distribution and market development: This arrangement with us allows you to develop a market in the remote areas of Punjab where you haven't been represented before. And which could be very lucrative for you.

How to start the ball rolling. Write to us right away. Tell us about your organisation and your products. And we'll get back to you with information. We'll arrange to meet you and talk over what we can do for you.

Our turnover has more than doubled over the past five years. Our turnover has grown from 32 crores to 82 crores in five years. That's over double.

We've grown with the people we work with as their marketing organisation in Punjab. People like HMT, International, SPIC, Shriram, IPL, Ra!!is and other major companies.

Here's to your success. So now it's up to you. If you're a smart businessman you'll get your managers to write to us right now. And take your first step towards major marketing successes. Or languish with the small share you already have.

Punjab Agro Industries Corporation

S C O 307-308, Sector 35-B, Chandigarh 160 036.

ities and even the smallest villages in Punjab. Fast.

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BIHAR

False Arrests

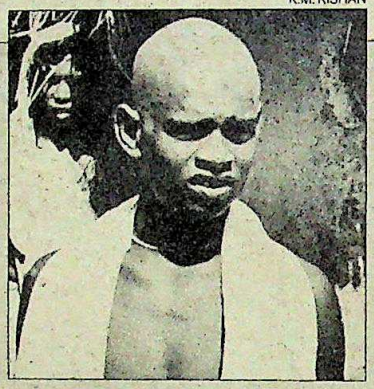
THE DREADED midnight knock in Munger, a district town in Bihar, brings a chill that far exceeds the area's reputation for having everything about it outsized and outrageous—from gun-running to kidnapping and murder. One such knock on January 14 brought Dinesh Kushwaha, 21, face to face with a warrant from a Sasaram court for a rape he never committed. Five days later warrant-toting constables struck at nearby Itwa and arrested Ramchandar Mandal, 18, and Ramawtar Mandal, 20, on dacoity charges. A week later when Ramchandar returned home on a provisional bail, his mother Kalu Devi, 40, who could not bear the shock died of heart attack. Said Ramchandar: "How can I commit dacoity in Sasaram? When my neighbours went to Sasaram with a lawyer to get details of the case, they found that no case existed in any court."

Such arrests on the strength of 'mysterious warrants' would have gone unnoticed but for the efforts of a social worker of Sunderpur, Loknath Kushwaha, 33, who spent months to obtain a copy of one such warrant and went to the Superintendent of Police Rakesh Jaruhar last fortnight to complain that innocent people were being harassed and fleeced by an organised gang. Jaruhar however told INDIA TODAY: "We are yet to make a breakthrough in the case. It is so puzzling."

But the people who have suffered in the past few years have horrendous tales to relate. Said Nageshwar Singh, 45, an assistant superintendent of the electricity department, who faced warrants four times between January 1977 and March 1981: "I paid my way out of the first two confrontations with the warrants but the third one I pursued to the Gaya court which issued it. I found that no case existed against me and brought back a certified copy to tell the police that I was innocent. The fourth time when a warrant came from a Ranchi court, I knew it was bogus and threatened to expose the policemen who brought it. They took to their heels." Last April, however, Nageshwar found that some 'unknown persons' had lodged an FIR against him and a warrant of arrest had been issued. By the time he successfully challenged it, the police had raided his home and arrested his son Motikant, a student, as being wanted in a dacoity case.

Loknath, who estimates that scores of people have been arrested on the basis of 'fake warrants', fleeced and ruined, says in a majority of cases the victims are never produced in court and the deal is struck in a thana. "Since they are not given a copy of the warrants, they just pay the amount demanded to avoid arrest and social disgrace."

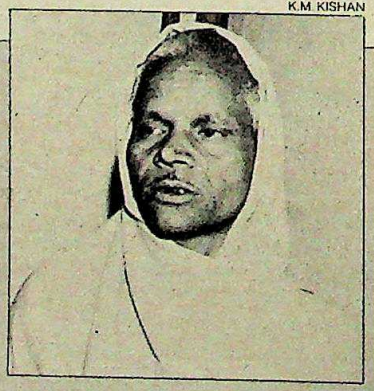
K.M. KISHAN



"How can I commit dacoity in Sasaram? When my neighbours went to Sasaram with a lawyer to get details of the case, they found that no case existed in any court."

RAMCHANDAR MANDAL

K.M. KISHAN



"I paid my way out of the first two confrontations with the warrants but the third one I pursued to the Gaya court...I found that no case existed against me."

NAGESHWAR SINGH

Bashis Lal, a leading lawyer of Munger town, feels that the racket is quite widespread because six victims whom he helped out were all facing 'fake' warrants. Other lawyers say that the modus operandi is quite above board. The gang picks a target and gathers details of any court case in the neighbouring districts, taking down the case numbers and sections under which any genuine accused is facing trial. Then a blank warrant of arrest or custody warrant is obtained, and filled up. All entries are genuine—only the name of accused is left blank. A court stamp is placed, the signature of the issuing magistrate is scribbled and the letter in a "On Govt. of India Service" envelope is posted to the superintendent of police's (SP's) office for execution. From the SP's office which does not have any machinery for verifying the authenticity of the warrant, the letter is forwarded to the police station concerned for execution. Since the court concerned never really issued the warrant, it does not pursue the matter but members of the gang who have interest in blackmailing people do so with vigour and vengeance.

The local police, on the other hand, is protected because it is supposed to be executing a court order which it has received through proper channels—so everything is legal. Admitted Jaruhar: "Some fake warrants might have passed through this office but how could one detect which one is genuine and which fake?" While the police find themselves helpless, the courts have apparently no reason to do so. Blank warrant forms are openly sold by stamp vendors. Suresh Tanti, an advocate, feels that the gang might include some lawyers and court clerks also.

The racket has assumed such proportions that a Munger lawyer, Bhajan Mani Chakraverty, recently received a warrant of arrest from a Dhanbad court on charges of 'rape'. A contestant in the assembly elections from Sultanpur has as many as four warrants pending against him. While the exact ramifications of the racket of fake warrants are yet to be fully understood, the number of people who have been dragged to the thana in the dead of the night and forced to fork out tidy sums continues to grow unchecked in the lawless jungle that is Bihar today.

—FARZAND AHMED in Munger

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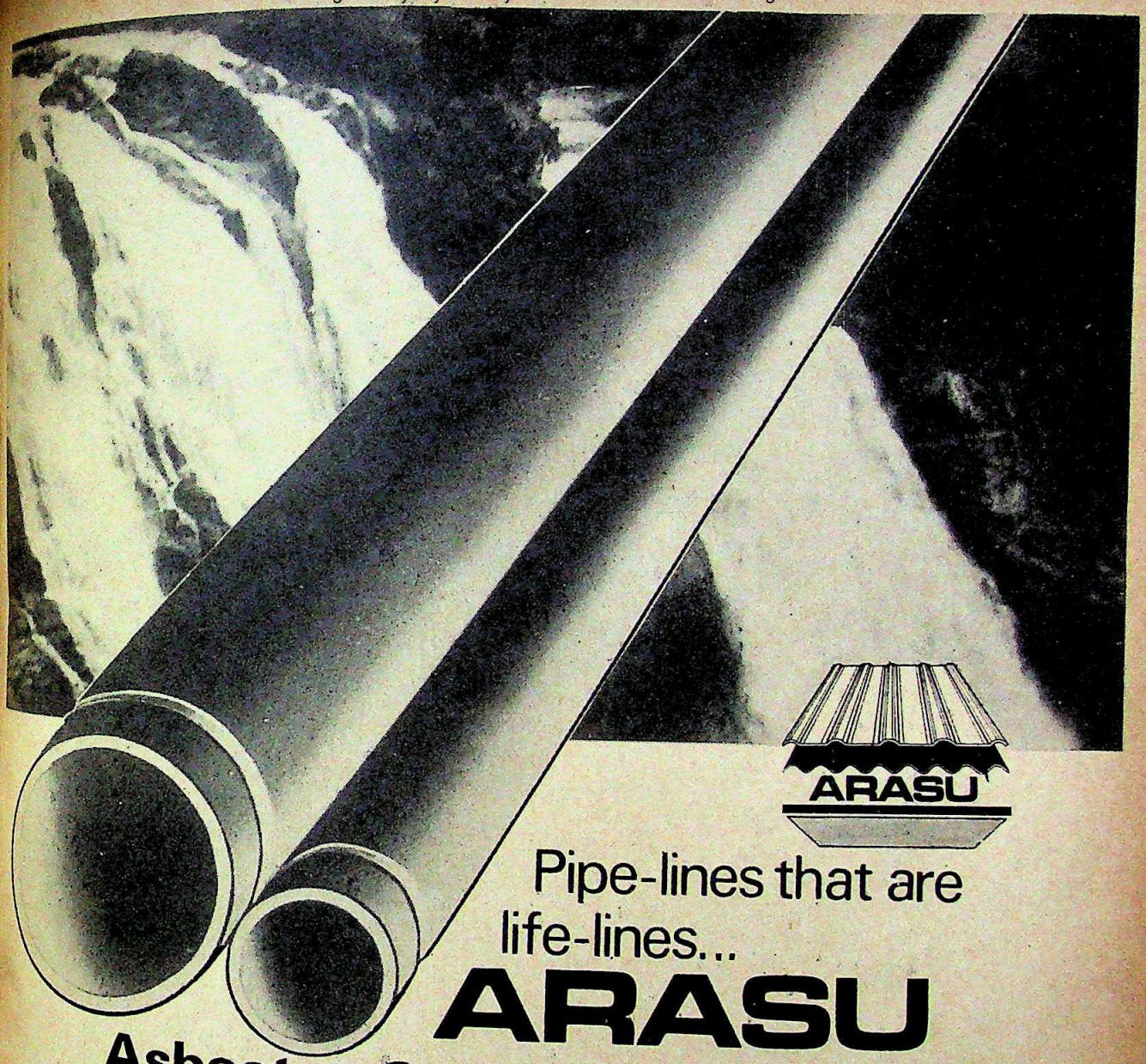

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ARMS FACTORIES

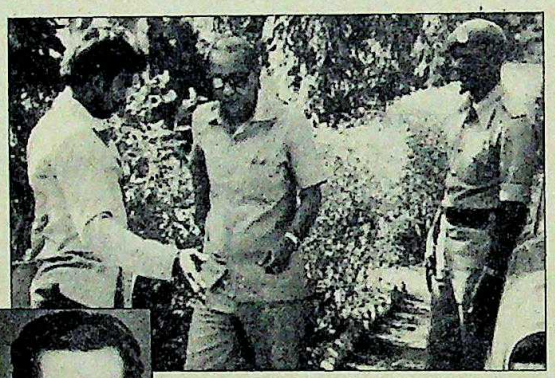
An Explosive Find

WHEN Bellary district officials raided the Dwaraka Arms Store, one of the top four private arms factories in the country, last October, they seized explosives of a different kind. In six brief-cases thrown carelessly around the store, they found copies of confidential documents of the Union Home Ministry, including blank letter-heads of the department. A week later, they trapped two people selling a Spanish gun that allegedly had been brought to Bellary by Golla Lakshman, the proprietor of the store, from Dhirendra Brahmachari's Shiva gun factory in Jammu which is already facing charges for peddling illegal arms. Apart from this, the officials found evidence to suspect that Dwaraka was manufacturing and selling arms illegally.

Ironically, when the case first broke, there was little public outcry and Lakshman even filed a defamation suit against Bellary's Deputy Commissioner, Sudhir Kumar, for making some of the facts of the raid public. It was only last month when the sensational spy scandal shook the country that investigators realised the true import of the documents they had seized. Lakshman seemed to have had access to all the key government papers relating to his factory—the home minister's notings in his file as well as a confidential letter written by the joint secretary, defence production, outlining the country's arms production capability.

Last fortnight, Sudhir Kumar filed a 57-page first information report that among other things charged Lakshman with violating the Official Secrets Act and of manufacturing and selling illegal arms. Both these are non-bailable offences, which, if upheld, could result in seven to 14 years' rigorous imprisonment for Lakshman. But before any arrests could be made, Lakshman and his two sons, Raghunath and Jagannath who are also accused, apparently went underground and a massive police manhunt has begun. However, officials in New Delhi arrested Y.P. Dangwal, who before his retirement as desk officer in the Union Home Ministry two years ago had allegedly passed on confidential information to Lakshman. Also arrested were R.N. Lakshman, a retired sub-inspector, his son Srinivasalu and Hardeep Singh, an employee of Dwaraka for trying to sell the illegal Spanish gun.

From all accounts, Lakshman seems to have been a resourceful person. Starting as a blacksmithy instructor in a government polytechnic college in Bellary with a salary of Rs 50 a month, Lakshman had by the end of last month, partnership interests in four gun factories in Bellary, an explosive manufacturing factory and an arms dealership. The police estimate his current assets between Rs. 10 crore and Rs 40 crore. He got into the arms business in the late '60s by converting old guns discarded by the police into usable ones. After he became a partner in Sujatha Arms Factory in neighbouring Guntakal which had a licence to convert 525 arms annually, Lakshman resigned from government service and took up the business seriously. By 1977 he established Dwarka Arms and merged it with Sujatha and obtained a licence to manufacture 700 breech and muzzle-loading guns a year. Soon he got licences to manufacture three lakh blank cartridges, 3.75 lakh live cartridges and one lakh lead shots.



Dangwal (spectacled) being arrested in Delhi and (left) G. Lakshman: key figures

His powers of persuasion seem to have been enormous. The Union Government as far back as 1958 had decided that manufacturing of arms should be a public sector activity and licences should not be issued to anyone in the private sector. But the 133 existing gun manufacturing factories were exempted from these provisions and have flourished. They now manufacture an estimated 60,000 guns every year. Lakshman was not only able to persuade the Government that conversion of arms was "tantamount" to manufacturing them and therefore had a licence issued to him for producing 700 guns in 1978, but in September last even got his capacity enhanced to 3,000. In this he is said to have received help from Dangwal who as desk officer put up his case favourably. But Lakshman's and Dangwal's only mistake was that they were too meticulous in their dealings and kept detailed accounts either in their diaries or in files. These have now become vital documents which among other things give out details of how Lakshman tried to persuade the Government to allow him to set up a pistol and revolver factory and how he was able to secure the confidential notings of the Union home minister and secretaries.

District officials suspect that Lakshman is deep in the illegal manufacture and sale of arms and ammunition. From the books of accounts they have examined, they find that, ironically, Lakshman was manufacturing items far short of the licensed capacity: 18,500 blank cartridges against three lakh licensed, roughly half of the 3.75 lakh live cartridges and only 15 per cent of the lead shots it is capable of manufacturing. With 13 lathes in the factory it has the capacity to manufacture 9,000 guns but till last year used to make only 700 guns. Says Sudhir Kumar: "The excess capacity can and must have been used to manufacture more guns and cartridges without anybody knowing anything about it."

But when Lakshman's factory was raided, officials found very little evidence to corroborate their suspicions. They could find only 74 empty brass cartridges that were illegal, 33 kg of smokeless gun powder although Lakshman should have had only five, a single-barrelled breech-loading five-chambered revolver and two rifle barrels that were illegal. As the investigations move further, on the Corps of Detectives rests the responsibility of finding out whether the charges against Lakshman are false or whether they have the firepower that the district officials suspect they do.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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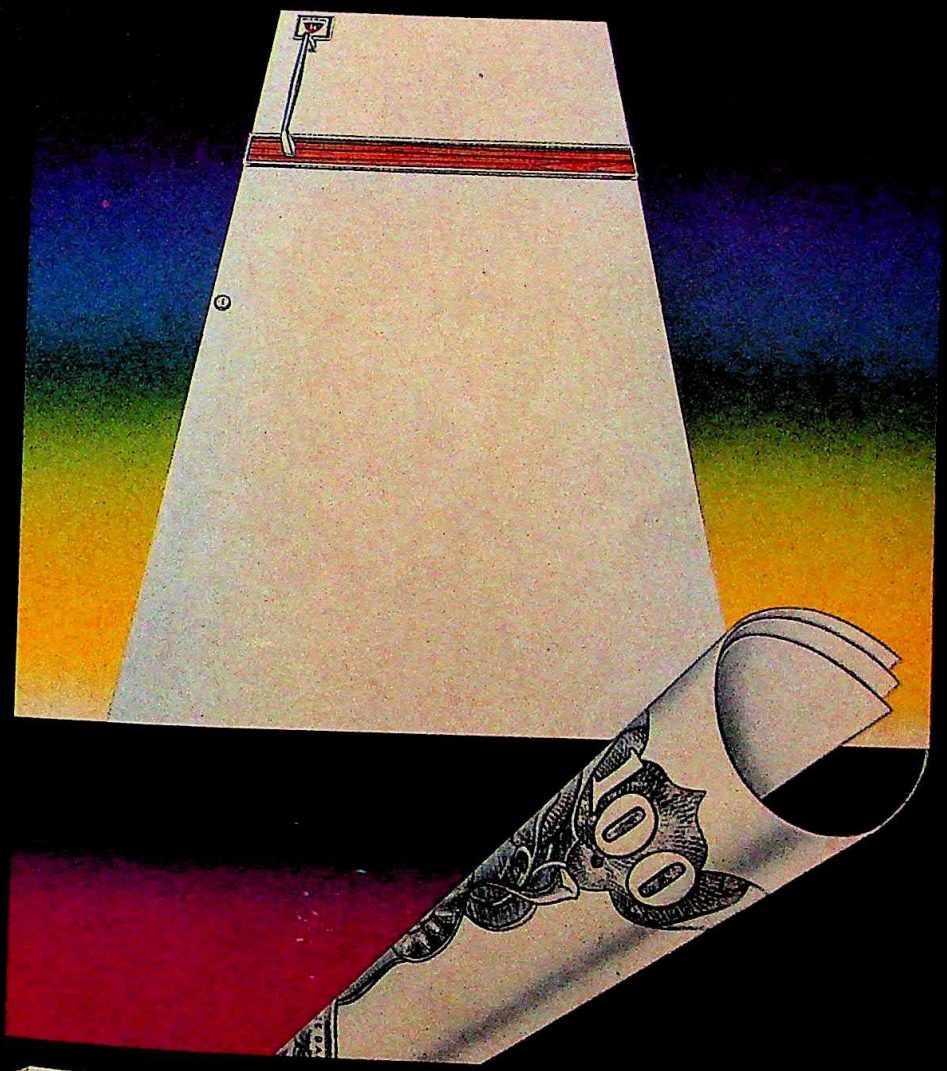

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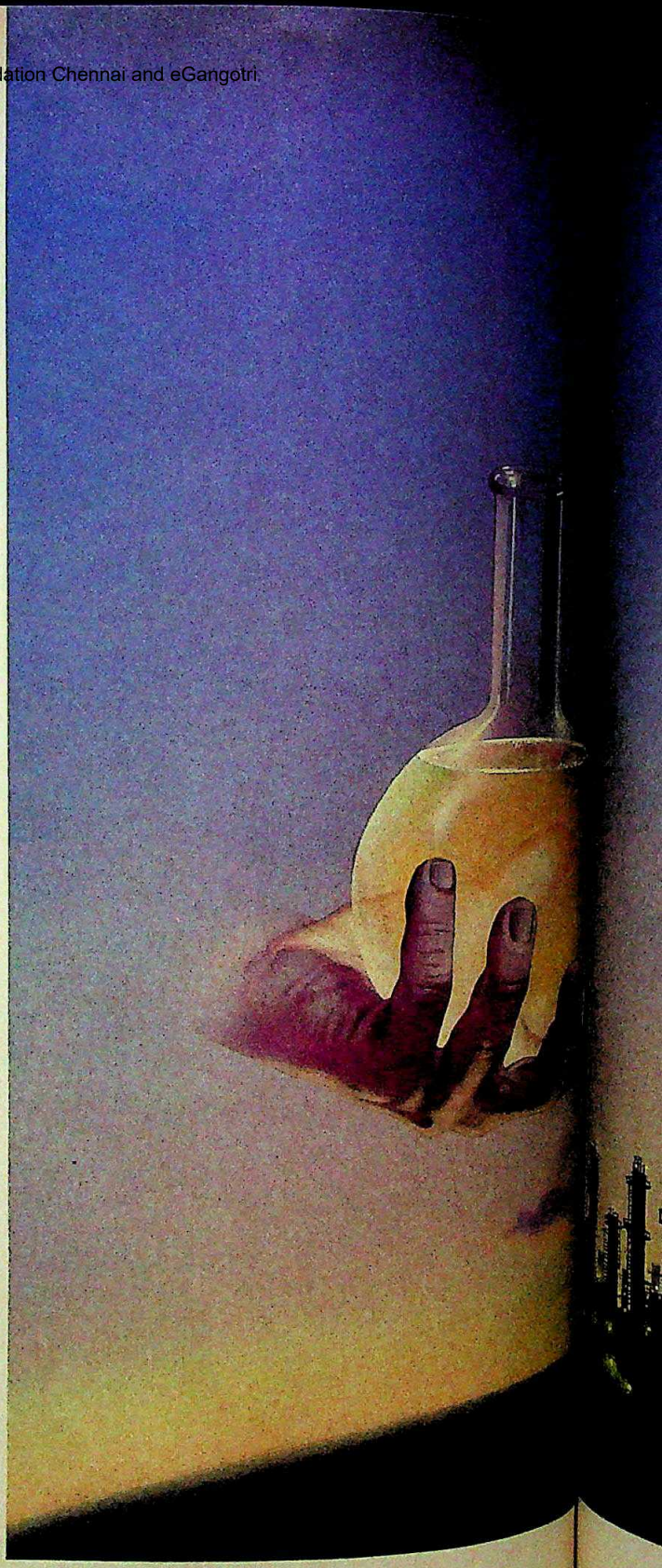

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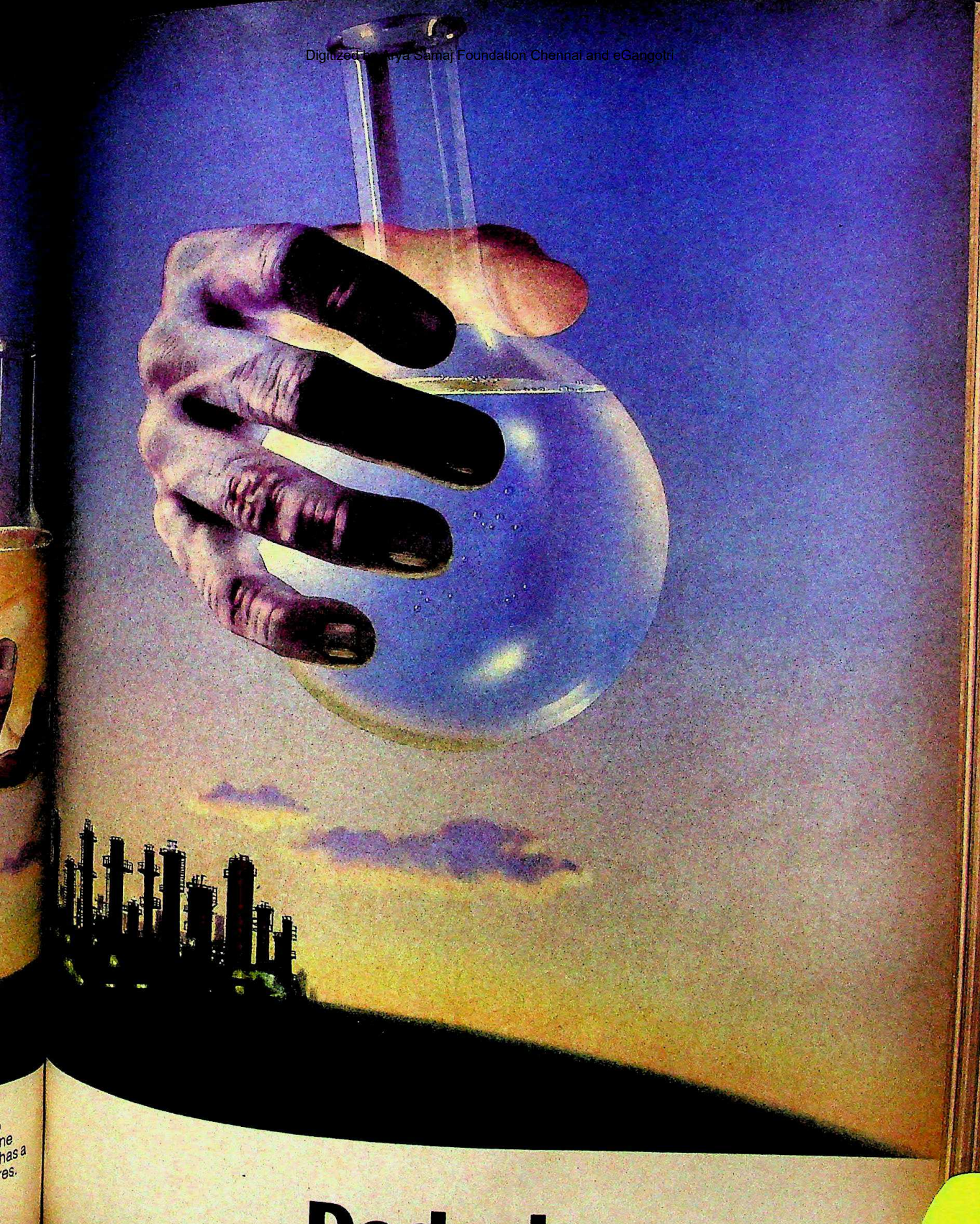

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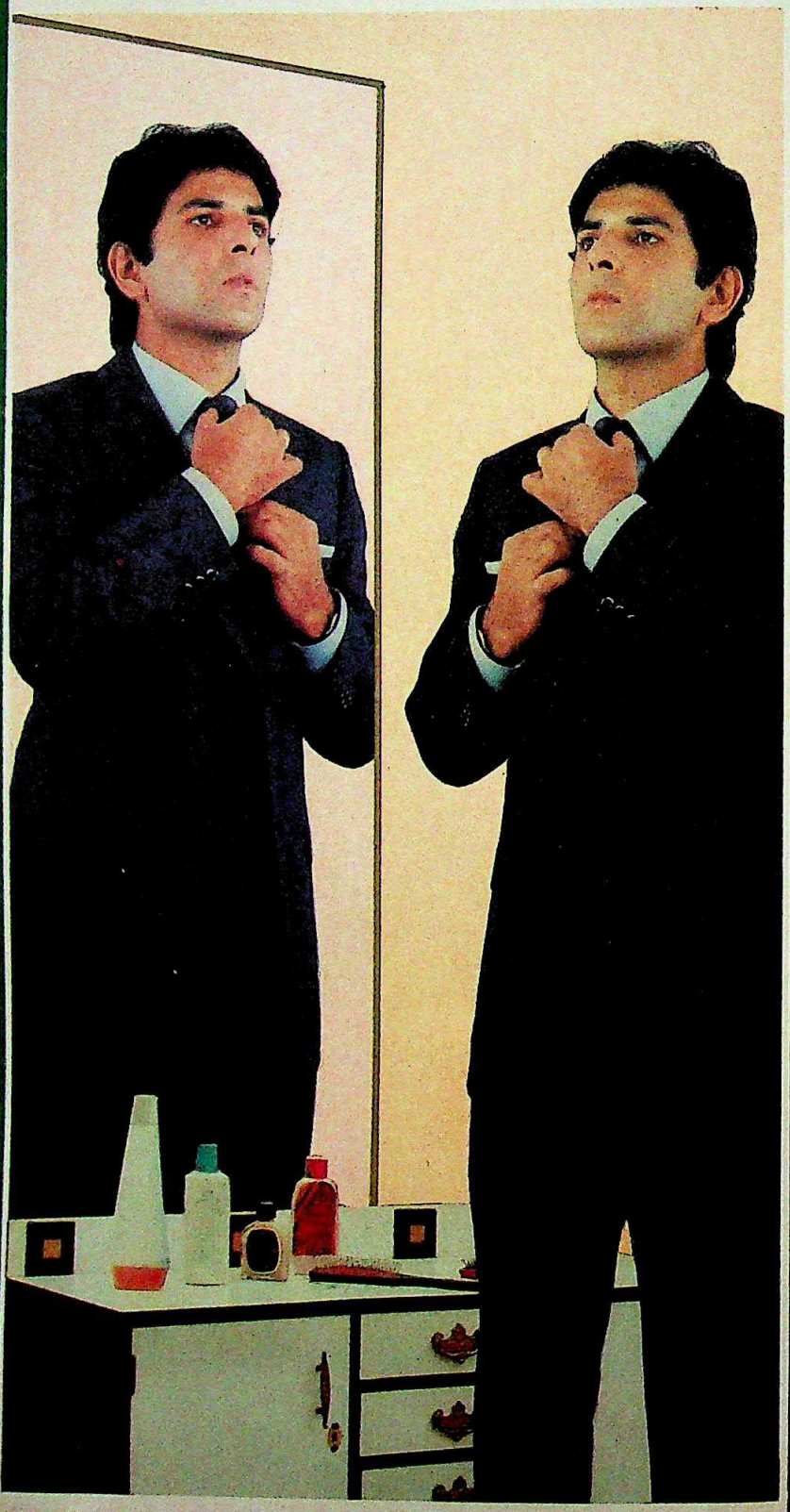

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Family Chronicle

THE NEHRUS AND THE GANDHIS
An Indian Dynasty
BY TARIQ ALI
Distributed by Rupa & Co
Pages: 302; Price: Rs 31.60

THE INDIAN National Congress was 40 years old when two Nehrus, Motilal and Jawaharlal, father and son, became its presidents, the son succeeding the father two years before Motilal died. Since then there has been no looking back for the Nehrus. This is, as the author says, a dynasty without precedent in the modern world. There have been other political families—Roosevelts and Kennedys in the United States, Churchills in Britain—but they are not in the same league as the Nehrus of Allahabad. Theirs has been an unbroken line of political succession, from great grandfather to great grandson, a series of successions fought and won, often with no holds barred, in the world's largest democracy.

How did it happen? Tariq Ali poses the question but does not explain. The book is a straightforward family chronicle beginning with the rise of Motilal Nehru on the wrong side of the tracks in Allahabad at the turn of the century and ending with the election of Rajiv Gandhi as prime minister. In between, the book traces, through the labyrinth of India's politics, the extraordinary lives of Jawaharlal and Indira, who laid the foundations for the family's political fortunes. In Ali's Nehru saga, there are walk-on parts for other characters but they do not interfere with the flow of the narrative. The author's spotlight is naturally on the two Nehrus, or rather one Nehru and one Gandhi, only one of whom he has met, but there are sympathetic sketches of the two Gandhis, Mohandas and Feroze. The book is a useful 'capsule' history of modern India, readable but not entirely reliable as history, though foreign readers might find it revealing.

There are certain uncanny parallels in the story of the dynasty. Both Jawaharlal and Indira were reluctant seekers after power, or, at any rate, that's the impression they gave. Gandhi made Nehru Congress president as he wanted to keep an eye on him and prevent him from going too much to the left. In the case of Indira, the party bosses, all of whom were Gandhians to the core, needed someone pliable, weak and susceptible to their control, a lump of clay, as Tariq says, they could mould and remould according to need. But the Nehrus were too smart for their keepers. As Congress president, Nehru declared that he was a socialist and a republican. There was consternation in the party and panic in London but Nehru did not give in. Thirty-seven years later, Mrs Gandhi on becoming prime minister did give in but only temporarily. Rajiv did not have to deal with bosses but he too was a reluctant entrant into the political arena and made it to the top within four years of his first political baptism.

In a perceptive introduction, Salman Rushdie has described the Nehru dynasty as part of a myth-making process which all countries go through, but that can only be a part of the explanation. The Nehrus are seen by most Indians as nationalists and modernisers, an unusual combination that gives them such a powerful hold on the minds of both conservatives and progressives, enabling them to create their own constituency, a Nehru constituency, across the country. Other parties, and other leaders, are nationalists or modernisers, but not both. Gandhi was a nationalist but he was anything but a moderniser so while other pre-Independence Congress leaders were classed as Gandhians, only Nehru remained a Nehru, a tree among the poppies. After Independence, the socialists, who alone could have laid claim to both, cut themselves adrift from the national mainstream and were lost for ever. The communists may have been modern in their outlook but their anti-national past betrayed them. The Jan Sanghis were and are strong nationalists, a little too strong perhaps for the modern times, but they are not perceived as modernisers, which puts them, so to speak, *hors de combat*. So the party follows wherever the Nehrus go, even when they do odd things like imposing an emergency or ordering troops into houses of prayer. But even the Nehrus have to abide by the rules, as Mrs Gandhi found to her great cost in 1977 when the people cast her out into the cold and she had to cool her heels for three years before she was allowed back in.

The Congress which the Nehrus have dominated for 50 years may have declined as a political party but it is still a powerful political force and is perceived by the bulk of Indians as a truly national organisation, perhaps the only one in the country. All countries need populist type leaders at the top when they are passing through a crisis and India's crisis is that it is still not quite a nation. When its nationhood is fully established, the Nehrus may find they are not as indispensable as they or their supporters might think.

The book was apparently rushed through the press and contains several errors. Mrs Gandhi became prime minister in 1966, not 1967, and she was killed in October, not November 1984. Rajiv was born in Bombay, not Allahabad and Namboodiripad became chief minister of Kerala in 1957, not 1950. Nehru won three consecutive general elections, not two, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak was born in 1856, not 1864. And surely in a family album of 28 pictures, there could be one, a tiny one, of Feroze Gandhi, who was after all one of the godfathers of the dynasty!

—JAY DUBASHI

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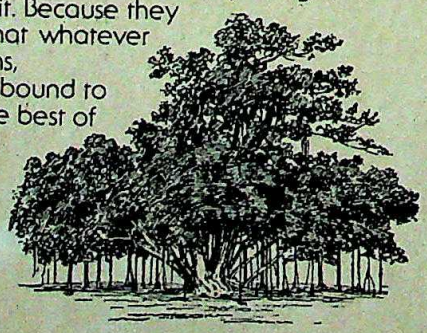

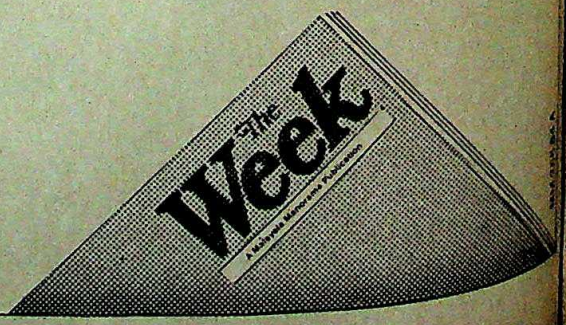

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SARAT CHANDRA

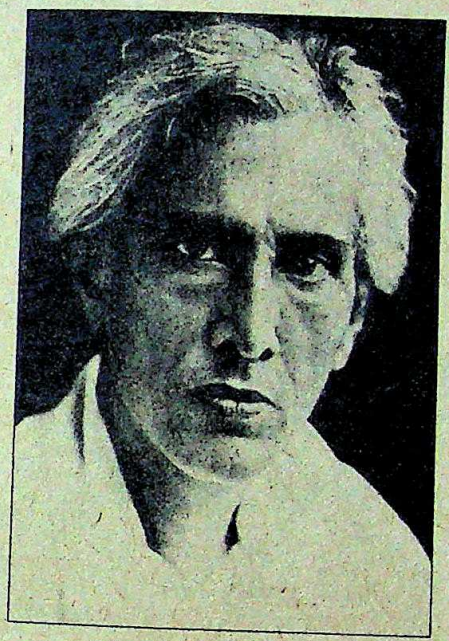
Novel Popularity

THE BENGALI novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, who died 47 years ago, is proving to be one of the biggest money-spinners in Indian book publishing history. Last fortnight, Calcutta's Ananda Publishers put into gear their plans for printing two lakh copies of the author's collected works —a plan that is going to cost the publishers at least Rs 40 lakh in royalty payments alone, making it the biggest single royalty deal in the country so far. The sales of Sarat Chandra's collected works, priced at Rs 100 per copy, are expected to gross a whopping Rs 2 crore. At any rate, says Badal Bose of of Ananda Publishers: "We are committed to pay the copyright holder Rs 40 lakh regardless of how many copies we actually print or sell."

The deal is obviously sound as the estimated demand for Sarat Chandra's works is enormous. A decade ago his collected works published by an association formed for his centenary celebrations, were bought up even before they were actually printed. For the first 50,000 copies, advance bookings were completed in about four months and by the time all the books were finally delivered by 1978 the centenary committee decided to print another 50,000 copies that also sold out.

"As a novelist Sarat Chandra is more popular than even Rabindranath Tagore, no matter what the intellectuals might feel," declares the best selling Bengali novelist Moni Shankar Mukherjee, who writes under the pseudonym "Shankar". Mukherjee's contention is, however, difficult to prove or disprove. Tagore's novels individually have sold a total of 11.2 lakh copies, according to records available with Visva-Bharati University, the sole publishers of the Nobel laureate's work. Two of the dozen novels written by Rabindranath, *Rajashree* and *Shesher Kabita* have sold over six lakh copies, while the rest have averaged about 50,000 copies each.

Unfortunately the two private publishers of Sarat Chandra's works, M.C. Sarkar and Sons and the Indian Associated Press Company, have not kept any comparable records. Supriya Sarkar of M.C. Sarkar and Sons, the company that held the exclusive copyright for Sarat Chandra's collected works before selling it to Ananda Publishers, claims that the 13 individual titles of the novelist's works being published by them currently sell about 35,000 copies a year. "The demand is growing considering that five years ago



Sarat Chandra (top) and Badal Bose: cashing in on the demand

only about 20,000 copies would sell every year," says Sarkar, maintaining that they have sold over a million copies of the author's novels during the last 50 years. Ananda Publishers are aiming to sell their edition of the collected works to the rural educated, avid readers of Sarat Chandra's novels, who have not always been able to afford his books. They are pricing their edition at Rs 100 as compared to Rs 450 charged by M.C. Sarkar and Sons, who have sold only about 50,000 copies of their edition.

The intentions of both the Ananda Publishers and Sarkar are to cash in on the Sarat Chandra boom before the copyright period expires in 1988, after which no publisher will have to pay royalty on his books. "Since we have already begun publishing Sarat Chandra's works we will be ahead of our competitors once the copyright expires," explains Badal Bose. Supriya Sarkar, has acquired the copyright for the collected works reportedly at a huge sum from Sarat Chandra's nephew's wife, Monica Chatterjee.

Publishers like N.D. Mehra of Rupa and Company are, however, somewhat sceptical about the sales target set by Ananda Publishers. "Except Shakespeare, I cannot recall another author's collected works selling more than a lakh copies in a single edition," says Mehra. But big retailers in Calcutta contend that Bengali novels and Hindi paperbacks are the biggest sellers in the country. Modern Bengali novels written by Satyajit Ray, Somoresh Basu and Shankar net several lakh rupees even though they are produced without exception in hard covers. Just how big the market is can be gauged by the fact that an omnibus of three of Shankar's novels sold a record 1.4 lakh copies. Most Bengali hardcover novels are priced upward of Rs 20 compared to less than Rs 10 for Hindi paperbacks.

"Sarat Chandra during his lifetime did not enjoy the kind of respect and popularity accorded to Rabindranath and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay," laments Mukherjee. Sarat Chandra's novels, with their stylistic simplicity and social plots were, and to a large extent are, still considered to be "devoid of literary content". Whatever popularity he did enjoy was "suspect both to the intellectual establishment as well as to himself," says Sarkar, whose father was the novelist's first publisher way back in 1913. Lacking institutional backing, Sarat Chandra's works after his death were brought out "by people who did not bother to ensure good printing and production", thus further dampening sales, argues Mukherjee.

Ironically when Sarat Chandra died in 1938, only about 25 people are said to have gone to his house to pay their last respects. But today thousands of his fans all over the state are queuing up to pay advance money for his collected works.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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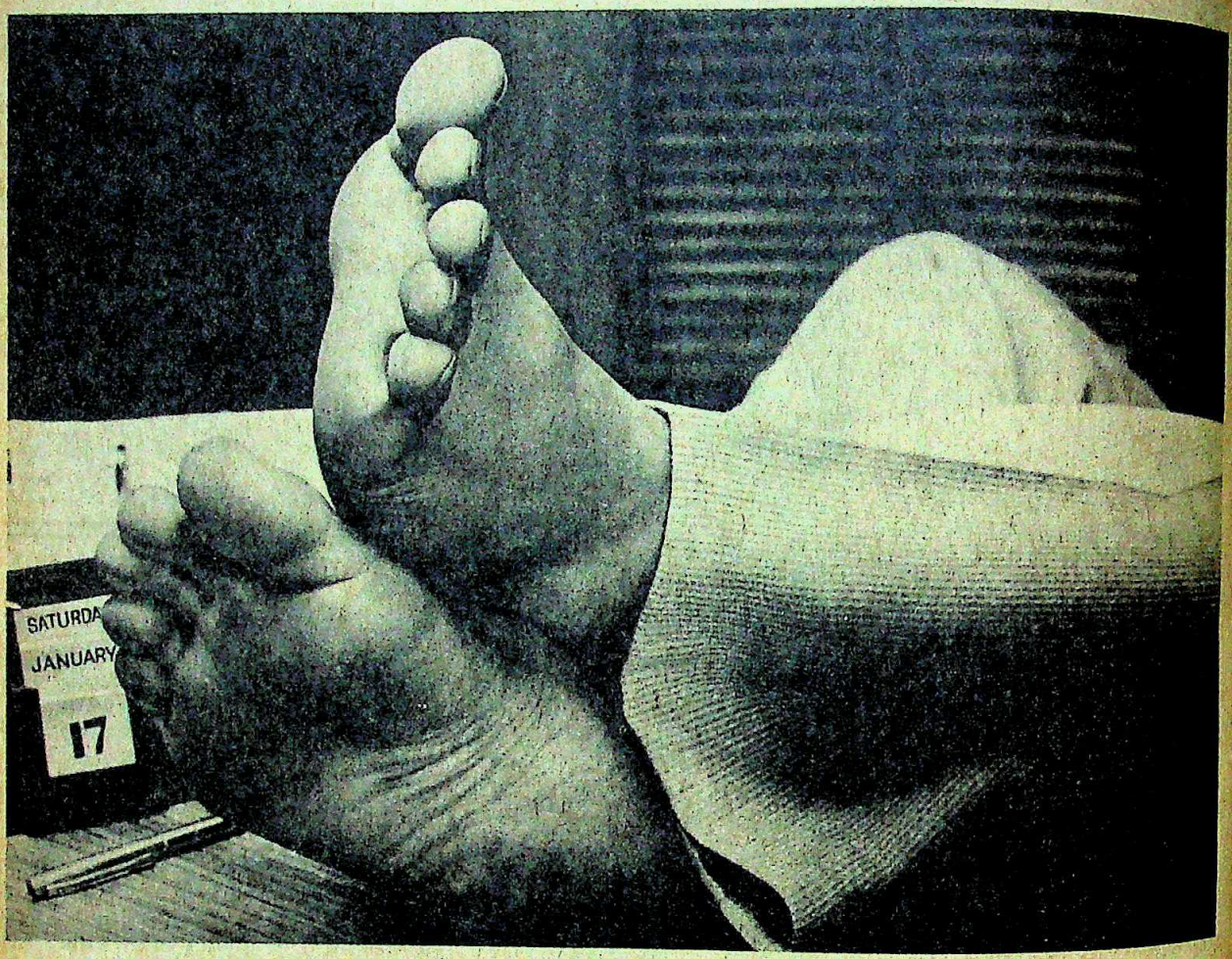

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MENINGITIS

Battling the Breakout

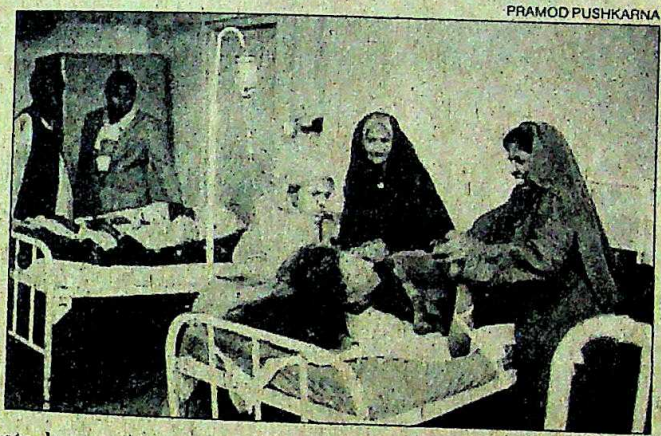
EARLY one morning, last month, 11-year-old Rajan woke up with a headache. He complained of a feverish feeling but his mother, thinking he only wanted to skip school, handed him an aspirin and packed him off. Within a couple of hours Rajan was back, looking pale and weak. By late afternoon, he had become unconscious, his blood pressure dropped to a dangerously low level and on his leg he had begun to develop a dark pink rash—medically known as haemorrhagic spots. When his parents rushed him to hospital, a lumbar puncture revealed that the child was suffering from meningitis. For three days doctors struggled to bring him out of danger. Little Rajan did not die. But he could have.

In the last few months, meningitis—a disease passed around by the hardy neisseria meningitidis microbe—has quietly spread through the capital bringing into hospitals over 1,000 patients and claiming over 70 lives. The disease is not new but it has always been alarming since it takes as its victims usually young children up to the age of about five years with a peak attack rate in the six to 12 month age group. When Delhi's mini-epidemic began its toll, many parents stopped sending their children to school. "There is no question that there is an increase of five to seven times in the disease over previous years," said a practitioner. Worse, reports of meningitis breakouts from Calcutta, Chandigarh and Lucknow also began to trickle in.

However the worst, it seems, is over. Doctors everywhere are confident that the situation is completely under control. Said Dr R.N. Basu, director of the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD): "We can't say how quickly the disease will die out, but there should be no more deaths." While the number of meningitis cases reported in February are almost twice those reported in January the number of deaths has significantly dropped by almost half.

That means, for a start, that people are more aware of what they should be doing. "The best way to reduce this epidemic," said Dr O.P. Ghai, head of the Paediatric Department at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), "is by early diagnosis and prompt treatment." Which means once a child develops a severe headache or a sudden fever—the first symptoms of meningitis—parents should rush him to the doctor. At that time "every day counts" said an official of the Delhi Administration. Not all headaches indicate meningitis.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



A patient in hospital: fighting fear

But if it is meningitis, immediate treatment with antibiotics in most cases results in complete cure within a week or two. "There is no need to panic because not everyone is going to get it," said well-known paediatrician Dr S.C. Arya.

The disease is caused by a little microbe called neisseria meningitidis which has several strains. For years, the cocci may lie harmlessly in the nasal pharynx but once it gets into the bloodstream, it can localise itself around the brain and cause meningitis, that is inflammation of the coverings of the brain. Predominantly an urban phenomena, infections occur largely in closed communities. They are passed on from person to person by direct contact through infected droplets of respiratory tract secretions. Anyone can be a carrier of the microbe but may suffer from no symptoms of the disease himself. The early symptoms of meningococcal disease are fever, disorientation, nausea, headache, stiffness of the neck and a sudden rash. The cocci thrives mostly in cool, dry weather and is most active from the months of November to March.

Doctors are at a loss to explain the sudden onset of the meningitis epidemic this year. Of course natural phenomena rarely follows a prescribed pattern and medical men feel that this year the cycle has reached a peak. The epidemic has also, mysteriously enough, chosen a slightly unusual pattern: its victims are no longer coming from any specific, congested areas nor are their ages restricted to five years and under. NICD surveys show that at least 50 per cent patients are young adults over 14 years. NICD has worked out a strategy to counter the spread of the disease by:

- Careful surveillance, including compiling data on the disease, patients, localities affected;
- early diagnosis and treatment on suspicion;
- ensuring an adequate supply of drugs and continually testing the sensitivity of the organisms to the drugs.

It has also telexed all state health directorates—and is keeping medical associations posted with a regular bulletin. The Indian Academy of Paediatricians has on its part instituted a panel of experts to keep a close vigil. "Fortunately the microbe responds to most antibiotics," said Dr Ghai, "the best drug to use is penicillin by intra-muscular intra-venous injections, but not by mouth." He cautions against the use of Rifampicin for either treatment of patients or as a preventive measure for those in close contact. "It is useful for convalescent carriers only," he further warned.

Fortunately most patients become non-infective within two days of treatment and only three out of 1,000 people who come in contact with them are likely to contract the disease. Nevertheless doctors feel it is advisable for family members to receive chemoprophylaxis, a short-term treatment with drugs like sulfonamides. "There is no cause for alarm," said an official of the Directorate of Health Services in Delhi, "we can keep our fingers crossed that the epidemic dies down soon but people have to help us, people have to help themselves." In other words, awareness and prompt action are the best cure. There is no need for paranoid parents to barricade their children at home, nor, according to Dr Arya, "is there any need yet to vaccinate the populace at large". But human nature being what it is, panic often spreads faster than the disease.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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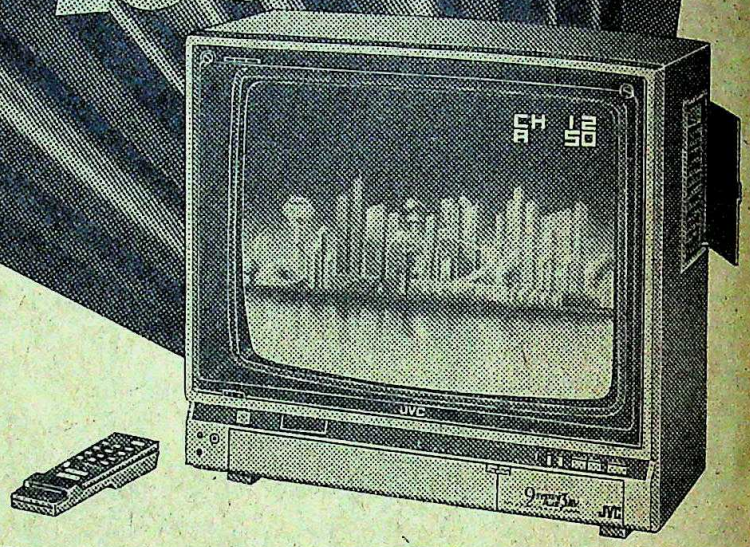
9 SYSTEM PLUS 3 AV



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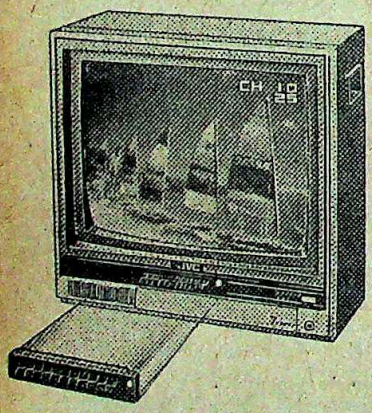

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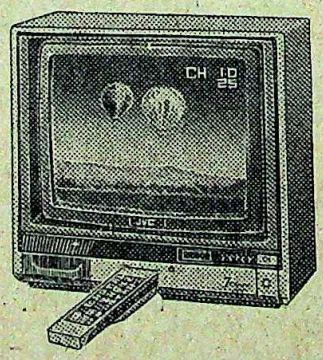

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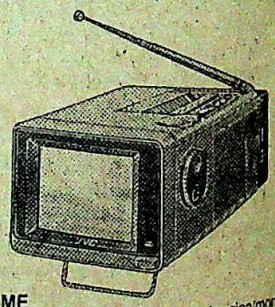

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CARDIAC SURGERY

Heartening Trend

PRESIDENT Giani Zail Singh made the trip. So did Sanjiva Reddy when he was president. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao has been there as has film director Satyajit Ray and several hundred Indians a year.

The trip is, of course, by the ever increasing flow of cardiac patients who have visited the United States and other western destinations in search of cardiac surgery. Ironically, even as well-placed Indians have been making their pilgrimage to western hospitals, a reverse flow has begun of heart patients from the West Asian countries attracted to India by its rapid advances in sophisticated cardiac surgery.

This irony was noted at last month's international conference of cardiac surgeons in Bombay, organised to mark the silver jubilee of open-heart surgery in India. Cardiac surgery has moved ahead since K.N. Dastur performed the first open heart operation at the Nair Hospital in February 1961. Last year, some 8,000 heart operations were performed in about 40 Indian hospitals, including 800 coronary bypass procedures in which clogged arteries of the heart are bypassed using veins taken from the patient's leg or elsewhere. More important, the mortality rate in bypass operations in India is around 3 per cent as against 1.5 per cent in the US, the leading country in heart surgery. Since the first coronary bypass was performed in India by K.M. Cherian and T.J. Cherian at Madras' Southern Railway Hospital, no fewer than nine hospitals, four in Bombay, two in Madras and one each in Delhi, Chandigarh, Vellore and Trivandrum, now regularly undertake bypass procedures. And more specialised centres are in the process of being built.

Indeed, Harvard University's Dwight Harken, one of the delegates to the conference, who was among the pioneers of open-heart surgery in the 1940s, remarked that Indians spending vast sums on such surgery abroad would do better to have the operation done at home and donate the difference in cost to charity. Harken's reference was to the fact that while it costs up to Rs 5 lakh to have a coronary bypass performed in the US, a similar operation in India can cost Rs 25,000 to Rs 50,000 in a private hospital and only Rs 15,000 in a government facility.

Clearly, cardiac surgery is not cheap, and is well beyond the means of poor patients who are obliged to go to charity for the funds required. High cost is, in fact, one of the biggest factors inhibiting the expansion of heart surgery. The equipment needed to detect the location of a blockage in a coronary artery, the coronary anjor machine, costs about Rs 1 crore and is available in only about a dozen hospitals in the country. Monitors for blood pressure and heart performance cost Rs 5 lakh each, and a heart valve replacement comes for Rs 8,000. Disposable oxygenators cost Rs 3,000 each.

Some of the sophisticated equipment needed for cardiac surgery is simply not available. Indian surgeons, for the moment, have to do without high quality monitoring machines, respirators and well-equipped operating rooms.

A second inhibiting factor is the lack of experienced surgeons, doctors and assistants. Only about 12 of the country's 120-odd medical colleges offer specialisation in heart surgery. Nor do the available facilities give surgeons the sort of experience their American counterparts, for example, get.

In India, a few hospitals are responsible for most of the heart surgery performed. Of last year's 8,000 open-heart operations, which include such procedures as the replacement of valves and correcting physical defects, about 5,000 were performed in 13 centres and two Bombay hospitals alone accounted for 600 each.

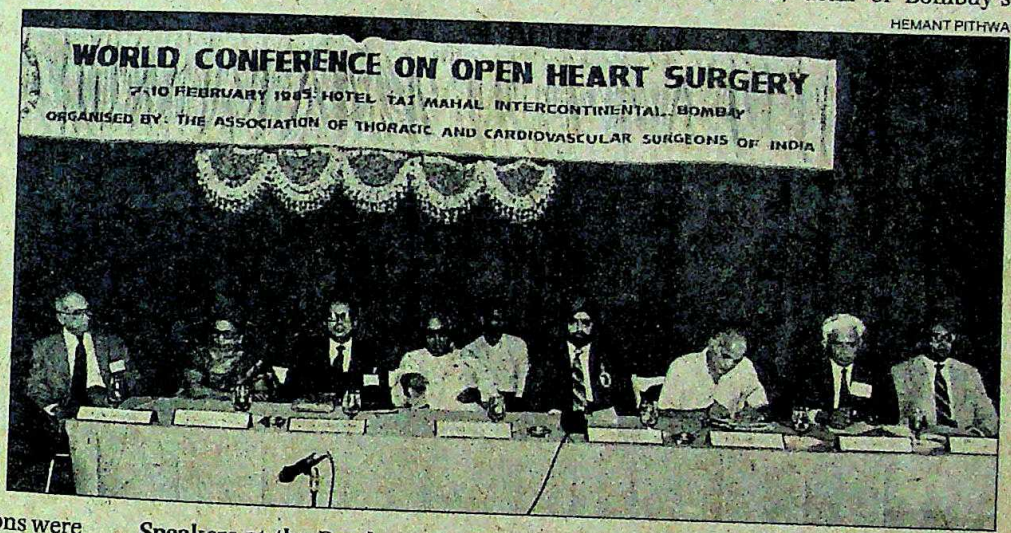
Even so, the demand for coronary surgery far exceeds supply, and there are long queues to get into the operation theatre. In Bombay, patients have to wait for six months, but in other centres the wait may be even four years.

G.B. Parulkar, dean of Bombay's King Edward Memorial (KEM) Hospital says that "sheer necessity" dictates that facilities for heart surgery expand. Congenital heart disease occurs in two of every 1,000 births, and 10 lakh patients develop rheumatic heart diseases each year. These numbers dwarf the available facilities and it is estimated that last year's 8,000 open-heart operations were a mere 5 per cent of requirement.

Things are improving, but all too slowly. The Government proposed funding in the Seventh Five-Year Plan for six centres where coronary bypass operations will be performed after a study showed that a substantial saving in foreign exchange could be achieved with more facilities for this operation in India. Significantly, some 17 of the 40 coronary centres in India are run privately, and their number is likely to increase as large corporations, some working jointly with expatriate Indian doctors, venture into the medical field. But it promises to be a long haul, and the spread of cardiac surgery will hasten slowly

—COOMI KAPOOR

HEMANT PITHWA



Speakers at the Bombay open-heart surgery conference in Bombay

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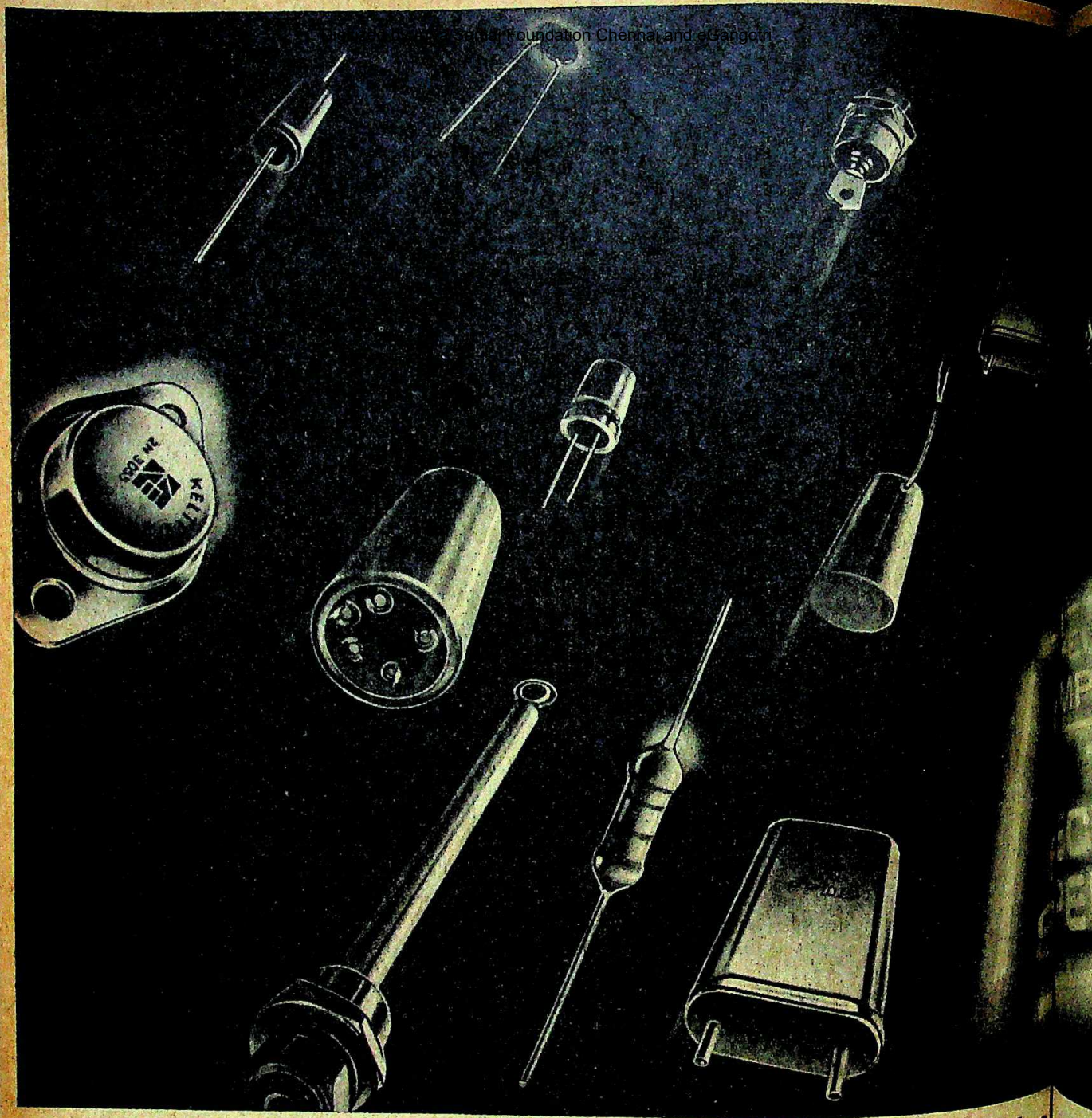

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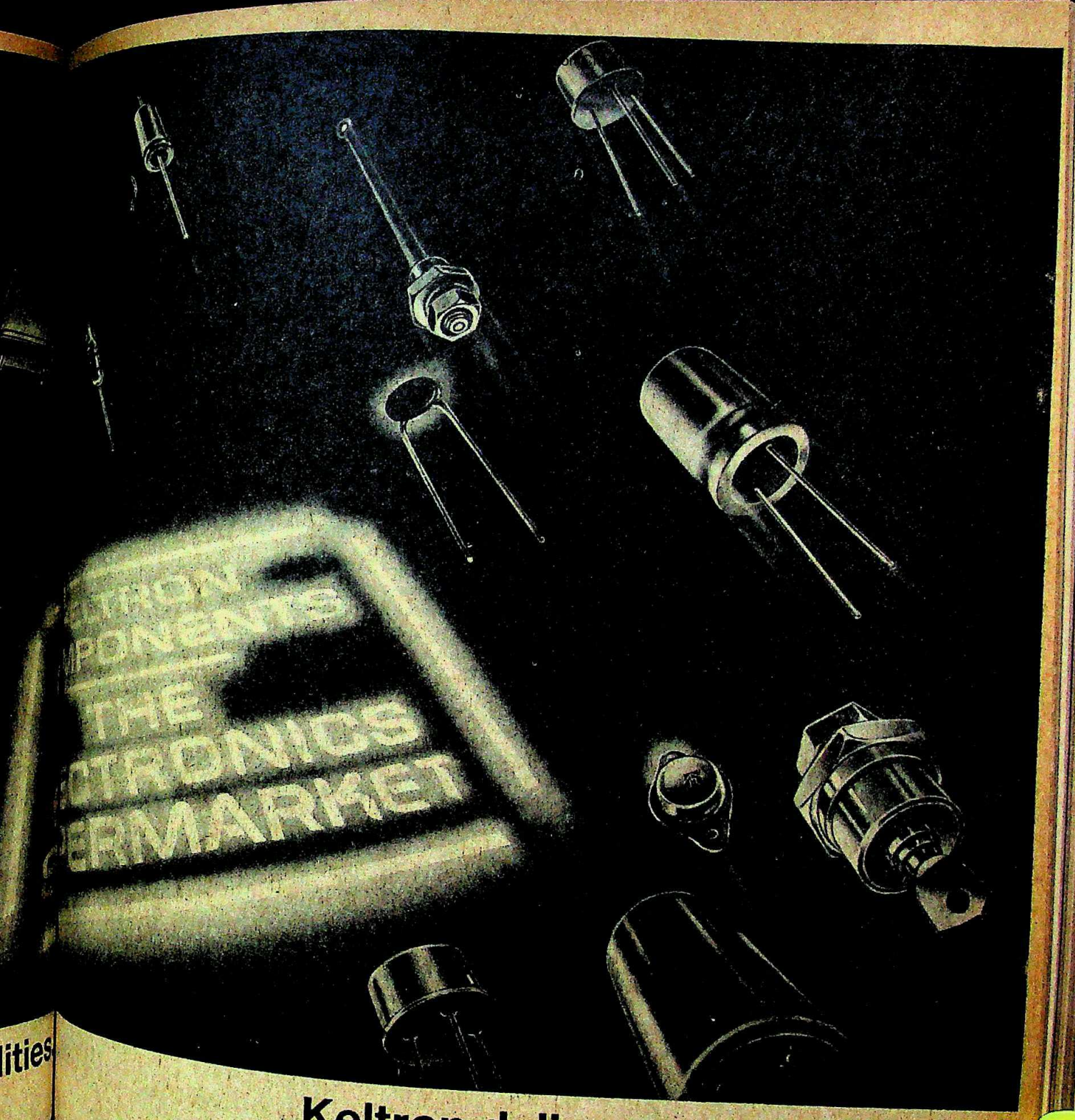

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SANDEEP NAIK

King Momo: high spirits

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Mickey Mouse: no rat race

◆ "Let there be mirth", **King Momo** said, Bacchus, the god of wine, smiled from above, and true to carnival tradition, Goa prepared itself for three days of non-stop merrymaking. But the revellers of Panjim faced a highly indignant clergy this year. The church organ *Renewal* launched a tirade against the 'pagan' festival which it considers an affront to Christian values and morals and the vicar refused to allow the hedonist King Momo on to the holy church steps to announce his reign. But the immoral majority was just as determined to have its feni and drink it too. The carnival committee erected a rostrum a few feet from the church, organised a grand opening day parade and in general, insisted on its pound of flesh before the hard and fasting days of Lent.

◆ There's not a young girl in Bombay who wouldn't give her eye-teeth to be a famous model, but famous model **Shyamolie Verma** feels "modelling is literally just a means of livelihood". What's really after the 6-foot Lakme lady's heart is art. She paints and she's obviously good. Verma exhibited her own work—a series of tall, willowy nudes in various stages of sleep—last week in Bombay. Before nightfall, the very first day, 12 of the 19 sleeping beauties were sold out. With that kind of encouragement it just might mean that art's gain is going to be fashion's loss.

◆ The world's most famous mouse was in town last week. In a whirlwind 30-day, 30-country merry-go-round designed to infect the universe with Disneyland's 30th birthday festivities, **Mickey Mouse**—the world's most recognisable cartoon character—dropped into New Delhi. The mouse arrived on a jet plane, checked into a luxurious five-star hotel, rode an elephant and spread his message of goodwill. "Keep up a big smile," he said, "it makes your day." Even at the grand old age of 80, Mickey has lost none of his youthful sex appeal: there's not a grey hair on that happy head and that bewitching smile still has the power to send hundreds of six-year-olds swooning. As for the delighted photographers, there was no problem getting this VIP to say "cheese".

◆ "Every time we want a raise we have to go on strike," said an intern at the Lady Hardinge Medical College. This year too, students from several of the capital's medical institutions put down their stethoscopes, chucked away their thermometers and refused to heal the sick till their stipend was raised from a measly Rs 550 to a more respectable Rs 850 a month. But this year the agitating young doctors went a novel step further: they congregated at a construction site—and much to the amusement of the poor labourers—grabbed their shovels, picked up loads of bricks and decided it was time they called a spade a spade. "These labourers are better paid than we are," said one medical student exaggerating somewhat. Nevertheless the point was made, the stipend raised and within a few days, the medical structure was restored.

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

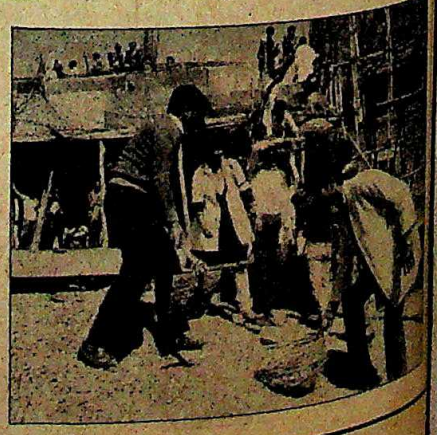
Verma with her paintings: for art's sake

Striking students: internal crisis

SIGN POSTS

Died: Ramu, the wolf boy, who was captured in Sultanpur district of Uttar Pradesh in 1976. Discovered in the company of wolves, Ramu had acquired many of their characteristics: he walked on all fours, his nails had grown into claws and he ate raw meat. Although he later found a human home in Prem Niwas, run by Mother Teresa's missionaries Ramu could not learn to speak. Last fortnight he developed cramps and did not respond to medical treatment.

NAMAS BHOJANI



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RAN BHARGAVA

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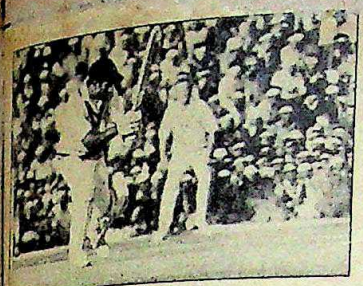


World Champions Again

Starting off as underdogs, a rejuvenated Indian eleven powered its way to a dramatic victory in the World Series of Cricket in Australia last fortnight. Above all, it was a team effort that led to the success as skipper Gavaskar concurs in an exclusive interview.

COVER STORY 136

A Historic Comeback

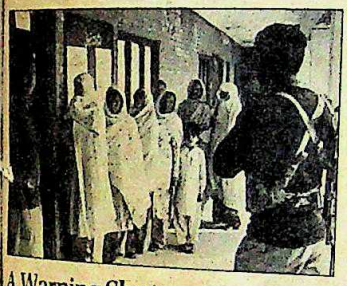
Against all electoral odds, Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde swept back to power with a stunning victory in last fortnight's assembly elections, stemming the Congress(I) tide. A report and analyses on the overall election results.

ELECTION SPECIAL 18

The Boat People

The Tamil exodus into India from the beseiged north of Sri Lanka swelled to crisis proportions with over 12,000 making the hazardous crossing in the past month alone. Their arrival has posed new and awkward problems for the state of Tamil Nadu.

SPECIAL FEATURE 76



A Warning Shot

President Zia-ul-Haq's first election since he seized power in 1977 sent a significant message to him, prompting him to tighten his grip on the country through constitutional amendments. An on-the-sport report and an exclusive interview with Zia

SPECIAL REPORT 74

Breaking the Logjam

In a major initiative, the most significant part of which was the release of key Akali leaders and the appointment of Arjun Singh as Governor of Punjab, the Centre seems to be finally trying to come to grips with the Punjab tangle.

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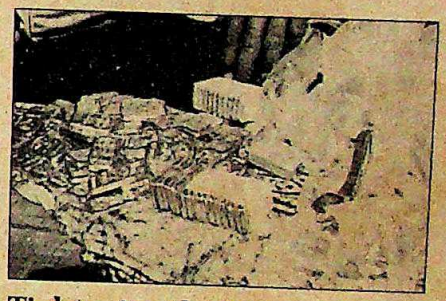

Tightening the Net

In a welcome development the Government has ordered the biggest crackdown ever on smugglers in a bid to curb the menace that deprives the exchequer crores of rupees. The move has paid rich dividends and a massive hunt is on for the godfathers of the trade.

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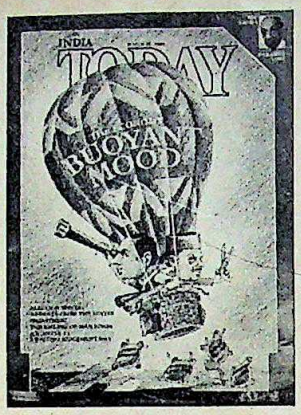

UNEVEN GROWTH

"Buoyant Mood" (March 15) depicted the performance of the economy in the last six or seven years excellently. I agree that the economic state of the country is far better than it was before but we still have a long distance to cover in this direction. The achievements of the economy are yet to be extended to the poor and to the remote areas of the country. Virtually nothing has been done on the price front, and without controlling the prices it will be difficult for the ordinary man to get the benefits of progress.

Jabalpur NITESH KATHANE

■ The impressive performances of certain macro-economic variables should certainly put most of us into a buoyant mood. But the rather rosy picture of India's economic prospects that you go on to draw from these is scarcely warranted, at least until much more is known about the distributional impact of the new policies on various sectors.

You appear to set great store by the publicity of even higher growth rates offered by the recent moves towards liberalising the economy, and stress that this may result in "a more than proportionate increase in per capita incomes". This however is only cause for jubilation if there exists a direct connection between higher growth and lower poverty, or even between increases in per capita incomes and decreases in the poverty ratio. This link is yet to be demonstrated. Indeed Raj Krishna has recently argued that there is no significant relation between the latter two, and others have gone further to suggest that higher growth rates with an unchanged institutional structure may even worsen the plight of the poor.

The crucial question for the Indian economy, against which the much heralded "take-off" has to be assessed, is not whether sustained high growth rates are possible, but whether, as you yourself well analysed in a previous issue, such growth can make any lasting impact on the 'other half', sunk in the continuing mire of poverty and malnutrition. In the absence of such a wider perspective the buoyant bubble of confidence may risk being pricked rather soon.

Trivandrum GOPALAKRISHNA KUMAR

ACCOUNTABLE LAPSES

I have yet to see the old tradition of a minister resigning as a rule in practice because of a major catastrophe ("Defining Accountability", February 28). Two or three cases don't make a tradition. After the Chinese debacle who should have resigned? There is no morality left in public life, and those who enter it are not immoral but amoral. It is refreshing to know that a man at the top or near the top has resigned or is sacked now and then because he is accountable for a major catastrophe in his area of responsibility even though cynically such accountability is considered only instantaneous and academic and there is no permanent stigma.

Pune P.G. JOSHI

■ To sack a top civil servant for outside office activities of his assistant, over which the former has no control, is not only improper but unethical and may also be utterly demoralising for all the public servants. The tendency to find scapegoats cannot allow any system to function smoothly and efficiently. Political leaders should also show their regard for public accountability more by their deeds rather than words.

New Delhi P. GOPAL

LIMITED LIABILITY

Referring to the article "Damage Discount" (February 28) I disagree with your contention that the big question is whether Kinetic Engineering was involved in the fraud or whether it was the bank officials who were really the culprits. The big question really is what your article rightly points out in the last paragraph "if the basic trust which underlies these deals is broken, where do we go?" Based on the newspaper reports one comes to the conclusion that it is the bank officials who are actually involved and that they have tried to damage the name of the Firodias in an attempt to save their own skin. It is surprising that your correspondent thinks that Kinetic was involved in the fraud.

Chandigarh S.K.

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■ Banking is a business that is carried out on faith. The outsider has no way of knowing that the branch manager's signature is not valid if it is not countersigned by his superior or a certain branch is not authorised to transact certain business. Thus the general manager's excuse is invalid.

A lot of people in the banking circles have expressed shock and surprise at the statement. But if this contention is true then the Central Bank should hang a plaque at its entrances saying "our branch manager has very limited authority. His signature is not adequate for any transactions. Any business you transact with our branch is at your own risk."

Pune A.S. JOSHI

STAR TURN

Reading about "MGR : Return of the Hero" (February 28) one cannot help feeling that professional actors, joining hands with professional politicians who are themselves no mean actors, can only create a great tragic play. God save us from the shock!

Ahmedabad J.V.V. MURTHY

HOUSING PROBLEMS

Your special feature "Opposition Leaders: Life After Defeat" (February 28) made interesting reading. The Lok Sabha Housing Committee rightly asked the defeated MP's to vacate their houses and all of them should have complied with it as meanwhile law-making and now law-abiding citizens. Ram Jethmalani's reported remark "the heavens will not fall if the new MP is asked to wait for a few months. I waited for a year when I was defeated in '77", showed the inefficiency of the Janata government to enforce rules and regulations. He should also know that two wrongs do not make one right. If the law-makers themselves become law-breakers their image will suffer immensely in the eyes of the public.

Madras B.K. MALHOTRA

■ It makes amusing reading that many political stalwarts have to vacate their houses which they occupied as MP's. I'm glad that they will now come to the mainstream and know what the life of a common man could be.

Ahmedabad SOORYAKANT PARIKH

■ Your coverage on the opposition stalwarts' present problem to find themselves robbed of a roof from over their heads tells us how the Housing Committee without considering the fact that rents and property values in the capital have skyrocketed, gave them only a few weeks to vacate their houses in order to make room for new MP's. These leaders who were swept aside by the mighty Congress(I) wave in the recent Lok Sabha elections have not retired from politics. They need to stay in the capital so that they can be actively involved. The committee should provide them with temporary accommodation until they can find themselves an alternative.

Eluru, Andhra Pradesh C. SURYAM

ALL IN THE FAMILY

This is with reference to your article "Dirty Linen" (February 28). The sexual humiliation of the female students is deplorable. The criminal attitude of the principal is condemnable, instead of taking stern action against the defaulters he threatens the female students with dire consequences in case they raise their voice against the outrage on their modesty. The Stephanians called it their "family affair" instead of openly boycotting those who sullied the image of this prestigious institution.

Jaipur V. BALA KRISHNAN

■ Being an ex-Stephanian I read "Dirty Linen" before anything else and found that it gave a true picture of the minor incident at the college. It had been bloated out of proportion by the press. St Stephen's College has always roused envy and this time the adverse publicity was also given out of envy.

Ajmer HARKIRAT SINGH

■ Your report on St Stephen's was a well balanced one. It was heartening to read about the unity and loyalty shown by the students of the college and even the women students, who were the targets of this despicable affair, accepted it as a "domestic affair". What team spirit!

Calcutta SUSHOVAN BASU

BUREAUCRAT'S BUMBLE

Apropos of "Loan Mela" (February 28) I do not agree with Mr P.K. Kaul that he has done nothing wrong. Heaven help the nation if all bureaucrats start emulating his example.

Jabalpur R. SHEKHAR

NOT RELATED

In the cover story "Assembly Elections: An Unequal Battle" (February 28) it says "Gujarat: Tickets have been given to the wives of Jadeja, the health minister, Harihar Khamboljia, minister of state for finance, and Jaswant Chauhan, south Gujarat Congress leader, all of whom were denied tickets." This statement is totally baseless and untrue since Harshadba R. Jadeja is neither Manoharsinh Jadeja's spouse, family member nor relative.

Gandhinagar, Gujarat CHANDRASINHJI JHALA
personal secretary to the minister of health, civil supplies and sports

The error is regretted —*Editor*

STANDING BY STEREO

Your article "The Gold Rush" (February 28) was very biased. Appachen and I chose Stereovision over all other available 3-D systems to film *Kuttichathen (Chotta Chetan)*, now India's biggest box-office hit. Arrivision cannot in any way be considered the "new superstar". The first Arrivision film has been delayed, perhaps because the producer is reshooting scenes in an attempt to equal the astounding 3-D effects of our film.

Madras THOMAS EASAW
executive producer of Kuttichathen

ACCOUNTING FOR ACCOUNTS

This refers to your Trade Winds item "Adman Cometh" (January 31), concerning our agency. The accounts of Plantation Corporation, Oil Palm India Ltd. and Coconut Development Corporation were acquired by us when executives who were servicing them in other advertising agencies joined us and the clients wanted the same executives to service them. We are not handling any work of Kerala Agro Industries Corporation, and we handle only a very insignificant part of the advertising by the Milk Marketing Federation. In the case of the Kerala State Warehousing Corporation, we and Aries of Cochin do their work equally. Also, it is important to point out that we get more than half our billing from private clients—Rs 3.63 lakh as against Rs 2.58 lakh from government clients.

Cochin T. VINAY KUMAR
Manager Administration, Guide Advertising & Marketing Associates

Two spokesmen of rival advertising agencies and the managing director of a state government undertaking told our correspondent that they were pressurised to give some business to Guide Advertising, in which the daughter-in-law of the state agriculture minister is a partner. —*Editor*

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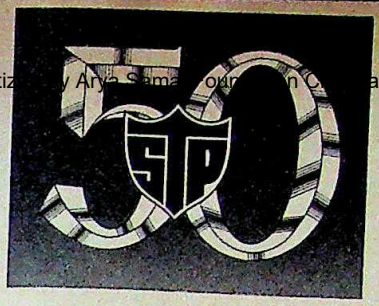

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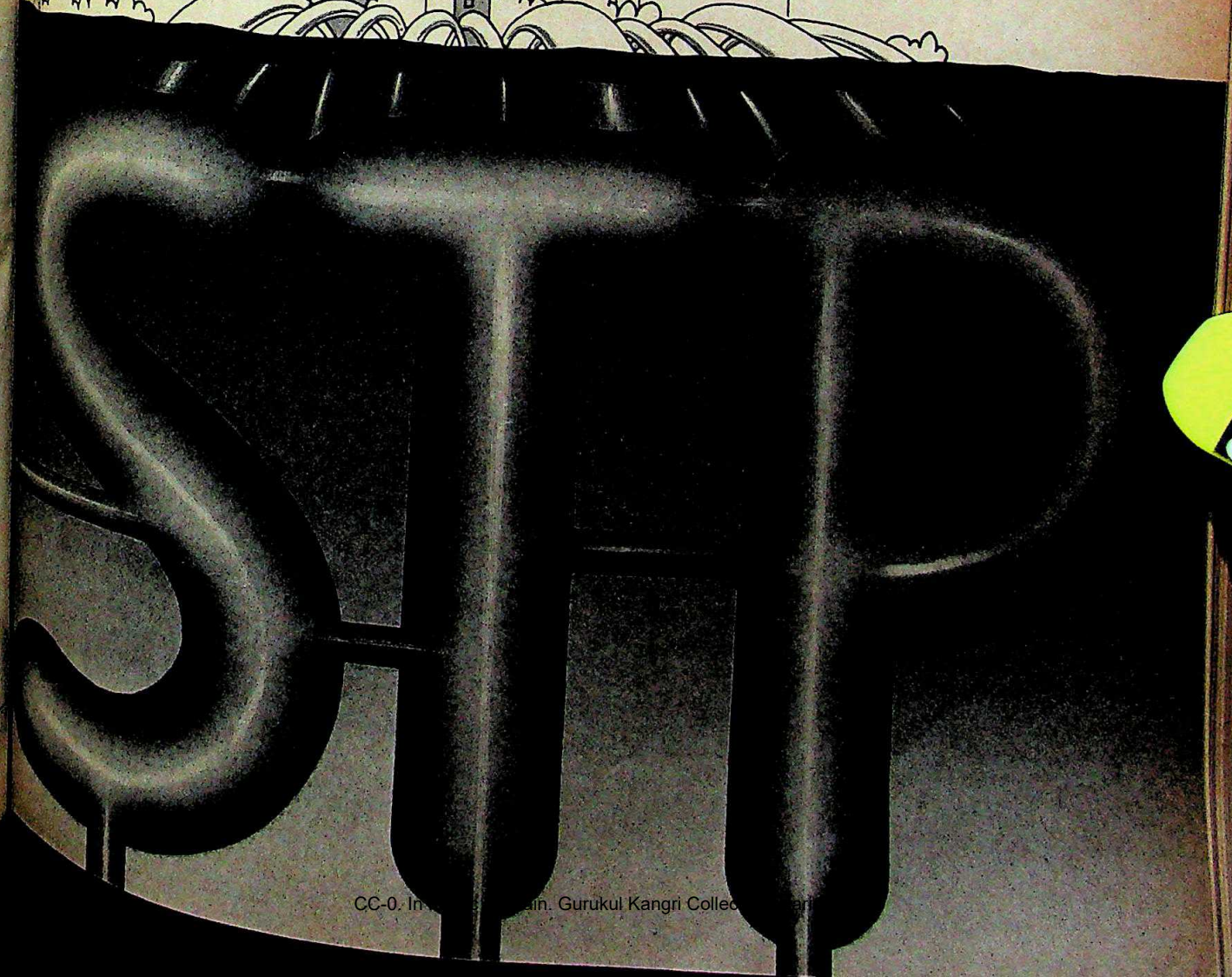

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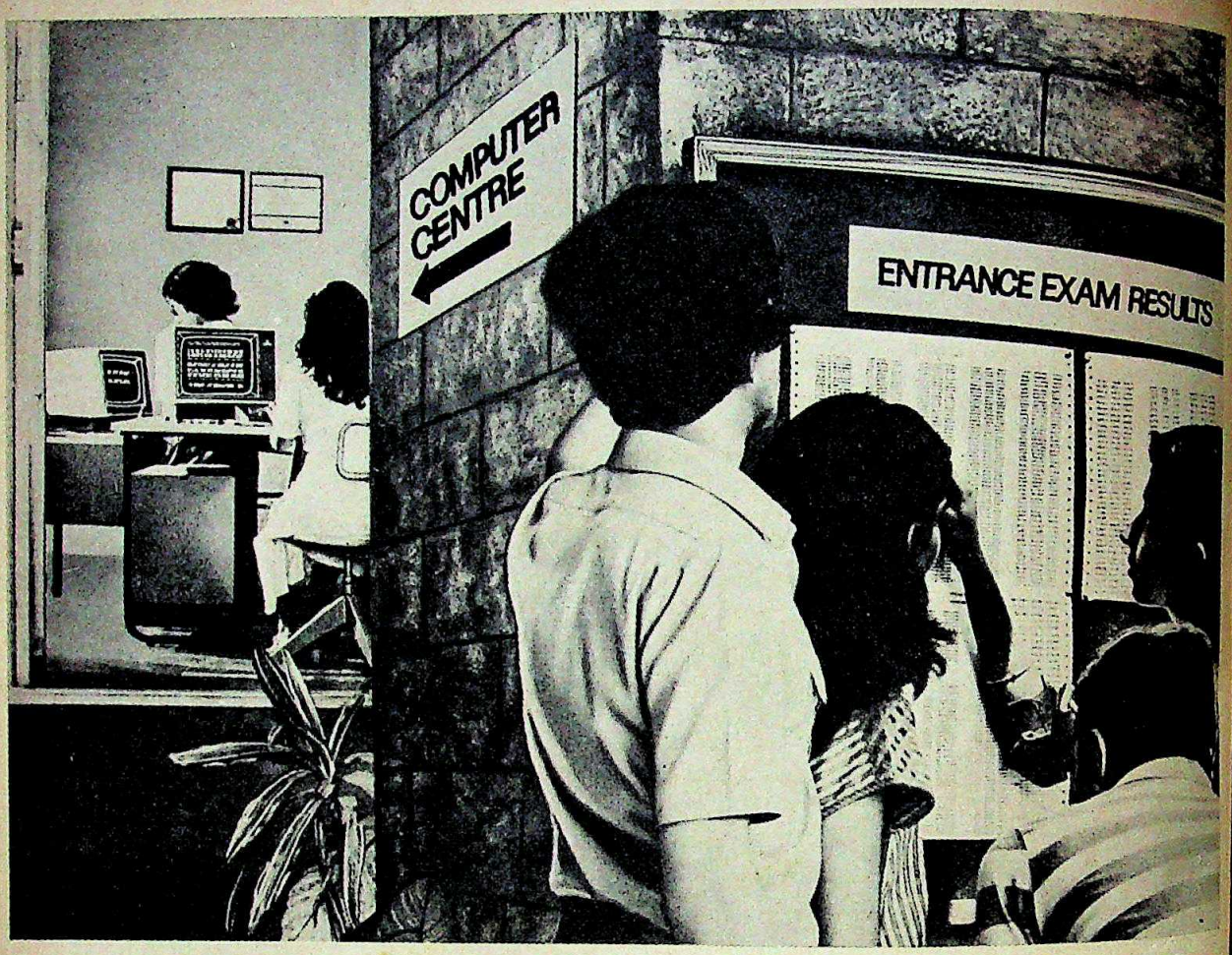

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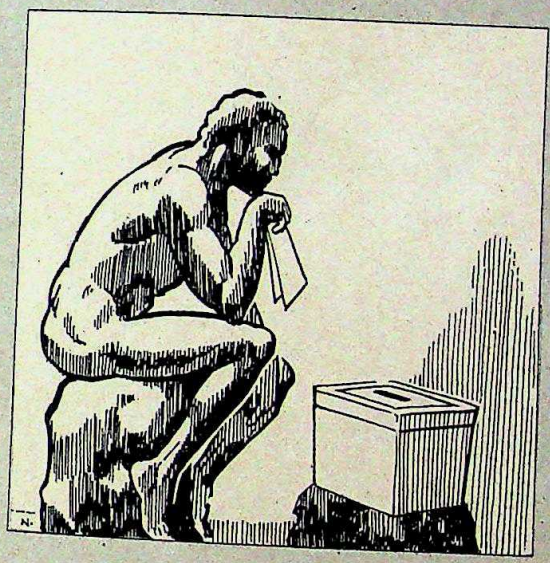
Messages in the Mandate

THERE are many ways of winning power in the states and the recent assembly elections have been a verdict on some of them no less than they have determined which party will rule which state. Politicians would do well to heed the message of the electorate.

The elections have at last shown quite conclusively that toppling popularly elected governments or tampering with them to win power is definitely out. Each of the three opposition governments that were thrown up in last fortnight's electoral battle were the object of concerted Congress(I) conspiracies that either got rid of the governments (in Sikkim and, temporarily, Andhra Pradesh) or put them under unacceptable pressure (in Karnataka). The humiliation of the Congress(I) in these states is entirely of its own making. Had the Centre last year permitted N.T.Rama Rao's Telugu Desam Government to lose steam on its own, and permitted the Central Bureau of Investigation to look into charges of alleged corruption against Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the story of the elections might well have been different.



The results have also shown that only parties that offer a realistic option or are led by men of charismatic appeal can hope to capture the popular imagination. The Congress(I) has swept the northern states because it is the only party which offers any credibility in these states, and enough of the electorate is unwilling to experiment with unstable opposition coalitions which are the only alternative. True, the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party has improved its position in Uttar Pradesh and the opposition parties—united for a change—made a big dent in Rajasthan, but this was due as much to the ruling party's own problems as the appeal of the opposition parties.

Finally, the elections strongly suggest that good performance is good politics. There is little doubt that the return to power of Ramakrishna Hegde's Janata Party with a vastly increased majority in Karnataka has to do with Hegde's performance as chief minister, a performance that Rajiv sought very unsuccessfully to belittle.

Hegde's success in overcoming Rajiv's challenge is doubly important. Not only does it show that good performance and a good image can carry the day, it also shows that the electorate is discriminating in its judgement. In both Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, Rajiv's abrasive comments about the state governments were dismissed for the election rhetoric that they were, and the voter was obviously influenced by his own experience of the state administrations.

The message from the electorate is clear, that the fight for votes, the battle to form governments, must be played by the rules, that the competition for votes will have to be a competition of good deeds and policies, not the unrestrained exercise either of brute power or unconstitutional cunning. Amongst other things, this means a second look at the validity of the G.M. Shah Government in J & K, a government that was brought about by political manipulation and failed to carry conviction in last December's Lok Sabha election. It also means not discriminating against states that are ruled by opposition governments or denying them their dues in resources. And, such opposition regimes as there are need to remember that their continuation in office depends just as much on providing good government. A repeat of the administrative decay in Andhra Pradesh which characterised the drift of the previous Telugu Desam Government would be a sure invitation to disaster.

But, it needs to be emphasised, good government and good performance are not the same as wasteful populist measures. Midday meals and free saris, loan melas or concessions on reservations may work for a while, but they do so at very great cost. Governments that rely on buying the support of their electorate rather than winning it are merely being shortsighted: populist concessions tend to bankrupt governments and pampering certain sections of society at the cost of others tends to become self-defeating.

What is needed is something different. It is structural change that will speed up prosperity and there are no shortcuts to that. It is not the distribution of largesse but the creation of better administration, of justice for the public at the hands of bureaucrats, of more jobs and opportunities, better schools, more homes and law and order that win the loyalty of the average voter in the long run.

The election itself is a pointer to that, a signal that the electorate at large was aware that it needed to put brakes on the power that it handed the Congress(I) so liberally in the December election. A repeat of that in the assembly elections would have been an invitation to complacency if not at the very top then most certainly in the rank and file of the Congress(I). Each of the previous two Lok Sabha elections, in 1977 and 1980, was followed by a recession of the popular vote in the assembly polls that followed immediately afterwards. The same thing has happened this time round, only more so and enough to give the Congress(I) pause for thought. If the end result is to introduce caution in the governance of the states and an obligation to play by the rules, if the elections are followed by an awareness in all political parties not to take the voter for granted any more but obey his mandate for clean, effective politics, then it will have been a historic election.

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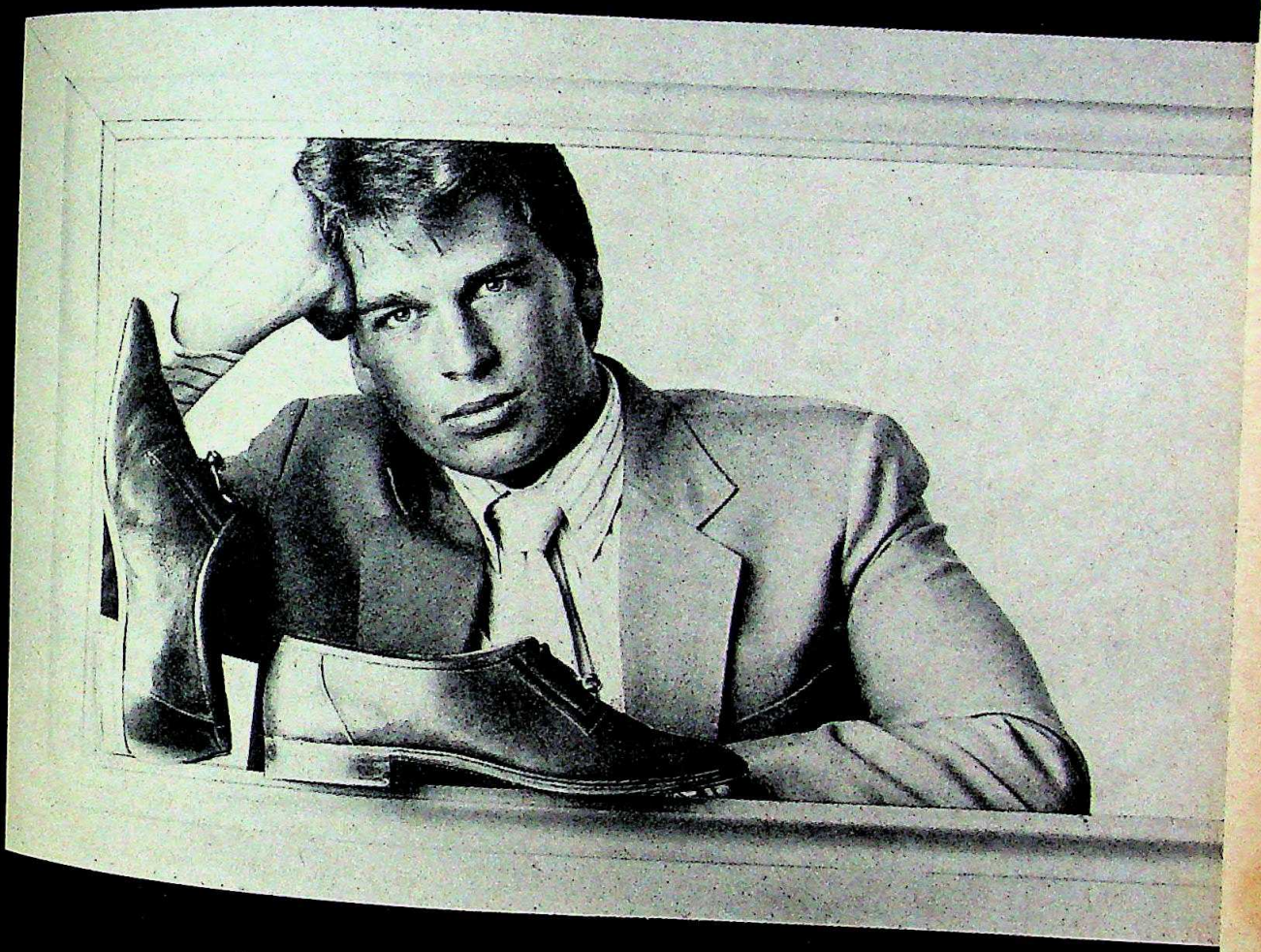

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● *Those who get the licences behave like those who get into a railway compartment and then bolt it from within.*

■ V. P. SINGH in *Current*

● *Indian cricket needs a father figure like Gavaskar. And believe me you currently have the best balanced side in the world.* ■ IAN CHAPPELL in *The Telegraph*

● *I do not think that the Constitution of India is a joke. I don't think terrorism can be permitted to continue.* ■ RAJIV GANDHI in *Blitz*

● *His (Antulay's) biggest fault was that he took cheques. Why did he have to take cheques? Such an idiot. I don't know how he passed his barresteri (law). And then he talks too much.* ■ HAJI MASTAN in *Sunday*

● *You have to be prepared for everything in politics. I am not unhappy. I have had my innings—from a junior minister to chief minister. I am still young.*

■ GUNDU RAO after he was denied a ticket for the assembly elections in *Current*

● *The two men are in your mind. The myth and me. As for me, there is only one person.* ■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *By letting Punjab slip down his priority list Mr Gandhi may be causing himself more problems than he is dodging.* ■ Editorial in *The Economist*

● *Why should Rajiv keep asking the Akalis to condemn terrorism which is now universally acknowledged as a creation of the ruling party... Instead Rajiv should take his men to task.* ■ NIRLEP KAUR in *The Telegraph*

● *I do not play for records. I play the game for its own sake. I think the game is greater than those who play it.*

■ MOHAMMAD AZHARUDDIN in *Society*

● *Azharuddin can get runs on any kind of wicket; he will get them on the beach and on a desert.*

■ SUNIL GAVASKAR in an interview with *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*

● *I love the Indian people. They're very subservient. They're very emotional people. They whine a lot.*

■ MELVIN BELLI American lawyer representing Bhopal victims in *USA Today*

● *Journalists are the eyes and ears of society. How can a sensible person say that all journalists are wretched.*

■ JUSTICE YOGESHWAR DAYAL defending his earlier statement in *Onlooker*

● *Indians definitely lack musicality, especially in the north. There is nothing except film music which a lot of people look down upon, but I think that is the only saving grace.* ■ RAVI SHANKAR in *The Weekend Review*

● *Flirting is a feminine diplomacy. My husband says if I was in politics I'd start the third world war.*

■ MOON MOON SEN in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *I'd rather be more adventurous than be consistently safe and good and boring.*

■ SMITA PATIL in *Filmfare*

● *Yes I'm a bastard. I am the illegitimate child of my parents so what? It makes me different, unique. How boring that everybody is so legitimate.*

■ MAHESH BHATT in *Sunday*

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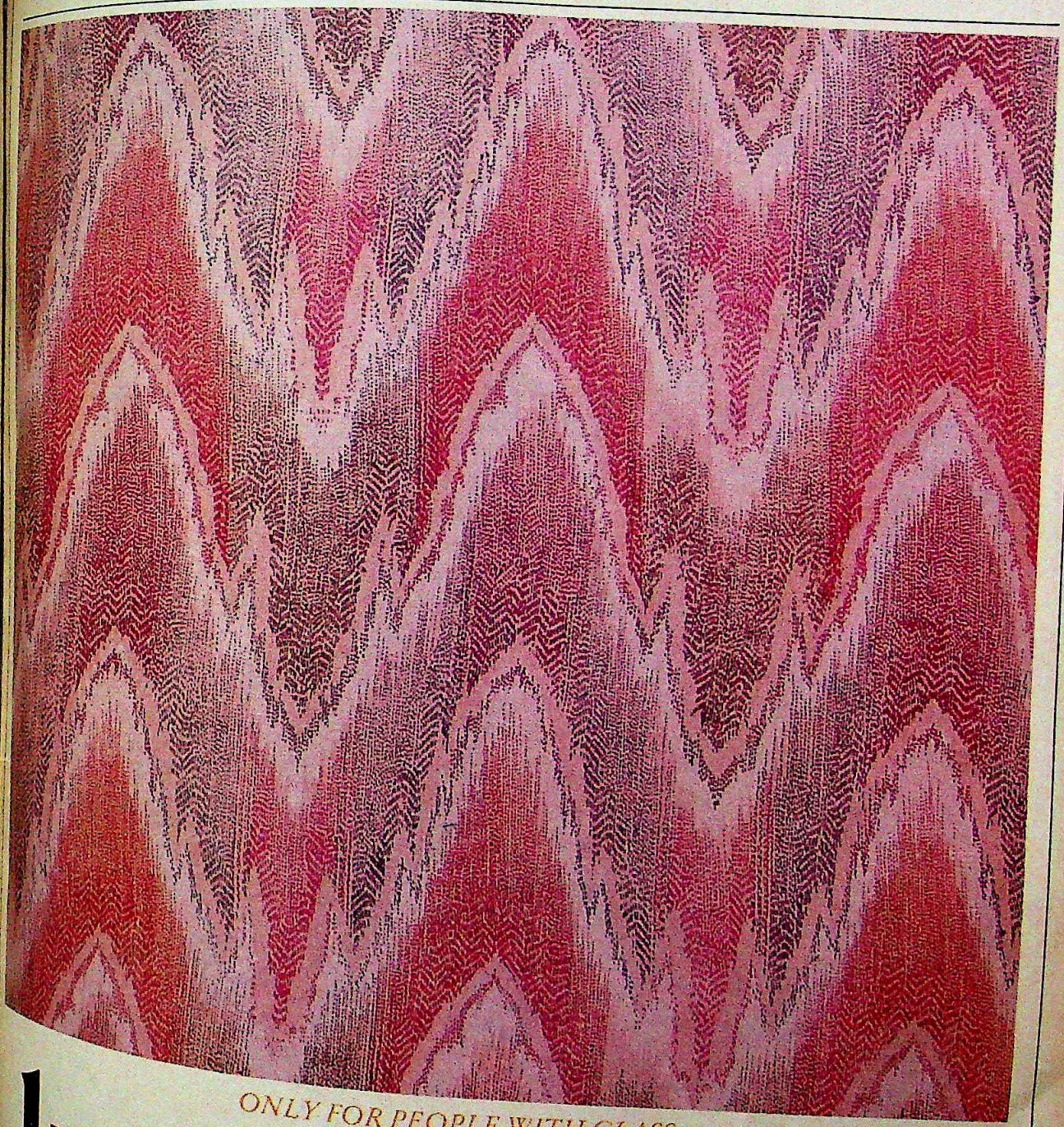

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Gentle hostess in your sarong kebaya you care for me as only you know how across four continents of the earth in the luxury of the world's most modern fleet. Singapore Girl you're a great way to fly.

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MILKY WAY

■ The milk of human kindness has been written about so often, starting with that lady in Scotland and her singular lack of any, that the expression has since been watered down considerably—and not just by the *doodhwala*. The unkindest cut of all now comes from Bhopal.

Last month a horde of *doodhwalas* from a government dairy outside town gathered three quintals of milk together in about a hundred cans and marched on the municipality. When they got there, they proceeded to splash the milk all around and on top of any municipal employee who happened to be passing by. The result of their single minded effort was that the municipality soon started to look like a land of milk and honey though the curses that emanated from its corridors were far from what could be called catholic.

However, it appeared that this somewhat unusual protest had in fact managed to put across its point. The milkmen were apparently peeved over the fact that the dairy was located miles outside town with few facilities by way of transport and other necessaries. It is to be hoped that after the drenching the authorities will now turn a somewhat kindlier eye to their problems.

STANDING CHARGES

■ The chair and the question of who sits on it rule Indian life. So it is not surprising that a tiny force one storm is brewing in Calcutta's Writers Building over chairs—about 130 of them to be precise.

The problem has to do with 130 employees who were recently promoted as upper division clerks on the basis of recommendations by the administrative reforms committee. But the committee had no idea that the furniture situation was so desperate: for the last few weeks now, the 'promotees' have been clocking in and signing the attendance register and then just hanging around because there are no chairs for them.

This has the various departmental heads in a tizzy. They fear that their

charges are enjoying all the benefits of higher pay for little or no work done and with a valid reason. The administration is reluctant to force the issue because anything that has to do with workers' obligations in a state as conscious of workers' rights as West Bengal is subject to much debate, and no one wants to hold the buck. So the 130 come, sign and go, their heads held high in pride.

BEERING THE BURDEN

■ Elections are a fun time for everybody concerned except for tipplers. The Government usually declares dry days and so it was a rich young man in Bombay found himself sans beer on a extremely hot, humid and thirsty afternoon listening to the waiter of a restaurant telling him apologetically that "*Saab, gormint ka order hai*". The waiter added helpfully

that only foreign passport holders could get drinks. The rich young man dashed off immediately and came back with another rich young man with a Nigerian passport. The grinning waiter promptly served them half a dozen bottles of beer. All around them were people with their tongues hanging out so the host graciously ordered beer for everybody present. As the evening wore on and night crept up the restaurant was one rowdy picnic with empty bottles stacked up on the tables.

When it came to the bill, though, the young man's magnanimity vanished. The perfect host who had been telling stories of how he always bought a round of drinks for everybody present in a pub in England now turned into the prudent businessman who asked the waiter to get separate bills. After all, it was no small beer.

FILMI FINALE

■ The West abounds with agony aunties who are ever ready to give copious advice in their regular columns in newspapers and suchlike. In India, where most press aunties are more interested in the best way to pluck an eyebrow, such consideration is sadly lacking. However, the films more than make up for this lacuna.

A Baroda couple had filed for divorce and the case was in court. The judge asked them to see a film together: *Pyar Jhukta Nahin*. The film is about a poverty-stricken photographer (Mithun Chakraborty) who marries a millionaire's daughter (Padmini Kolhapure). Mithun and Padmini's idyllic existence—when the Bombay film industry makes something idyllic it stays idyllic—is

shattered by Padmini's parents. Finally, everything works out well and the two walk away into the sunset.

Mysteriously, this love story had the couple sobbing in their seats. Afterwards, they went to the judge and told him that they saw his point of view and wanted the case withdrawn. He patted them on the head, and they walked away into the sunset.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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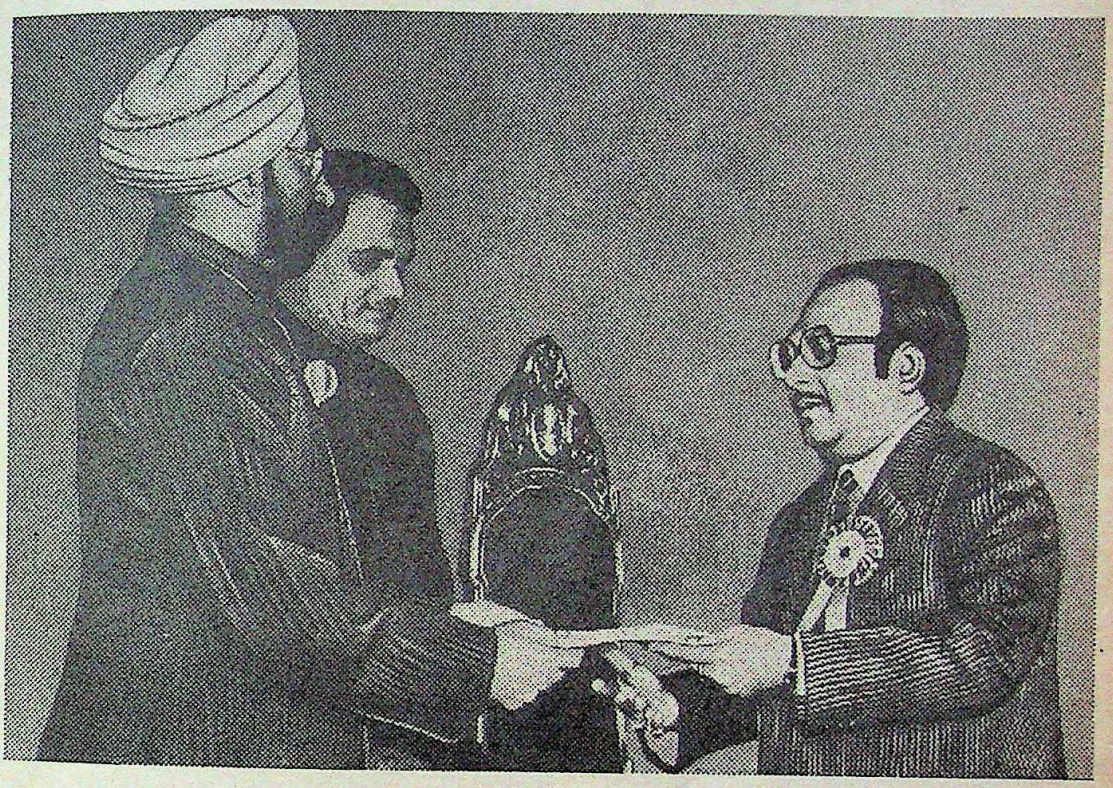

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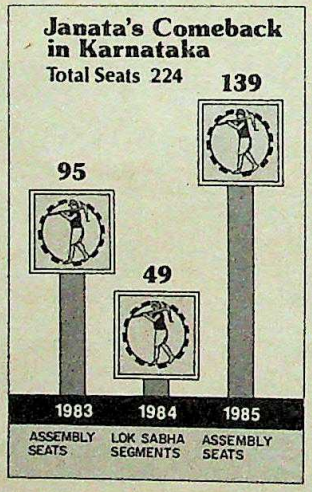
KARNATAKA

A Historic Comeback

RAMAKRISHNA Hegde was prepared for the worst as he and a handful of his ministers settled down around the oblong teakwood table in the sunny cabinet hall in Vidhana Soudha last week. Outside it was a breezy spring morning and Bangalore was living up to its name of the garden city of India with flowers in full bloom. It was the day the results of the assembly elections were to be announced and Hegde had deliberately called the Cabinet meeting so that if the Janata Party lost he could wind up office immediately and bid goodbye to his officers.

But an hour after the meeting had begun his private secretary handed him a white slip of paper that showed that after the second round of counting of votes was over, the Janata Party was leading in as many as 141 out of the 224 constituencies in the state. His cabinet ministers whooped with joy but Hegde was unruffled and even looked a trifle disappointed. As he said later: "Nobody is going to believe this but my immediate feeling was that I was going to be deprived of the short holiday that I had promised myself after the gruelling campaign."

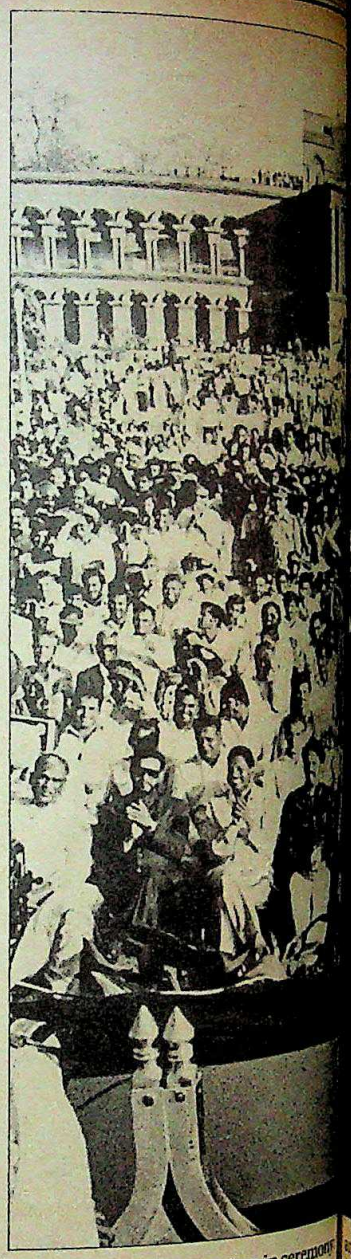


As the results flowed in and a relaxed Hegde and his jubilant colleagues adjourned to the box-shaped chief minister's office called Krishna, which Gundu Rao had designed when he was in power, it became obvious that instead of Hegde it would be the Congress(I) partymen who would have to take a long holiday. By evening while Hegde watched the none too clear Doordarshan telecast of the election results, a picture of him taken 10 years ago flashed on the screen with the announcement that the Janata Party had won an absolute majority in Karnataka capturing 139 of the 224 seats. "I look like a Chambal dacoit in that picture," was all Hegde had to say.

If anyone saw Hegde in that role, it could only have been the Congress(I) which was robbed of victory by the chief minister and his Janata marauders. Nothing could stop the Hegde juggernaut. The dusty plains of north Karnataka which the Congress(I) had for long regarded as invincible yielded without a murmur. The rocky Kolar and Raichur could not withstand his onslaught and the Muslim districts of Bijapur and Bidar were captured. And as Hegde and his raiders marched down south, they overran the hilly Chickmagalur and Hassan districts. The palace city of Mysore was ransacked. The Janata fort in Bangalore remained undamaged except for two turrets. Only coastal south Kanara held Hegde at bay. Otherwise he was the undisputed king of Karnataka. The Congress(I), as former chief minister Gundu Rao put it, had been "thrown into the dustbin by the people of Karnataka."

For the battered national opposition parties, after their dismal defeat in the recent Lok Sabha elections, the Janata victory in Karnataka came like a breath of fresh air. The Rajiv tornado which had swept the country only two months ago had at last been contained to the north of the Vindhyas. It had showed signs of waning in Maharashtra where Sharad Pawar's Progressive Democratic Front had given the Congress(I) a run for its money initially before yielding. As expected Andhra Pradesh which had remained unaffected by the Rajiv wave earlier continued to repose its faith in N.T. Rama Rao. But the unexpected victory in Karnataka was a morale booster for the Opposition. In Bangalore as vast crowds gathered to cheer Hegde in Basavangudi a day after the election results, Janata Party leader Madhu Dandavate turned somewhat poetic and remarked, "In 1979, our garden was destroyed. But in 1985, in the hands of Ramakrishna Hegde our garden has bloomed again. Spring has come at last for the Opposition."

Democracy too seems to have got a new lease of life, with the electorate displaying a rare maturity. Only two mont[illegible] ago when they felt that the nation's un[illegible] was at stake they had voted solidly [illegible] Rajiv giving the Congress(I) 24 of the [illegible] Lok Sabha seats in the state. In an ana[illegible]tical editorial the *Deccan Herald*, [illegible] state's largest circulated English daily [illegible] commented: "The voters have demon[illegible]strated their ability to distinguish inte[illegible]gently between the issues in a Lok Sabha [illegible] election and assembly poll and have [illegible]reby displayed a high degree of polit[illegible] acumen." The people by and large [illegible] Hegde was good for Karnataka. Said [illegible]



Hegde's outdoor swearing-in ceremony a personal victory

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BHAWAN SINGH

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...ani, a college teacher: "Thank God our electorate is intelligent. We now have a chief minister that we are proud of."

Within two months Hegde had done the impossible. Only in December the chill weather turned bleaker for him when his party's strength was only 94 and could muster a slender majority of five with the help of the BJP and the two communist parties. When he called for fresh polls nobody, not even his own partymen, gave him an outside chance of winning. As R.G.R. Sindhia, a former minister who stood for the Parliamentary elections and was humiliatingly, put it: "We thought we wouldn't even be able to make it to the Opposition benches." Only Hegde had not given up hope. Said Hegde: "I knew that it was a colossal, almost impossible task. But I had some kind of feeling that the voting pattern would be different this time." Relying on what he called a gut-level feeling Hegde launched a virtual one-man crusade. He toured every constituency in his Jaya Vahini, a van similar to Rama Rao's Chaitanya Ratham, travelling more than 5,000 kilometres in a span of two supercharged weeks and addressed an average of 25 meetings everyday despite an ailing throat.

His efforts were not in vain for the party increased its strength from 94 to a whopping 139, but along with the six seats its allies, the two communist parties, had won it fell four short of the two-thirds majority in the Assembly. In the process it demolished the Congress(I) in the state whose tally dropped to 66 from 90. The BJP which had earlier failed to come to an electoral understanding with the Janata Party was virtually wiped out in the state retaining only two of the 18 seats they held previously. Said state BJP president B.B. Shivappa, who resigned after his party's disastrous showing, "Last time it was a Rajiv Gandhi wave. Now there is a Hegde wave. This is a vote for Hegde not for the Janata Party."

But Hegde did not rely solely on his 'gut-level' feelings to pull off this astonishing win. He secretly hired a private poll re-

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search group and asked them to conduct regular opinion polls to assist his campaign strategy. When the pollsters first reported to him before he set out on his election campaign in mid-February, the news they had was depressing. The Congress(I) was in a position to win 190 of the 224 seats and Hegde needed a huge 7.5 per cent swing in his favour if he had to make a comeback. Economist and one-time Janata Party poll strategist L.C. Jain, who assisted Hegde in his campaign, said: "It was a bone-chilling prospect." But Hegde himself was unfazed. He merely looked at the figure and said: "So this is the size of the challenge." The pollsters advised Hegde to carry out a subdued campaign that was designed to evoke the sympathy of the voters.

Hegde did just that and, quite unlike his Lok Sabha campaign, there was hardly any fire in his speeches. If anything, his meetings were designed to leave people with a warm afterglow—the kind they get from sitting around dying embers of coal. He never cajoled the people or carried out a vituperative attack against Rajiv Gandhi. On the other hand, he praised them for voting for a strong Centre. He made performance his sole campaign issue and cleverly convinced them that by resigning before his term was over he was a moral and sincere person who believed in value-based politics. He told the voters, everywhere he went, that they should vote for him only if they approved of his government. Said he: "My government did really nothing wrong in the past two years. So I was confident that my arguments were convincing." Initially, however, his approach did not appear to work and Hegde observed dispiritedly after the first leg of his campaign that the people "were cool and mysterious about their feelings".

Ironically, what gave Hegde the real boost was Rajiv's aggressive campaign in the state. Rajiv walked into Hegde's trap by challenging the claims of his performance. He derided Hegde's achievements and pointed out that the state had actually slipped down the development ladder under the Janata Government. In retrospect, Rajiv's biggest mistake was telling the people that if they wanted speedier progress, the same party should rule both at the Centre and the state. State intelligence reports revealed that in the process Rajiv had not only hurt the pride of the Kannadiga by telling him that the state was going downhill but put forward what seemed an unreasonable argument to them by asking for a same party rule. Hegde countered Rajiv's arguments

INTERVIEW

"I was prepared for the worst"

SUCCESS hardly seems to go to Ramakrishna Hegde's head. The bearded 59-year-old Karnataka chief minister was swept to power again by a wave akin to Rajiv Gandhi's in the Lok Sabha elections. But even in his moment of triumph Hegde remained as cool as ever. Just before he was formally elected leader of the Janata Party last week Hegde spoke for an hour to Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *in Bangalore. And when he found that this time was insufficient he asked Chengappa to join him for a brisk morning walk to complete the interview. Excerpts:*

Q. *How does it feel to sweep back to power like this?*

A. Many people might think this funny but I am not elated. Just satisfied by the results. I have gone through vicissitudes in political life and am now used to taking things in the same spirit whether they are in my favour or not. For me power has never been an ego trip. I advised my party workers not to celebrate our victory until we had fulfilled our electoral promises. There is so much of poverty and unemployment that I cannot be at ease celebrating a small victory of ours when compared to Himalayan problems like these.

Q. *Did you expect to win and that too by such a big margin?*

A. A gut-level feeling made me confident that the people would not let me down. I was also prepared for the worst because I never take things for granted. Frankly, I expected to win only about 120 seats at the most.

Q. *While campaigning you remarked that the people's mood was mysterious. When did their attitude change?*

A. I think people were mysterious for two reasons. One was because initially the atmosphere had not warmed up. There was no election fever as yet. Secondly, people had heard me during the Lok Sabha elections and did not feel the need to express their feelings. That's what made them cool towards me.

Q. *This time your campaign was more systematic than the one for the Lok Sabha and you even carried out an opinion poll. Why?*

A. Because this poll was not just a battle, it was a war. It was not just a matter of my government winning the very future of my party depended the outcome of this election. With win here the Janata Party in particu and the Opposition in general have g shot in the arm.

Q. *What were the factors wh helped you win this election w such a large majority especially af the party's poor showing in the L Sabha elections?*

A. Rajiv Gandhi made my task eas by the kind of issues he put forth bef the electorate. Number one was that th same party should rule in the Centre a state for faster progress. Well, it did even take me a couple of minutes t demolish this because the glorio example of the past 15 years when th same party ruled both at the Centre an at the state was before the people. The knew what Gundu Rao and his dram troupe had done. The other wrong mov Rajiv made was that when I said th election was going to be a referendu for my performance in the past tw years, he thought the best way t counter it was to tell the people that m performance was zero. Well, he w caught because how can anybody b that statement in Karnataka. Take an single village here and you will find th in the past two years either a road ha been constructed or a high scho started or even a borewell sunk fo drinking water. What people had expe rienced was contrary to what Rajiv w saying. Once it was driven home in the minds that the prime minister was n speaking the truth, whatever I sa gained automatic credibility.

Q. *Didn't an undercurrent o sympathy which you exploited by go subdued campaign help you to w also?*

A. I don't think the sympathy factor was strong either for me or for Rajiv i this election. I didn't adopt a 'poor m approach because I knew that would b counter-productive. I didn't seek the pity in my speeches. If any sympa came it was because of my sincerity stuck to the same speech throughou not even changing a comma so much a that I was tired of it myself. I explained the people why I had to resign and a campaign was easy this time becau

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the only issue I put before the people was my performance. I spoke to the people in the simplest possible language and appealed to their hearts. They listened with rapt attention and every word went down. It was simple for me, very simple, to win their hearts.

Q. Don't you think that projecting you as the undisputed leader for your party helped?

A. I think that had a considerable influence too. Actually I have been studying the impact of a strong leader on the electorate with a certain degree of acuteness in the past seven years. Earlier, I never believed that symbolism plays such an important role in politics. When Nehru was there I thought it was just natural that people adored him. But he really symbolised the aspirations and dreams of independent India. If there was any room for suspicion Mrs Gandhi removed that as she systematically built up the personality cult. Hindus believe in symbolism and unlike in other faiths God has various forms, shapes and characteristics. But now thanks to Mrs Gandhi even in politics symbolism has come to stay. People now want a strong person who radiates confidence and charisma to lead them.

Q. You had once said that you too had become a symbol of the Janata Party in Karnataka. Isn't that dangerous because there is really no second line of leadership to take over from you?

A. I agree. Before my term is over, if it is possible, I would like somebody to take over from me so that in the next election that man has sufficient confidence and experience.

Q. Many political observers feel that you have the potential to be the next prime minister of the country?

A. I have no such illusions.

Q. You once remarked that all politicians should retire by the age of 65, will you?

A. Yes. There must be a time when we must say farewell. We must go when the going is good and before we become a strain on the people. A man has plenty of things to do apart from politics.

Q. How different will your second term be from your crisis-ridden first spell?

A. It is going to be a severe test of our ability to fulfil our promises. Otherwise people will say what is the point of giving us such a majority. There are no excuses. My second term will be qualitatively different. Administratively, I will not allow MLA's to bring pressure to transfer government officers as before. Similarly, with regard to corruption and efficiency we are going to be very very tough on government officials. We are going to speed up the investigation of corruption charges so that immediate action can be taken. The bureaucracy is against this government because they had their heyday during Gundu Rao's rule and there was hardly anybody to check them. Particularly the police who are not feeling constrained under my tenure. Otherwise earlier at the slightest excuse they opened fire.

Q. You have made the police trigger-happy again by your statement that violence will be met with bullets?

A. Hooliganism will not be tolerated. People have a fundamental right to agitate for their demands. But nobody has the fundamental right to damage public and private property or molest women. So far as violence is concerned, we are going to be very very tough.

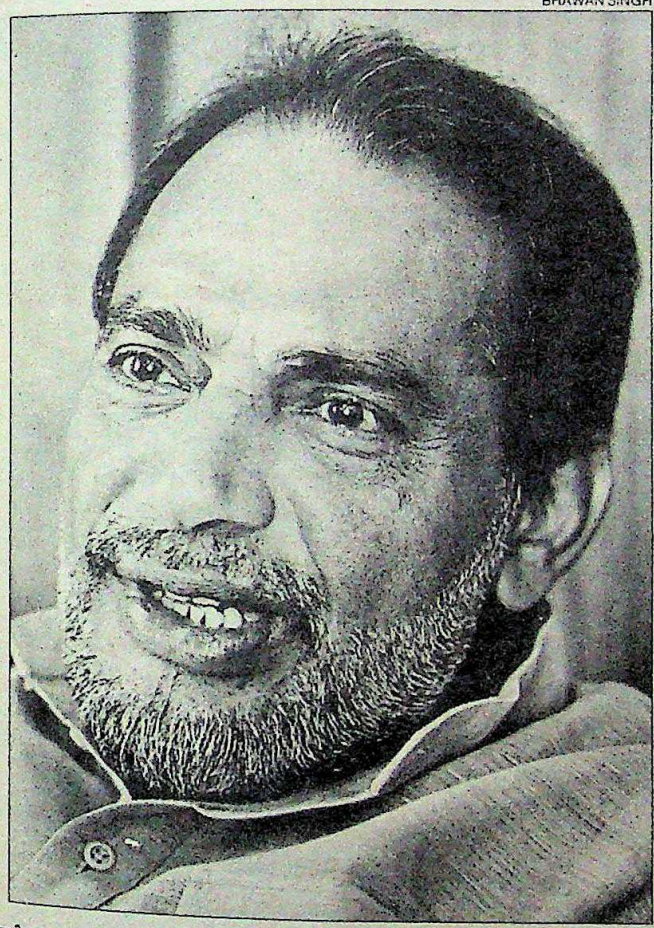
Q. You have borrowed a leaf or two from MGR and NTR by announcing such populist measures as providing rice at Rs 2 a kg and finding jobs for at least one person in each family?

A. There is nothing wrong if I take something good from them and try and emulate that. It is a misnomer to call selling rice at Rs 2 a populist scheme. The state Government is not in a position to control prices because inflation is the result of the wrong policies of the Central Government. But if we want people to have two square meals a day, we must at least give them the main items at a subsidised rate. And providing jobs is essential. It is a pity we have not included the right to employment as a fundamental right. We cannot escape the responsibility of providing jobs to people. We owe at least this much to the younger generation who have stood by the party and have been loyal to us in these two years.

Q. Do you think the line adopted by Rajiv Gandhi in this election campaign that the same party must rule in the Centre and the state for faster progress would affect relations between him and you?

A. No, I don't think he will continue with this kind of attitude in his dealings. Maybe he wanted to impress the people during his campaign, but once elections are over all of us should become conscious of the fact that except in party matters, we should not be partisan. The ultimate objective is the same, as we are serving the same people. Rajiv Gandhi is the prime minister to serve the people of the country. I am chief minister to serve the people of my state. Where is the contradiction?

BHAWAN SINGH



Hegde: "This was not a battle but a war"

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quietly and told the electorate of the work he had done in the past two years and contrasted it with the Congress(I) that had ruled uninterrupted for 14 years. Said Jain: "The more aggressive Rajiv got, the more reasonable Hegde became." A spot poll showed that as much as 68 per cent of the people interviewed did not believe what Rajiv was saying. With that the Congress(I)'s campaign went into a tail-spin while Hegde's moved ahead with much speed, his credibility soaring.

Boosting Hegde's campaign rocket was the leadership issue in the state. Long before the campaign was launched the Janata Party had decided to project Hegde as undisputed leader. In sharp contrast, the Congress(I) which has surfeit of what one partyman described as "accumulated leadership" decided not to project anyone from the state but instead relied on Rajiv's charisma to pull them through. This worked as a double-edged sword.

While Rajiv's charisma was not clicking as it did in the Lok Sabha election the uncertainty over leadership resulted in plenty of groupism within the party. The two main contestants were Veerappa Moily, leader of the Opposition, and K.H. Patil, state Congress(I) chief, and not only did they influence the selection of candidates by getting their own men tickets but even while campaigning were busy cutting into each other's supporters.

Hegde kept rubbing this point in wherever he went pointing out that Rajiv would not come back as chief minister but would appoint one of his nominees. The Janata Party released a catchy advertisement which said: "Karnataka must be governed from Karnataka. Not from Delhi." A leadership survey done by the party showed that 45 per cent of those interviewed believed Hegde was the best leader for the state but only 5 per cent had faith in Moily while Patil had a lower three per cent.

As the Congress(I)'s campaign faltered Hegde's gained momentum rapidly. Just four days before the election, another opinion poll was done and it showed that there had been a remarkable swing of 5 per cent in the Janata Party's favour within a week. Encouragingly 54 per cent of the men were for the Janata but still 60 per cent of the women believed in the Congress(I). Fortunately for Hegde, the poll showed that 30 per cent of them were still undecided and the party decided to go all out to woo them. Women party workers were pressed in service in all districts to explain to the women the schemes the Janata had launched for their benefit like pension for widows and grants of money for pregnant women. The reaction was electric. J.H. Patel, Janata Party secretary-general, said: "Women who never listened to us were now attending our meetings and listening with rapt attention."

But the Janata Party still needed a 2.5 per cent swing in the vote to win. To do it they needed the support of the weaker sections which never really had faith in the party. The Janata Party had not been able to shed its image of being controlled by the two dominant communities the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats and in fact had allocated more than 60 per cent of the seats being contested to these communities. While the move would have helped it retain its fund of support in these two communities it still needed votes from the backward classes, minorities and Scheduled Castes who form 60 per cent of the population in the state.

This was when the Janata announced its most ambitious populistic schemes: it promised that rice would be supplied at two rupees a kilo if it won and that for the weaker sections women would be given every year two sarees and a blouse worth Rs 20 while men would be given two pairs of dhotis and kurtas worth the same price. For the urban women it promised entrepreneurs loans without security and at subsidised interest rates. While the Congress(I) cried "foul" the move gave the Janata the much needed edge. On the last day of the campaign, Hegde, whose voice had turned hoarse from speaking, said excitedly: "The people have revealed their mood. There is a sea change in their attitude. It looks like there is a wave for us."

The Congress(I) never had a clue as to what was on. Just three days before voting day two of its key central observers stationed in Bangalore, Thangabalu and Amarjit Kaur, sent a confidential report to Rajiv that the Congress(I) would easily win 120 seats while in another 30 seats they had a 50-50 chance of winning. In fact the party workers were brimming with confidence and this had made them complacent. Although on the surface the Congress(I) election campaign was functioning like a well-oiled machine, behind the scenes several people were throwing spanners into the works. Gundu Rao who was ordered not to campaign was not quiet. The former chief minister still has powerful friends in the state and his supporters

An enthusiastic supporter gives vent to his feelings: popular mandate

BHAWAN SINGH

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refused to work for the party. In Hassan the Congress(I) paid the price of refusing the powerful Vokkaliga leader H.C. Srikantiah a ticket. The result: a total washout in the district which has eight seats.

In other constituencies the new faces that the Congress(I) had chosen were showing up their inexperience. Dissidence had broken out in the ranks and those who were denied tickets told their supporters to work against the party. The Congress(I) grassroots organisation was really, as one partyman put it "grass without roots." A red-eyed K.H. Patil, state Congress(I) chief, who resigned after the defeat, admitted: "While selecting candidates we did not properly guide our leader. The loss was not on account of Rajiv Gandhi but at our level."

A right regular slanging match has broken out between the various Congress(I) leaders in the state with each one blaming the other. Patil came under fire from all sections for his "uninspiring leadership". Irritated Youth Congress workers stormed the asbestos-roofed Congress office a day after the election howling for Patil's blood and the police had to be called to maintain order. Moily who was also blamed for the debacle tried to slip out by saying that in south Kanara, his home district, the Congress had done well. He felt that because they failed to project a state leader it hurt their chances. Bangarappa on the other hand reasoned that the selection of candidates had an effect. Said he: "We should have fielded good candidates. In many constituencies the voters had already rejected our candidates." Gundu Rao who openly claimed that he was "the happiest man" lashed out at Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran who was in charge of the campaign in Karnataka. Said Rao in a typically brash outburst: "The whole debacle is because of Karunakaran and company who have destroyed the party here by their bad handling of the campaign."

Most of the leaders were content to accuse the Janata of using "money and liquor" to woo the voters but that sounded more like the pot calling the kettle black. Few were willing to search their conscience for answers. The Congress(I) seems to have lost on all counts. Of the 64 backward class candidates it had put up only 27 won dispelling the myth that this section was their real vote bank. Only 12 Scheduled Caste candidates of the 35 who stood, won. The major communities, the Lingayats and Vokkaligas, seemed to have preferred the Janata with only 21 Congress(I) candidates from this powerful lobby winning. Fortunately for the Congress(I) Moily, Patil and Bangarappa won, a fact even Hegde appreciated, as he put it: "Without them the assembly sessions would have been insipid."

The BJP, on the other hand, is hard put to explain its poor showing. Out of the 118 candidates which they put up, 90 of them lost their deposits. To add insult to their grievous injuries, the BJP leader in the former assembly, Dr V.S. Acharya, was soundly defeated from the Udipi constituency by the Congress(I) candidate Manorama Madhavraj. Only two of the 18 MLA's survived and ironically one of them is Vasanth Bangera who last year defected to the Congress(I) with the explanation that he was mesmerised by Bangarappa and then returned to the party under pressure. Shivappa, the state BJP president, feels the reason for their defeat was because the people were angry with them for not reaching an electoral understanding with the Janata Party. Said he: "People would just not believe our explanation that it was Hegde who refused to yield to our demands." To their mortification the BJP is now finding that their ranks are deserting to join not the Congress(I) but incredibly enough the Janata Party itself.

(From left) Congress(I) stalwarts Gundu Rao, Bangarappa, Moily and K.H. Patil: ineffective challenge

BHAWAN SINGH

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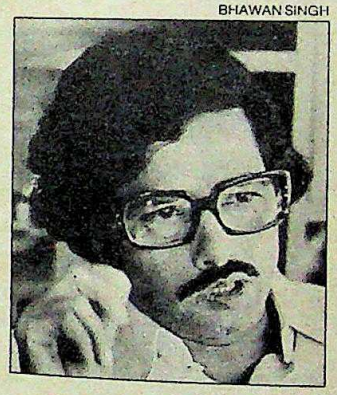

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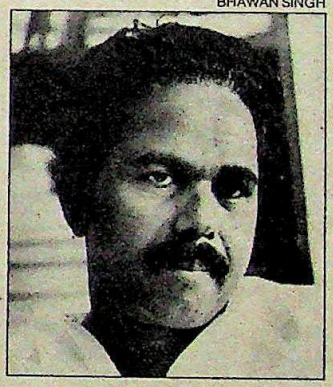

MUSHTAQ AHMED

Having won the elections convincingly Hegde is not likely to get carried away in the euphoria of his victory. He told party workers not to celebrate until the Government had been able to fulfil some of the election promises. He explains: "As soon as the results were announced I felt a creeping consciousness of the tremendous responsibility on me. The expectations of the people are so high that I do not want any section to be disappointed." This is easier said than done because he is saddled with a bureaucracy which is dead against him after he yielded to pressures from his MLA's to have them transferred at will in his first term. In his first two years he was accused of being influenced largely by the views of the Lingayats and the Vokkaligas. Decision-making was hampered too because of his very thin majority. In his crisis-ridden first term, more energy was devoted to keeping his MLA's happy than for solid work. Fortunately for the people, he has no "excuses", as he puts it, now and has to show some concrete results. Said Secretary-General Patel: "We must get cracking immediately and do a real good job, otherwise we would be in serious trouble."

And if Hegde's action last week is any indicator, he certainly means business. Delaying his decision to have a full-fledged Cabinet, he chose just two members, Abdul Nazir Sab, a Muslim, and B. Rachiah, a Scheduled Caste, thereby setting the tone of his administration which is likely to tilt decidedly towards the weaker sections. But first he is going to have to break the stranglehold of the powerful Lingayats and Vokkaligas who account for almost two-thirds of the party in the Assembly. However, Hegde asserts, "I will not yield to pressures from these groups so far as social justice is concerned. I will function free from inhibition and with sole intent of keeping our electoral promises." How far he will succeed though remains to be seen.

His second term is likely to be domi-

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nated by the implementation of such populist schemes as the selling of rice at Rs 2 a kg and finding a job for at last one person in each family. While the rice programme is going to cost the state exchequer Rs 50 crore, the details of the employment programme have yet to be worked out. Hedge is keen on pushing it through because unemployment in rural areas has reached alarming levels and there is a mass of frustrated and cynical youth which vents its anger openly if there is no succour in sight. His other major programme is to root out corruption, but this is likely to remain what it is: just a programme. Hedge is still rather vague about the major changes he wants to introduce and right now is more embroiled in choosing cabinet colleagues.

His major worry is finance. The state has already taken an overdraft of Rs 250 crore and the Central Government has not taken too kindly to it. Rajiv Gandhi made it a campaign issue and Hegde is rather upset with his stand. He was angry with the prime minister for telling the electorate about the development. Said he angrily: "The prime minister made it look like a sin to vote for another party. He virtually threatened the electorate about it. Rajiv Gandhi had made unity and integrity a campaign issue in the Lok Sabha elections but he is undermining the country's unity by dividing it into Congress(I) states and non-Congress(I) states."

Hegde is keen that a radical change be brought about in Centre-state relations but does not regard it as his immediate concern and prefers to wait till the Sarkaria Commission appointed by the Central Government gives its report. About whether he agrees with Rajiv's idea of development Hegde says: "He gives me the impression that he has good intentions. But so far he has been vague about them."

Hegde's other problem would be to develop a second line of leadership to take over from him. He is keen on pulling out of the state before his term ends so that his successor could have some experience before the assembly elections are held again. Hegde may then move on to the national stage and try to build up the national opposition into a viable alternative. But before that, he has to fulfil his promise to give Karnataka a "model government". And with the fortunes of the Opposition inextricably linked to his performance in the state, the inimitable chief minister has a testing time ahead of him. —RAJ CHENGAPPA

A. PRABHAKAR RAO

NTR at a victory rally: no surprise

ANDHRA PRADESH

The Third Coming

THE TELUGU Desam's victory in the elections to the 294-seat Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly came as no surprise. But even though the party got a resounding two-thirds majority, it did not fare as well as the party's charismatic leader N.T. Rama Rao had expected it to. The final tally of 202 seats was the same as in the January 1983 elections when four Rashtriya Sanjay Manch candidates also rode to victory on the Telugu Desam's bicycle symbol. The seemingly invincible number whittled down considerably in August last year to temporarily unseat the Rama Rao Ministry and ultimately force him to call for fresh elections. Though the gamble paid off, he had to settle for 18 less than the 220 seats he hoped he would win.

Rama Rao was sworn in as the chief minister at a large public ceremony on March 9 at 11.47 a.m—a time fixed by astrologers as most auspicious. But it was clear that amid the wild applause, cheering and firing of crackers as Rama Rao arrived in his Chaitanya Ratham and took the oath administered by the Governor Shankar Dayal Sharma, the uninhibited euphoria and excitement of 1983 was absent. The mood was a trifle more serious, for as Rama Rao told the large crowd sitting patiently in the scorching sun on the army parade ground: "The election was called to teach a lesson to the defectors. The Telugu Desam was formed not with the intention of capturing power but to promote moral and ethical conduct in political and public life. We have got the people's mandate once again to complete the unfinished tasks."

Beginning on this sombre note, Rama Rao introduced 12 new faces in his 24-member ministry sworn in collectively after him. Though all the ministers in the earlier cabinet were re-elected, nine of them, including Chegondi Venkata Rama Jogaiah, home minister, and Annabathuni Satyanarayana, civil supplies minister, were dropped. Rama Rao denied that they were dropped because of complaints against them, but it is widely believed that Jogaiah had been accused of interference with the police administration, ordering the transfers of police sub-inspectors. Satyanarayana had reportedly remarked a few days before polling that Muslims who did not vote for the party would be deported to Pakistan.

The new cabinet appears to have been shrewdly put together. K.E. Krishnamurthy, the backward caste leader from Kurnool district, has been allocated the important major and medium irrigation portfolio as a reward. A newcomer, Krishnamurthy joined the party just before the Lok Sabha elections and worked for the defeat of former Union minister K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy. Contesting from Dhone in Kurnool district,

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he defeated Reddy's brother to win the assembly seat. Similarly, G. Rajesham Goud, a 33-year-old lawyer, who defeated T. Jeevan Reddy —former chief minister N. Bhaskara Rao's partyman who then joined the Congress(I)—has been made a minister of state.

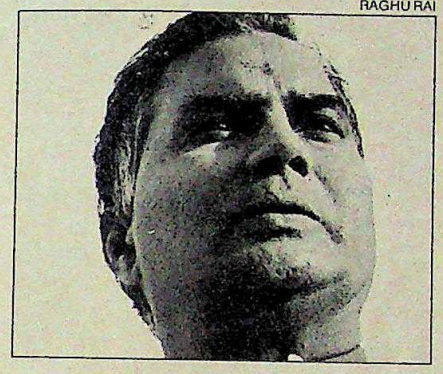
Keeping to his promise of completing unfinished tasks Rama Rao moved out of his Abids residence to a *kuteeram* (ashram) built on the banks of the Osmansagar lake nearly 30 km outside the city ostensibly to separate work completely from his personal life. He formally moved into the ashram, where he will be spending nights, after special pujas before the swearing-in ceremony. "I will be available in my official residence at Abids to meet people on weekdays and observe Sunday as a holiday for creative work," the chief minister said.

Undoubtedly the party's victory is largely due to the unfailing charisma of its leader. The drama surrounding the ouster last August, as well as the popular decisions like the abolition of the post of village officers has only increased its credibility. Other considerations of whether the candidate was a local or a non-local person were of little concern to the electorate. B. Sanjeeva Rao who won from the Gujwal reserved constituency in Medak resigned from the state-owned Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation to contest the elections. He belongs to Prakasam district in the Andhra region.

The Telugu Desam captured areas reckoned to be Congress(I) strongholds. In the 1983 elections 44 of the Congress-(I)'s 60 members were elected from the Telengana region which has a total of 106 seats in the Assembly. This time it won only 13 seats while the Telugu Desam which had won 38 in 1983 won 59. The party's allies—the BJP, Janata, CPI, CPI(M)—won 27 seats while the rest went to the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (3) and independents (2). One result was withheld and one countermanded. Similarly, the Telugu Desam did well in the north coastal districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Vishakhapatnam, East and West Godavari with several candidates winning by wide margins to get 67 of the 74 seats, two less than in 1983. However, in the south coastal districts of Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore the party had a slight setback, winning only 39 of the 60 seats where it had won 50 in the last election. And in the Rayalaseema region, the Telugu Desam won 37 of the 53 seats, as against 40 the last time.

The popular assumption that the Telugu Desam is the party of the Kammas (the moneyed classes) is believed to be the reason for the polarisation of the non-Kamma votes in favour of the Congress(I). But in several constituencies this swing was neutralised by votes to the party's allies, particularly the Communist parties, which have a base among the farm workers. Consequently the strength of the Telugu Desam's allies has gone up in the new

RAGHU RAI



Bhaskara Rao: total rout

house—Janata Party from one to two, BJP three to eight, both CPI and CPI(M) five to eleven each. The adjustment of seats worked to the mutual advantage of the two sides. As a party activist said: "We gave the friendly parties a few seats in gratitude for their help and support when Bhaskara Rao betrayed us and democratic principles."

In the wake of the Rama Rao victory, Bhaskara Rao's Democratic Telugu Desam (DTD) party was totally routed in the elections. None of its 220 candidates have been elected and only Bhaskara Rao and another candidate T. Surendra Reddy managed to retrieve their deposit. As P. Upendra, Telugu Desam's general secretary, said: "Their contribution to Andhra politics is Rs 500 each to the state exchequer." The Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, the DTD's election ally, retained only three of its five seats. It lost the fourth to the BJP and the result in the fifth has been withheld because of charges of rigging. The uncontrolled speculation on the outcome sparked off post-poll clashes which brought the death toll in the state to 21 since the start of the campaigning in mid-February.

The inability of the Congress(I) to shake off its past and present itself as a credible alternative has been the primary reason for its disastrous performance. The deliberate design by which a number of newcomers were fielded did not pay off. Analysing the reasons for its failure, K. Brahmananda Reddy, the state's election coordinating committee chairman, said: "The selection of candidates was not done carefully enough and we lost narrowly in several constituencies for want of luck. At the other end we were definitely wanting in resources which the Telugu Desam had in plenty in this election. NTR is only interested in results and not the means to achieve his objectives." At the same time he admitted that the chances for the Congress(I) to grow in the future in Andhra Pradesh lay in developing it from the grassroots. Observed K. Rosaiah, leader of the party in the legislative council, overseeing electioneering logistics in Hyderabad: "We have not been able to convincingly explain the weakness in the policies and programmes of the Telugu Desam."

Congress(I) activists in Andhra Pradesh knew they were not likely to form the Government, and only some of them were in a mood to actually put up a fight for the 75 assembly segments the party won in the Lok Sabha election. There have been no complaints of internal sabotage, but it is evident that the silence of former legislators who were refused tickets went to the party's disadvantage. Retaliating to Congress(I)'s charges about his government's non-performance, Rama Rao said: "The voters have shown for the third time in two years that the Telugu Desam is the people's party."

In his first speech after being sworn-in as chief minister, Rama Rao renewed his earlier plea for a review of Centre-state relations and pointed out that increased grants to states "is the only sure way to achieve the progress of the people all over the country". Predictably, he has not announced new welfare measures but has promised that the posts of village officers will be abolished and replaced with a new system of village assistants which will be legislated on in the first session of the new assembly. Together with such concerns, Rama Rao is also working on his plans to launch the Bharata Desam Party on his next birthday—May 28—at the annual Telugu Desam convention. He has not yet decided whether the Telugu Desam will be a part of it, but to keep his options open, has asked some constitutional and legal experts to work out a constitution and perhaps an ideology for the party. Whatever be the final decision, Andhra Pradesh under Rama Rao is going to remain in the news.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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SIKKIM

Getting Back

WHAT N.T. Rama Rao is to Andhra Pradesh, Nar Bahadur Bhandari is to the miniscule eastern Himalayan state of Sikkim. Last fortnight, Bhandari once again proved his political omnipotence in the state by trouncing the Congress(I) and winning a record 30 out of a total of 32 seats in the latest assembly elections. In the last parliamentary election, Bhandari had stunned his political opponents by winning the sole Lok Sabha seat in the state and capturing over 73 per cent of the total votes polled.

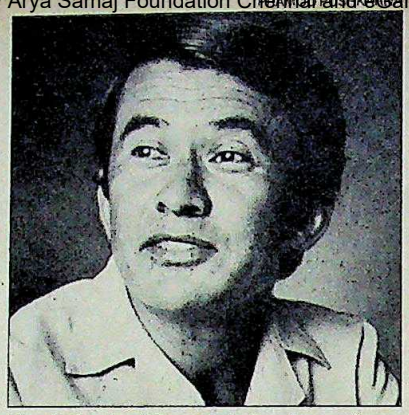
The Congress(I)'s defeat in the assembly polls was all the more humiliating since stalwarts like Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia, Jagdish Tytler and a host of other party luminaries had thrown in their weight to ensure Bhandari's defeat. "The election results are a slap on the faces of all those who thought they could finish me politically," Bhandari said the day after being sworn in as chief minister.

Looking more tired than triumphant, Bhandari—who is back in the saddle nine months after he was dismissed from chief ministership by the Congress(I) high command—says: "I have once again proved that it is I who enjoy the faith of the Sikkimese people and not those who created dissidence against me to have me thrown out."

At no time had the Sikkimese leaders opposed to Bhandari been as united as they were during this assembly election. Determined to teach him a lesson, the Congress(I) had roped in leaders like R.C. Poudyal of the Congress(R), elevating him to the presidentship of the Sikkim Pradesh Congress(I) Committee.

"One of the principal reasons for the Congress(I)'s defeat was the inclusion of rabid communalists like Poudyal," says Chamla Tshering Bhutia, the new Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) finance minister. Notorious as an unabashed champion of the majority Nepali community in the state, Poudyal had long alienated the Bhutia-Lepcha tribals by his persistent demands for a reduction in their representation in Sikkim politics.

Bhandari, on the other hand, does not appear to have had a communal image and his slogan "Sikkim for the Sikkimese" rallied both tribals and Nepalis against the influx of foreigners, mostly from Nepal. The fact that the majority of Nepalis speaking Sikkimese did not vote for Poudyal and his like shows their "concern for maintaining communal harmony and prosperity which would be destroyed in the event of an influx of foreigners," says Bhandari. Not surprisingly, the SSP not only won the Sangha seat where voters are purely Bhutia monks but also won all but one of the 13 seats reserved for the tribals.



Nar Bahadur Bhandari: dominant force

Bhandari does not consider his party's demand for a re-introduction of seat reservation for Nepali candidates to be communal. "This is a constitutional demand," says he, "all we are really demanding is the equal representation of tribals and Nepalis in the Assembly." Shortly after Sikkim's merger with India in 1975, the Centre had allotted 15 seats each to tribal and Nepali candidates, leaving a seat each for Scheduled Castes and monasteries. Morarji Desai had upset the applecart by suddenly withdrawing the reservation for Nepalis.

Just how much resentment this unilateral decision still generates can be judged by the fact that practically all political parties including the Congress (I) in this election had campaigned in favour of reservation. "My insistence on the seat reservation issue and the mammoth rally I had organised last April seems to be one of the reasons why the Congress(I) high command got angry with me," says Bhandari, who appears to have convinced Sikkim's electorate that he was dismissed for championing their cause too strongly with the Centre.

Firmly ensconced in the saddle, Bhandari is now making moves toward rejoining the ruling party, moves that are being met with no lukewarm response. Which leaves one little question still unanswered: what is going to happen to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) case against him?

The CBI began its investigations against Bhandari in May 1984. Officials raided his house in Gangtok, scrutinised voluminous files at his office and came to the conclusion that there was an unexplained Rs 18 lakh that Bhandari is alleged to have acquired from 1979 to 1984. But before the agency got a final go-ahead for formal prosecution, Bhandari was elected to power again.

Strangely enough, no formal case was lodged in a court, only a preliminary enquiry was registered with the CBI. If it had been formally registered, the Government would have had to take a decision on withdrawing the case now. As it is, it is easy for the Government to merely consign the Bhandari files into the dust heap without any qualms. Besides, Bhandari now has the power to withdraw CBI investigations on his own. The bureau derives its powers to investigate a case from the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act. Section 6 of the Act allows a chief minister to sanction or withdraw a CBI investigation.

Either way Bhandari wins. If he rejoins the Congress(I), it is hardly likely that the ruling party is going to insist on charge-sheeting him. If he doesn't he still has the option of stopping CBI proceedings against him. Said a Home Ministry official: "It's a heads-I-win, tails-you-lose position for Bhandari."

What is perplexing is Bhandari's obvious desire to rejoin the Congress(I). "All what has happened in the past is a closed chapter," he declares, "now that Sikkimese people have elected me as their representative I do not see why I cannot return to the Congress (I)." But this is going to be a difficult job since the SSP has sworn not to rejoin the ruling party at the Centre unless the latter first conceded their three demands—seat reservation, inclusion of Nepali in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and the granting of citizenship to the stateless persons in Sikkim. "This time we will not succumb to mere promises," says Finance Minister Bhutia.

Even if the Congress(I) high command declines to take back Bhandari, SSP leaders like Bhutia and others are confident that the "Centre will not create trouble for Sikkim". The Centre, in Bhandari's words, "is always for the people and since I am their representative, the Centre will always be in my favour". Whether Bhandari is being too sanguine or not, only the Congress (I) high command knows.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Gangtok

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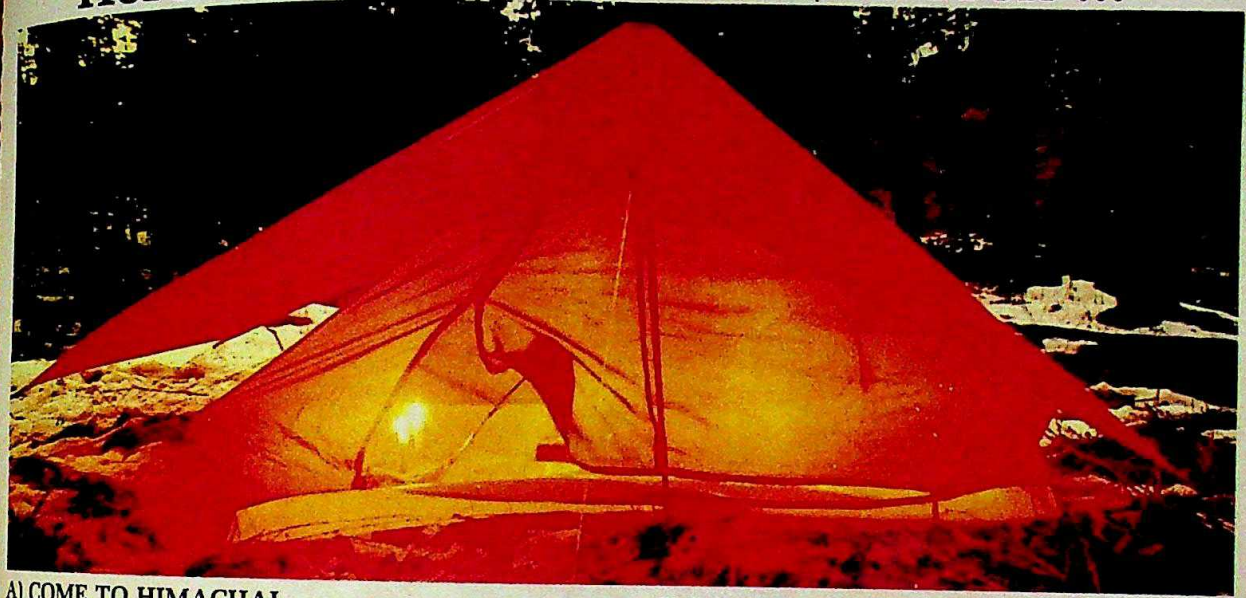
HIMACHAL

Here's How to Plan a Perfect Trek ...



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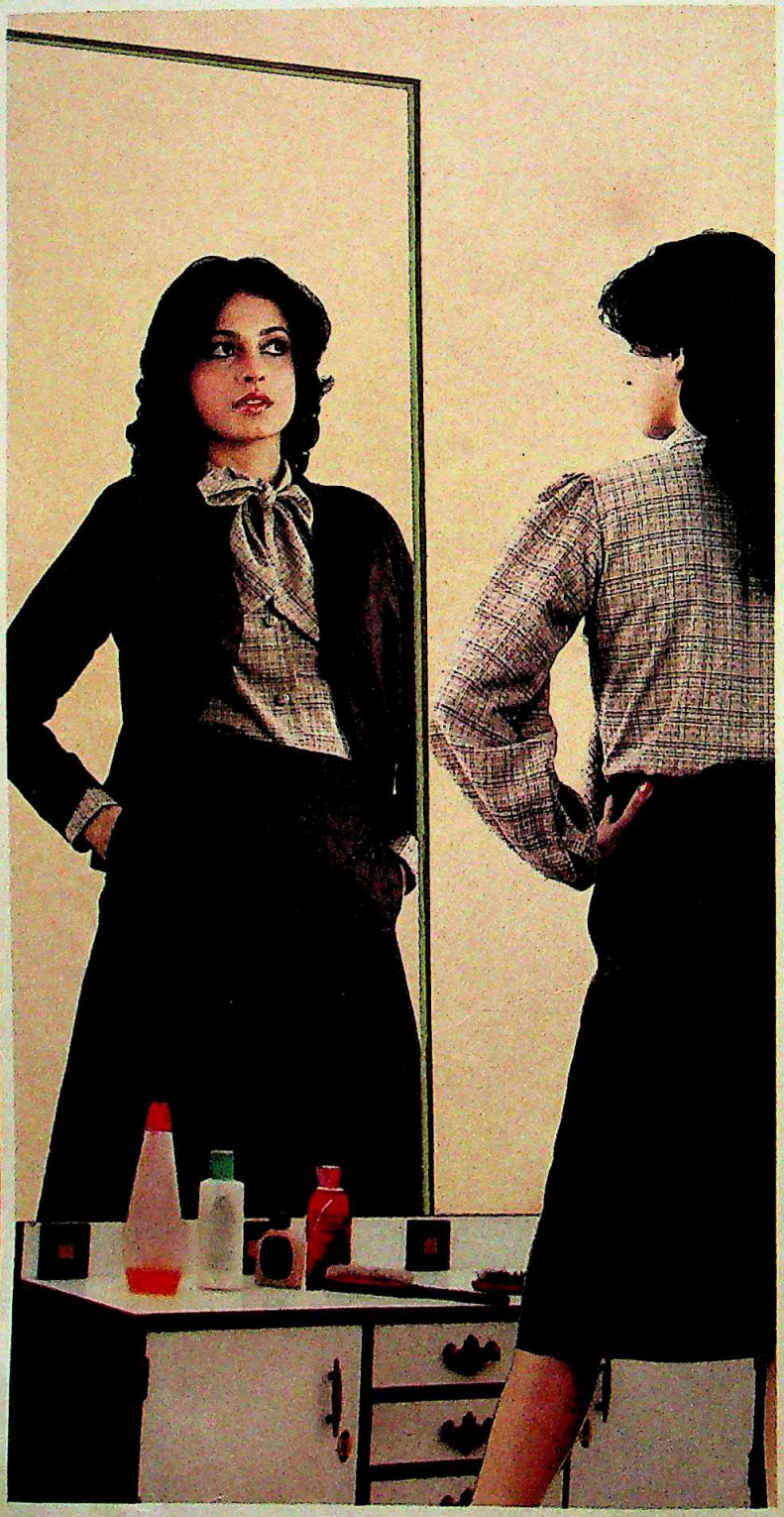

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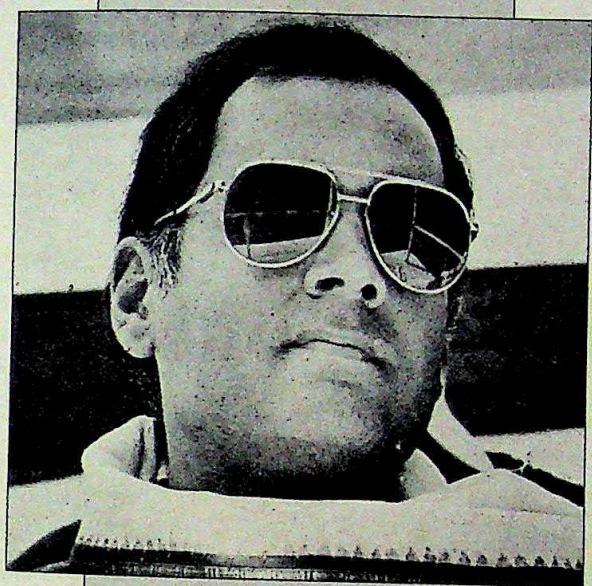
CONGRESS(I)

Unexpected Setbacks

WHAT goes up must come down. True, but not in such a hurry. Last fortnight, while Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was holidaying in the woods of Kanha National Park after three barnstorming weeks of campaign for the assembly elections, the results that poured out showed sudden, and, in some areas, sharp chilling off of popular enthusiasm about his party. Only nine weeks after its trail-blazing success in the Lok Sabha polls, Rajiv's new-look Congress(I) was back again to its original dimension: strong in many areas, weak in some, dominant as a whole, but not quite the unrivalled darling of the popular heart. Assembly elections seldom faithfully echo the outcome of preceding parliamentary polls. But, coming so close on the heels of the December polls, the verdict of the 279 million voters (against 380 million in the Lok Sabha) in 11 states and the Union territory of Pondicherry was bad enough to kill the holiday spirit.

Srikant Verma, the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) general secretary, exuding his characteristic never-say-die spirit, reveried that "the people have once again reposed their confidence in the correct leadership of Rajiv Gandhi". But evidence, slowly trickling in from the 2,543 constituencies, did not point at wholesale reconfirmation of the thumbs up that the electorate had given only two months earlier to the Congress(I) under Rajiv. The party lost no new state and gained only Pondicherry, the sleepy former French colony with only 3.93 lakh voters. But the results indicated a sharp (26.79 per cent) drop in the party's number of seats from the number of assembly segments won by it in the December 1984 elections. With the single exception of Gujarat, its share of popular votes plummeted from the December level in all other states. In Gujarat it rose from 53.2 per cent to 55.54 per cent but in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, the decline was as marked as 10 per cent.

BHAWAN SINGH



Almost everywhere, there were unmistakable signs of the Congress(I) undergoing a personality change, with loyalites consequently being redefined.

The vast sprawl of India's Hindi-speaking heartland failed to bring any cheer for the Congress(I). In the four mainline states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the aggregate of the party's gains—816 excluding the 14 Bihar seats where results were pending—showed an overall slideback even from the Congress(I)'s strength of 864 in the dissolved assemblies of these states. At any rate, it was a far cry from the recent Lok Sabha poll tally in which the party led in an overwhelming 1,140 segments—recording a 25.9 per cent tumbledown.

Only tiny Himachal Pradesh redeemed the ruling party which was able to wipe out the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to win 55 seats compared to 37 in the outgoing house. The other Himalayan state, Sikkim, saw a miserable rout for the Congress(I) which won a lone seat in a house of 30. And though Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh jointly proved to be the party's Waterloo, the defeat was rendered a shade more ignominious as the Congress(I) lost 33 more seats from its modest strength of 148 in the two outgoing assemblies. In Maharashtra, Congress(I) strength nosedived to 162 from 223 in the past assembly, and its popularity dipped to 43.76 per cent from 51.2 per cent two months ago.

1985 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

CONGRESS(I) GAINS	ASSEMBLY STRENGTH	LAST ASSEMBLY ELECTION	OUTGOING HOUSE	1985 ELECTIONS
HIMACHAL PRADESH	68	31	37	55
MADHYA PRADESH	320	246	231	250
GUJARAT	182	140	142	149
PONDICHERRY	30	10	10	15
BIHAR	324	166	194	192*

*Results of 6 seats still to come, 5 elections countermanded

CONGRESS(I) LOSSES	ASSEMBLY STRENGTH	LAST ASSEMBLY ELECTION	OUTGOING HOUSE	1985 ELECTIONS
ORISSA	147	117	119	117
UTTAR PRADESH	425	306	296	266
RAJASTHAN	200	133	143	113
MAHARASHTRA	288	186	226	162
ANDHRA PRADESH	294	60	59	49
KARNATAKA	224	81	88	66
SIKKIM	32	0	28	1

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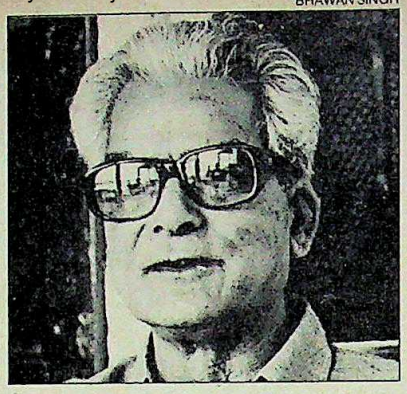
Even in its fortress state of Orissa, where the Congress(I) won an impressive 117 seats in a house of 147, its popularity as compared to December 1984 was on a downhill course: from 57 per cent to 51.01 per cent.

Not that Rajiv did not put his heart into the assembly campaign. To peddle his main theme—the Centre and states are like two hands, and two hands are required to do something—he stormed through 52,000 kilometres in cars, helicopters and a special Indian Air Force Boeing, addressing 235 public rallies in 20 days flat. Wherever he went, he sang the same tune: modernising factories and farms and giving the youth and women "a chance". He did not spare the Opposition and, true to what is now regarded as form, he would even turn non-issues into issues: such as the announcement in Himachal Pradesh, amid great relief, that the state would not be lumped together with Haryana and Punjab according to a plan unofficially floated by Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal, his own partyman. "Who cared for the ghastly suggestion, and who cares for the denial now?" asked an irate Shanta Kumar, former chief minister and leader of the state BJP unit. But apparently, a lot of people did care.

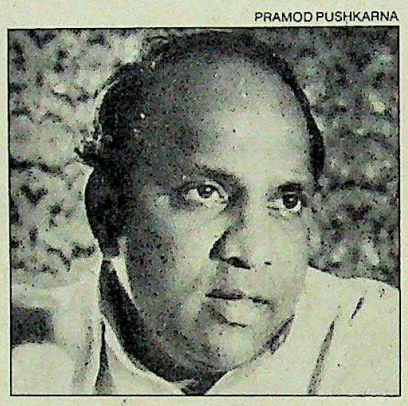
The buntings, posters and festoons were surely on a lower key this time round. But the AICC(I) was taking out full-page ads in newspapers all the same to rub in the message: *Congress laao, pradesh badaao* (Bring in the Congress, improve the state). Nor was there any let-up in promises from Rajiv: a new education policy promised in Andhra Pradesh; a new industrial policy promised in Bombay; a new agricultural policy hinted at in Gujarat. And Rajiv provided a credible backdrop to these by dropping two out of every five sitting party MLA's and raising the share of women candidates from a measly 2.5 per cent in the June 1980 assembly elections to a respectable 8 per cent.

Yet the Congress(I)'s popularity suffered a setback nearly everywhere. Of the eight constituencies he visited in Orissa, the Congress(I) lost six. Its candidates were also defeated in nine of the 19 constituencies visited by him in Maharashtra. In what was clearly a slap in the face of the Congress(I), K.P. Tiwari, who had vacated the Allahabad parliamentary seat to make way for matinee idol Amitabh Bachchan and was rewarded with a ministerial berth, was defeated from the Karchhana assembly constituency in Allahabad.

BHAWAN SINGH



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



BJP's Shekhawat (top) and PDF's Pawar: an improved image

Tiwari is a close friend of Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Union finance minister and Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (PCC-I) chief. In Maharashtra, the victory of A.R. Antulay, thorn in the flesh of Rajiv, by a huge margin of 33,000 also had its own message. And so had the victory of seven out of 22 'rebel' party candidates who fought on their own after having been denied party tickets.

The drop in the party's popularity was surely more pronounced than is generally expected between two rounds of polling. "There is an undeniable natural difference between Lok Sabha and assembly polls because issues are different. The two cannot be compared and there's no reason to believe that the pendulum is swinging backwards just because the Congress(I) has lost a few assembly segments that it won two months ago," said A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, former railway minister shunted since January into the AICC(I) as one of its general secretaries. But the difference between apples and oranges, if comparable at all, was much less marked in the 1980 Lok Sabha and assembly polls.

In January 1980, the Congress(I) won 1,888 of the 2,543 assembly segments that went to the polls now. In June the same year, it bagged 1,513 of those seats, a drop of 19.86 per cent in terms of seats. However, the party slipped from 1,959 in the December 1984 polls to 1,438 in March 1985 (leaving aside the few seats for which results have not been announced). Even if the final tally touches the 1,450-mark, the party will still have to contend with a decline of 509, or 25.98 per cent. The figures of voting percentages, with the sole exception of Gujarat, also confirmed this trend. In the key state of Uttar Pradesh, for instance, the Congress(I) vote (as share of valid votes polled) actually rose between the Lok Sabha and assembly polls in 1980—from 35.9 per cent to 36.9 per cent. But in 1984-85, after recording a phenomenal leap to 52.59 per cent, it hurtled down to 42 per cent.

It was a shot in the arm for a battered, dispirited and humiliated opposition—pilloried even by its friends, and subjected to ridicule by the self-approving Congress(I). "*Do ya teen, bas* (Two or three will do)—two in the BJP and three in the DMKP," the prime minister said in one of the election rallies. But even though no opposition party could spread its appeal across the boundary of its limited sphere of influence, it recorded impressive gains from shrunken bases: in most instances, individual opposition parties even topped their 1980 assembly performances.

The DMKP, in its earlier incarnation as the Janata(S) in 1980, won 59 seats in the Uttar Pradesh assembly that year; it has won 85 now. The BJP's strength in Madhya Pradesh has declined only marginally from 60 in 1980 to 58, whereas it has risen slightly in the Rajasthan assembly from 32 to 38. In Maharashtra,

COMPARISON OF CONGRESS(I) LOK SABHA AND ASSEMBLY WINS

	ASSEMBLY SEGMENT WON IN 1984	ASSEMBLY ELECTION RESULT IN 1985
ANDHRA PRADESH	75	49
BIHAR	262	192
GUJARAT	140	149
KARNATAKA	82	66
MADHYA PRADESH	307	250
MAHARASHTRA	222	162
ORISSA	125	117
RAJASTHAN	188	113
UTTAR PRADESH	383	267

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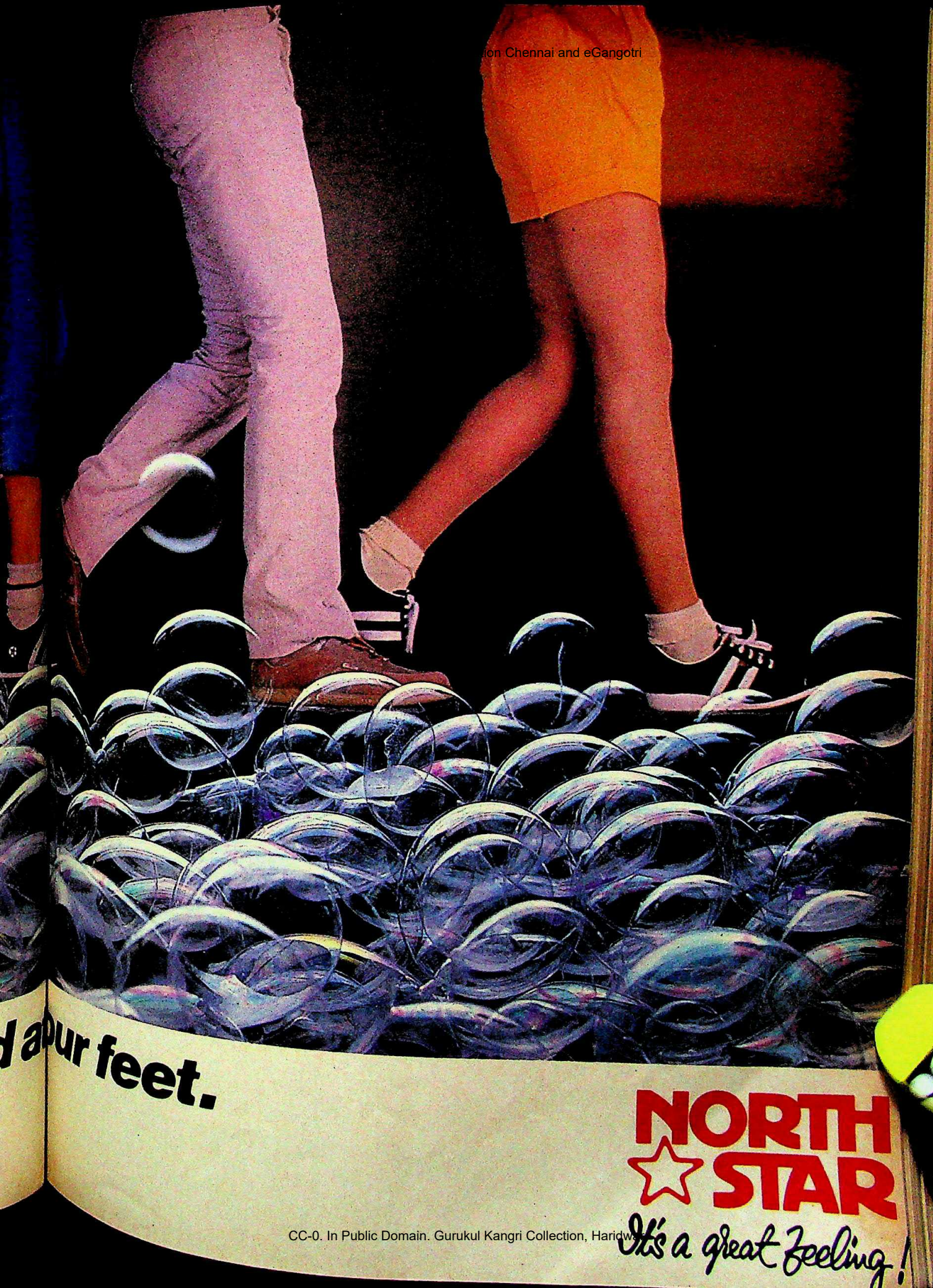

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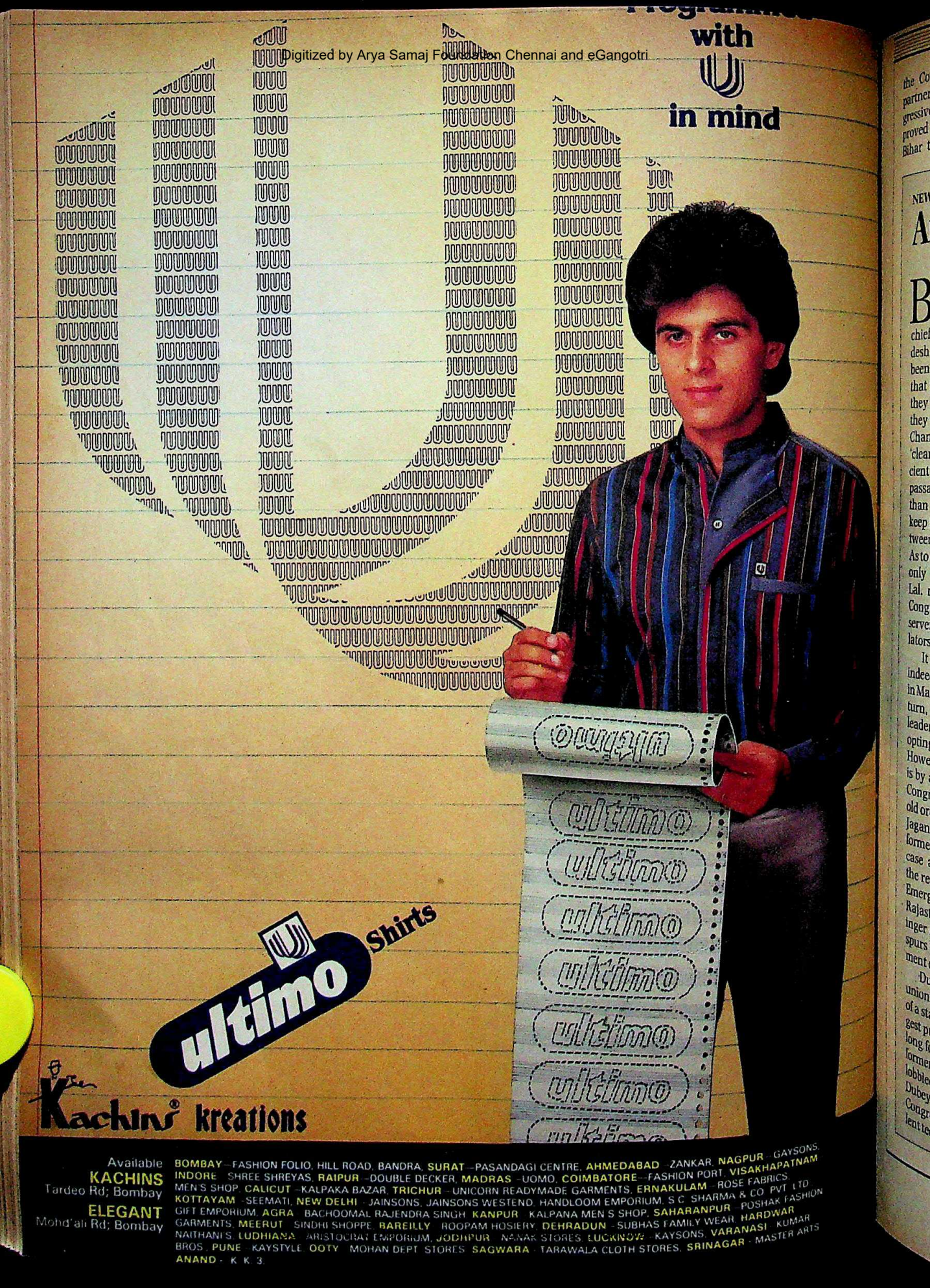

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the Congress(S), which is the senior partner of the Sharad Pawar-led Progressive Democratic Front(PDF), improved its strength from 47 to 58. In Bihar too, where the Congress(I) has gained in numbers since June 1980, the DMKP, which is the dominant opposition party in the state, also rose in strength from 37 to 44. Except in Himachal Pradesh, where the principal opposition BJP crashed from 29 in the 1982 assembly polls to seven now, and Gujarat, where the Janata Party's strength dwindled from 22 to 14, the Opposition pulled itself up by the bootstraps from the pit to

NEW CMS

An Old Order

BINDESHWARI Dubey, Motilal Vora and Harideo Joshi, the three newly-elected Congress(I) chief ministers of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, had for so long been tipped as potential successors that few eyebrows were raised when they actually made it. But the people they replaced were really significant: Chandra Shekhar Singh, admittedly 'clean'; Arjun Singh, 'clean' and 'efficient'; and Hiralal Deopura, a bird of passage who had been to the Rajasthan chief minister's chair only to keep it warm for the interregnum between Shiv Charan Mathur and Joshi. As to why they were replaced could be only cryptically answered by Bansi Lal, railway minister and All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) observer for Bihar, who said: "The legislators felt the necessity for a change."

It is uncertain if the legislators indeed felt so in all the states because in Madhya Pradesh, by a comic about-turn, the party MLA's chose their leaders twice in a span of 48 hours, opting for Singh first and then Vora. However, the choice of the three men is by and large being regarded in the Congress(I) circles as the return of the old order. Dubey is a close associate of Jagannath Mishra, the controversial former chief minister, the criminal case against whom was dropped at the request of the state. Joshi was the Emergency-time chief minister of Rajasthan. And Vora, formerly a stringer for a Hindi newspaper, won his spurs by attacking the Janata government during the 1977-79 period.

Dubey, 67, who is the first trade unionist to become the chief minister of a state that houses the nation's largest public sector investment, had for long formed an axis with Mishra and former minister L.P. Sahi. This axis lobbied hard for Singh's ouster, and Dubey's position as the Bihar Pradesh Congress (I) Committee (PCC-I) chief lent teeth to their effort. Working entirely to their plan, 30 Congress(I) MP's from Bihar petitioned Rajiv Gandhi last month for Singh's removal. When the results were announced, Dubey and Mishra, camping in Delhi, noted with pleasure that 124 of the new MLA's belonged to their lobby. While entering the meeting hall for the new legislators, a jubilant Mishra said: "I'll support any leader elected by the MLA's or selected by the high command." The die had by then been cast in favour of Dubey and against Singh, hated by him as an interloper.

Dubey

Vora

Joshi

The 64-year-old Joshi, however, was chosen as the party's trouble-shooter almost the moment its tally stopped at 113 in the 200-member assembly. Before that Mathur had resigned owning responsibility for the Deeg incident (see INDIA TODAY, March 15) in which Man Singh, the independent MLA, died in police firing. But Joshi edged past his rivals—Jagannath Pahadia and Deopura, entirely for his personal rapport with the MLA's and his long innings in the assembly. He is now the seniormost of the MLA's, going through the eighth successive term. Besides, Joshi has continuously been a member of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and later the AICC(I) since 1949. He was a general secretary of the PCC between 1950 and 1959, and later the PCC president.

However, in what was really a surprising move, Joshi selected neither Pahadia, Mathur nor Deopura as a minister in his cabinet. Instead, he chose an initial team of five cabinet ministers and two ministers of state but kept 36 departments with himself. All the seven ministers sworn-in had been ministers at one time or the other; the controversial Narinder Singh Bhati was even elevated to cabinet rank.

Like Dubey in Bihar, Vora too was waiting in the wings after becoming the Madhya Pradesh PCC(I) chief last year. But he must have thanked his lucky stars for the break he got because until he boarded the flight to Delhi last fortnight after Arjun Singh had been chosen chief minister he did not know that he would benefit from a gilt-edged afterthought. A journalist turned politician, said Vora, "I thought I was being summoned to New Delhi for consultations in connection with the cabinet formation. But when I landed from the state aircraft I was told by Arjun Singhji about my selection as chief minister." Drafted into state politics by P.C. Sethi from his native Durg district in Chhattisgarh, Vora rose in the estimation of the former state satrap as an effective foil against V.C. Shukla, arch rival of Sethi and, later of Arjun Singh.

Shukla's hold over the Madhya Pradesh Congress(I) Legislature Party has since then been reduced to the minimum—caused, first, by the elimination of many of his loyal candidates, and later by the sketchy performance of the party in the Chhattisgarh region. But Vora now may have to contend with opposition from unexpected quarters, because about 200 of the 250 party MLA's are personally beholden to Arjun Singh. So far, Vora and Arjun Singh have got along well together. But, with Singh abruptly taken away from the vortex of politics in Madhya Pradesh to the Raj Bhavan in Chandigarh, dissidence may even strike in absentia.

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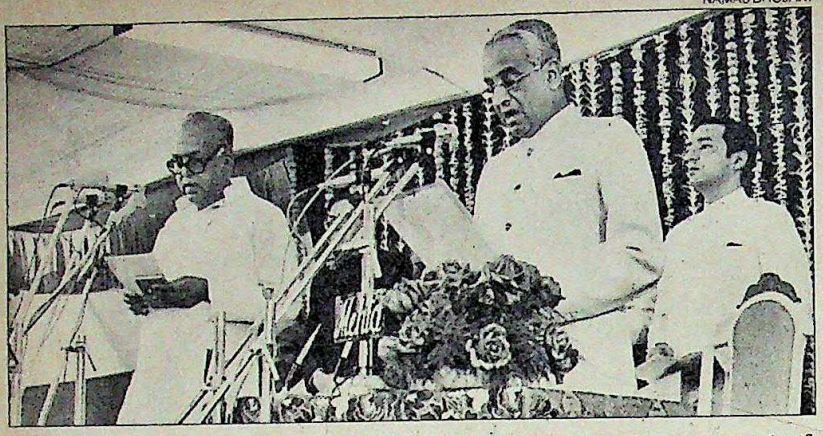
NAMAS BHOJANI



Patil being sworn in by Governor Latif: political manoeuvre

which it had been relegated in December.

"The Lok Sabha elections were an aberration, a drunken folly, a bad dream caused by the pressure of a calamity, a chapter that had better be forgotten," said Atal Behari Vajpayee, BJP president, who bounced back from his sensational defeat in the December polls. Also tasting the heady wine of success in moderate doses after a long bad patch, was Charan Singh, the 83-year-old chief of the DMKP: "Not all is lost yet," was his terse comment as the party's tally-board in Uttar Pradesh touched 85.

However, the most important lesson that the opposition leaders had a chance to learn from the assembly polls was that their unity had still not outlived its importance. Its best demonstration ground was Rajasthan where the BJP, the DMKP and the Janata Party had put up united candidates, their combined tally going up to 75 from 45 in the dissolved assembly. "The people were convinced about the sincerity of our unity efforts," said Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, former chief minister and state BJP president.

As a matter of fact, the Opposition is clearly wiser after the event in Uttar Pradesh where the Congress(I) won over a dozen seats by a wafer-thin majority—less than 500. In 50 other constituencies, the Congress(I)'s margins of victory were well within 2,000. If the BJP and the DMKP had fought together, the Congress(I) would have lost 28 more seats. If the BJP, the DMKP and the Janata Party had joined hands, the Congress(I)'s loss would have mounted to around 50. And although the party would have still been hanging on to the ledge of power, it would have been a push-over case.

The Lok Sabha elections, if anything, were marked by a cheery rapport between Rajiv and the people in which a whopping 63.42 per cent, of the electorate turned out to cast their votes, ignoring the bite of winter. That effusiveness was lost in February and the turnout sank to less than 50 per cent thus raising valid doubts about what had really attracted the voters to the polling booths in December: the shock of Mrs Gandhi's death, or Rajiv's charisma. The excuses that were put up for low turnout—a cricket match in Bangalore, or the beginning of the dry season in Rajasthan—sounded frivolous. The difference, in 1980, between the Lok Sabha poll turnout and that for the assembly elections was 7.8 per cent, whereas the recent polls showed a difference of 16.74 per cent. This is a measure of apathy which simply cannot be explained away by the argument that national issues wield a stronger magnetic pull than state-level issues.

However, though Rajiv's campaign theme varied from state to state, its perceived message was common: he sought to rejuvenate the Congress(I) not by promises alone but by fielding a new crop of personnel and, specially, more women. Verma announced soon after the candidates' lists had been posted that 40 per cent of the sitting MLA's had been changed. In other words, two out of five previous MLA's were dropped, their places being taken up mainly by younger people, fresh graduates, amateur party supporters, Sewa Dal volunteers, and, occasionally, by children of older Congressmen. For instance, in Bihar, Nagendra Jha and former speaker Radhanandan Jha were dropped to make room for sons Madan Mohan and Harkhu respectively. While the promised one-fifth of nominations could not be given to women, the Congress (I) did feature 200 of them in its final list.

But the electorate did not welcome the new entrants with any new exuberance. In states like Maharashtra and Rajasthan, voters' response was mixed. In Rajasthan, 49 out of 85 sitting Congress(I) MLA's (57.64 per cent) were re-elected as against 64 out of 115 new faces (55.65 per cent). In Maharashtra too, their success rates were comparable in a 50-55 per cent range. However the voters showed little respect for the greenhorns in Madhya Pradesh, rejecting 40 of the 93 candidates who got their tickets by replacing sitting Congress(I) MLA's. But 120 of the 150 veterans were re-elected.

In Uttar Pradesh too, of the 171 party MLA's who were renominated as many as 113 were successful again. But the party had fielded 254 new candidates in the state, including 38 women, 50 nominees of front organisations, and little-known people netted in by the AICC(I)'s talent-scouting teams. Of these 254 candidates 154 won. But, out of 100 'absolute freshers' who replaced sitting party MLA's, only 30 reached the winning post. Admitted V.P. Singh: "It is true that the majority of those who have lost were newcomers. But we don't regret our decision to encourage young persons and the front organisation people. They should not feel that they're mere-errand boys."

It is only a matter for speculation whether Rajiv would have ordered sweeping changes of chief ministers had the assembly elections indicated a verdict closer to the Lok Sabha polls. With a performance slightly better than Rajiv's in the June 1980 assembly elections, the late Mrs Gandhi brought about drastic changes, experimenting with a Muslim chief minister in Maharashtra, appointing a Harijan chief minister in Rajasthan and upsetting the Brahmin-domination of north Indian politics by getting three Rajput chief ministers for Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

But Rajiv chose to tread cautiously. The bringing along of three new chief ministers (*see box*)—Bindeshwari Dubey installed in Bihar, Motilal Vora in Madhya Pradesh and Harideo Joshi in Rajasthan—seemed merely a tactical move rather than marking anything of strategic significance. Even the choice of Mammanapillai O.H.K. Farook as chief minister of Pondicherry could not have been one among many options: Farook had been chief minister twice before, once heading a DMK-CPI coalition and another time a Congress government.

On the other hand, Madhavsinh Solanki in Gujarat and J.B. Patnaik in

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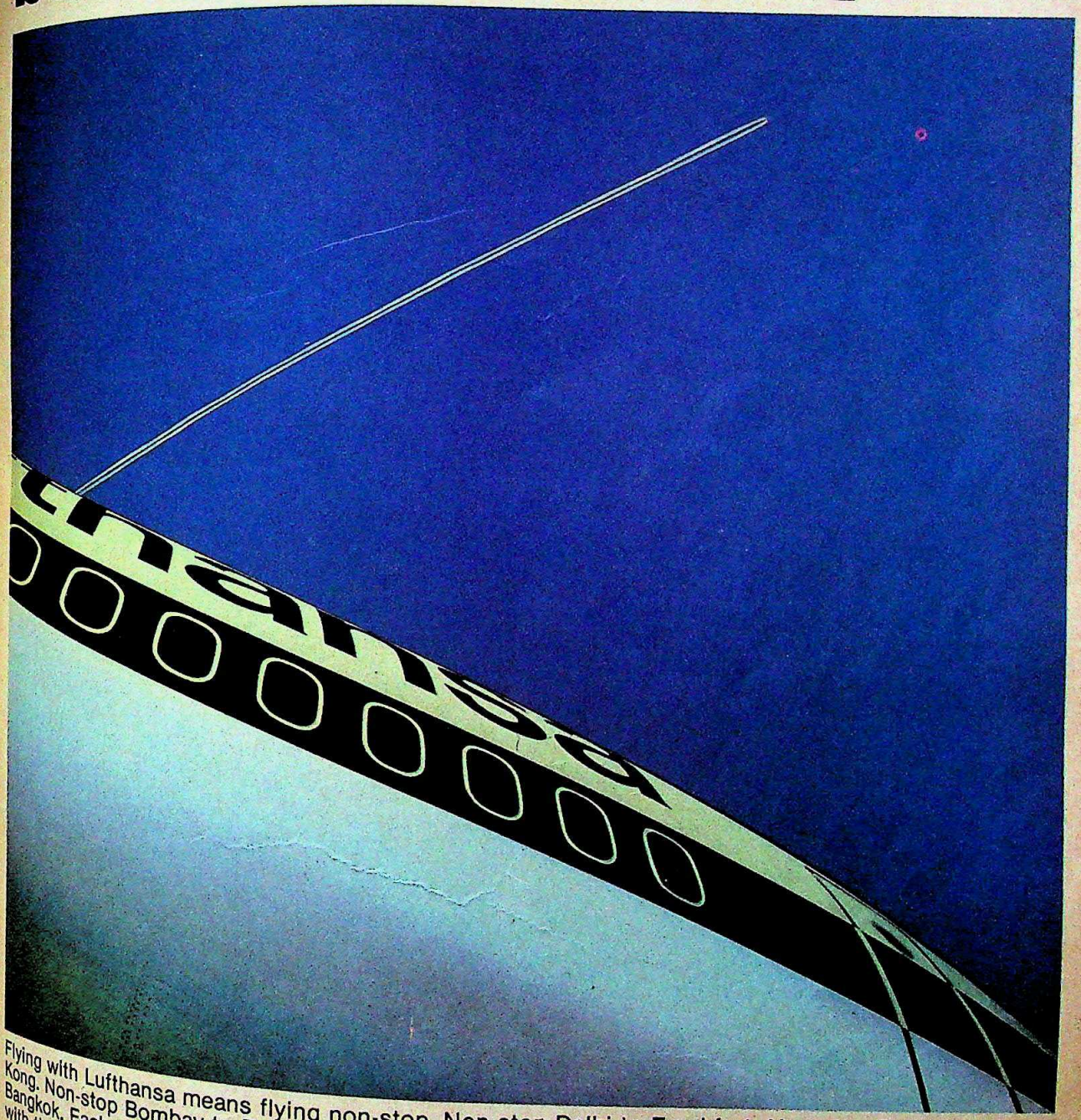

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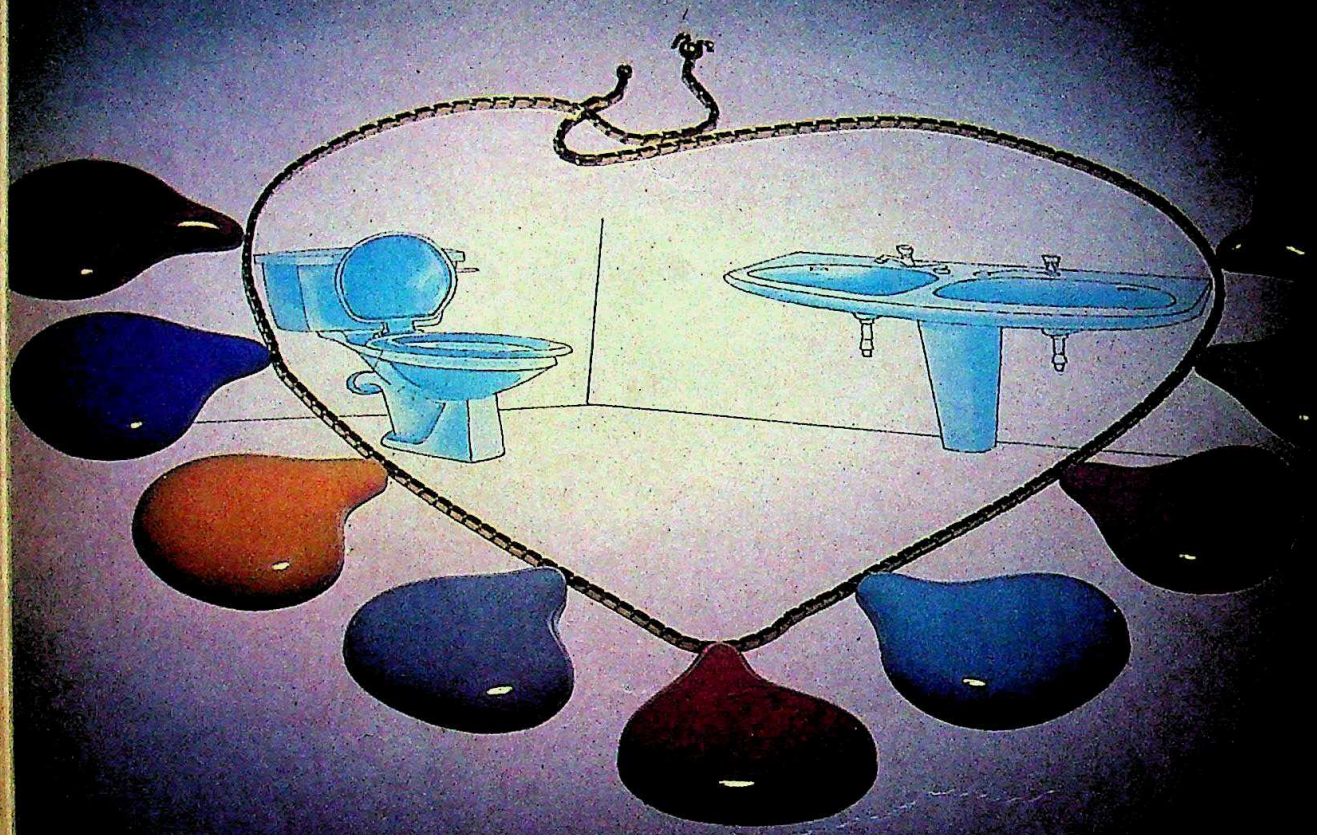

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Orissa were retained for a second term —a practice that Mrs Gandhi never encouraged since she came to power in 1966. Both Solanki and Patnaik are 'loyalists' who cast their lot with Mrs Gandhi in the 1978 split; and, by another coincidence, the party has done well in both states. But they do not carry the clean, efficient image that is generally associated with Rajiv's men. Gujarat, under Solanki, was rocked by a series of communal riots whereas Patnaik's Orissa witnessed a proliferation of scandals in which the name of the chief minister was also occasionally dragged in. It is significant that Basant Kumar Biswal, Patnaik's right-hand man and the controversial former minister of state, was denied a party ticket and a number of names from Solanki's list of candidates were changed. Still they made it to the top once more.

The choice of Vasantdada Patil as chief minister of Maharashtra was also clearly actuated by political compulsions. Had Rajiv tried to impose someone from Delhi, Vasantdada could have walked out of the party taking with him a number of MLA's personally loyal to him. Some independents (or rebels) elected from the sugar cooperative region of western Maharashtra are also tacit supporters of the chief minister. Sharad Pawar says cryptically: "His selection is good for the Opposition but bad for the state."

The electorate this time round also injected a high degree of uncertainty in the Congress(I)'s region-wise distribution of influence. In some states, like Maharashtra, the party attained dizzy heights of popularity in the cities but crashed in the countryside. In states like Orissa, quite the reverse happened. But, almost everywhere, there were unmistakable signs of the Congress(I) undergoing a personality change, with loyalties consequently being redefined.

This was clearly visible in Madhya Pradesh where the Congress(I) lost many seats in its traditional strongholds of Chhattisgarh, Vindhya Bharat and Mahakoshal areas but made substantial inroads into Madhya Bharat, a BJP citadel, where the BJP's strength came down from 34 to 18. Maharashtra too provided an example of shifting loyalties when the Opposition wrested 21 of the 66 seats in the Vidarbha region: in 1980, the Congress(I) had lost only 10 seats in that area. However, the Congress(I) improved its strength in Ratnagiri and Rajapur despite these areas being old Janata and BJP strongholds.

S. PREMI

A forest of hands greets Tiwari: lessons to be learnt

In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress(I) received a drubbing in its bastion of eastern Uttar Pradesh where 10 Thakur-dominated districts returned Janata Party candidates in sizeable numbers. The Congress(I) lost four of the five seats it held in Ballia district, two of the three in Allahabad and three of the five in Barabanki. It is only in the hill areas of the state that the Opposition failed to ent the Congress(I) vote bank.

Sadly, local and caste issues were back. In Bihar, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha bagged nine seats this time—two more than in 1980 when it had contested the polls as an ally of the Congress(I). There was no alliance now. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, the Congress(I) victory was largely due to the anti-reservation stir which, by a deft manipulation of the Congress(I) campaign, came to be seen as opposition-inspired. The party thus reaped huge dividends in the rural areas where all the backward castes and Harijans joined hands to ensure its victory. Similarly, Rajiv's public rejection of the three-state merger plan to settle the Punjab problem clinched the issue in favour of the Congress(I) in many constituencies of Himachal Pradesh—one of the three involved states.

In the absence of issues that cut across the country, the assembly polls were merely fought on the parties' balance of power which is weighted in northern and western India in favour of the Congress(I) and elsewhere against it. But the people chose to distinguish between individuals and ensured the victory of deserving candidates regardless of party affiliations. Thus, though having won power, the Congress(I) in Rajasthan will have to contend with a battery of seasoned opposition legislators in the assembly such as, Shekhawat (BJP), DMKP state chief Nathuram Mirdha, Sheopat Singh (CPI-M), and former minister Kedar Nath (Janata). In Maharashtra, the opposition benches will be occupied by Mrinal Gore (Janata), Vineeta Samant, wife of trade union leader Datta Samant, Ram Naik (BJP), and Datta Patil, leader of the Peasants' and Workers' Party (PWP). To crown it all, Pawar is resigning his Lok Sabha seat to retain membership of the assembly.

Politics has, therefore, returned close to the baseline from where the graph had suddenly begun shooting upwards since the assassination of Mrs Gandhi on October 31. Perhaps it has given Rajiv a better opportunity to judge the people he is supposed to lead, because the unqualified mandate that he received two months ago could easily result in complacency. The debacle in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh will at least cure him and the party of the mistaken belief that the federal structure of the country can be fiddled with at will. For weeks after the new ministries get going, the Congress(I) will undoubtedly try to grapple with the messages of the assembly elections. At least some of the messages were visible even during campaigning when Rajiv drew crowds that were decidedly large but not bigger than in December. They cheered him alright, but occasionally dragged their feet. In Bhubaneswar, despite Rajiv pleading with the people to raise their hands in support of the Congress(I) candidate, only a few hands actually went up. The Congress(I) lost the seat badly to Biju Patnaik. For democracy, then, the striking gain of the 1985 assembly polls is that it is expected to make the Opposition a bit less overawed and the ruling party a trifle less smug and self-adulatory. —SUMIT MITRA with bureau reports

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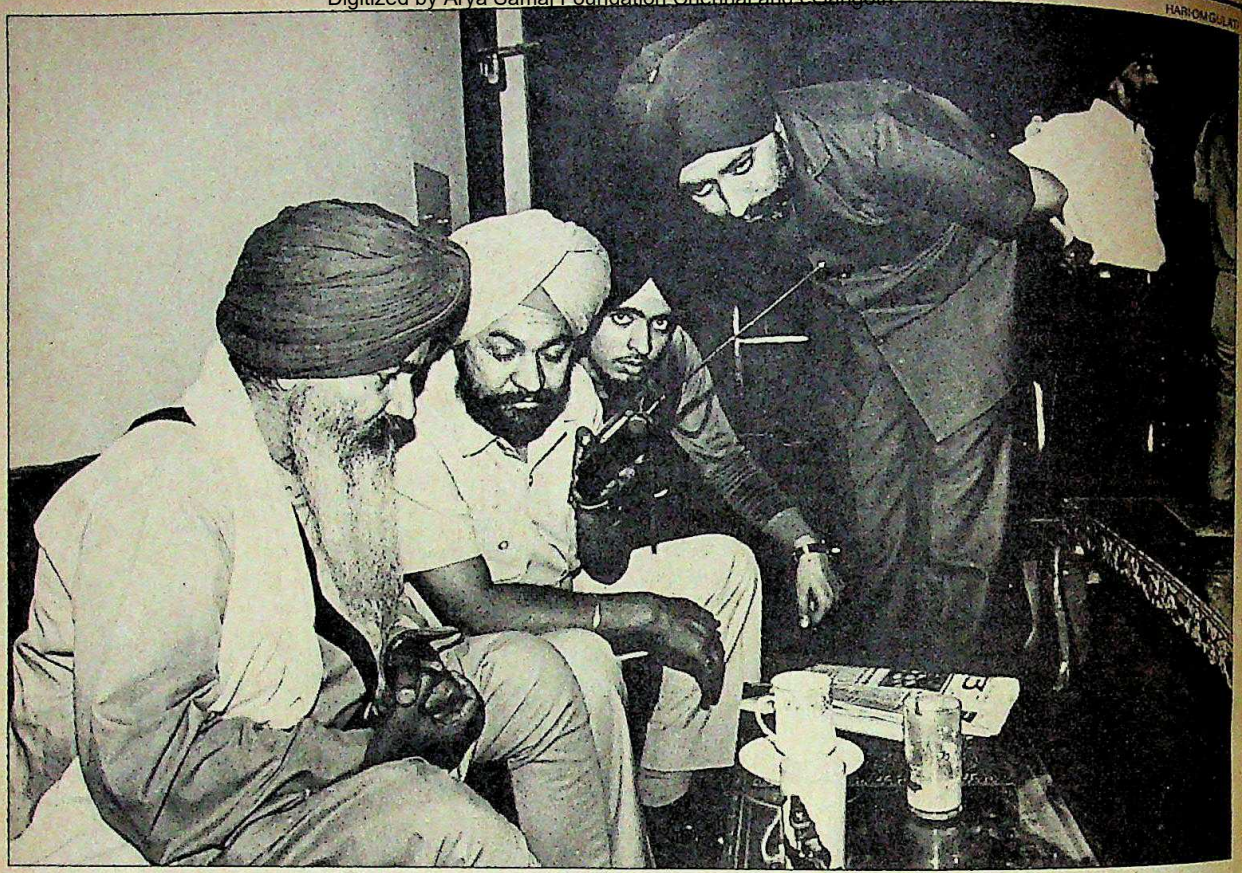

HARI OM GULATI

Longowal listening to the radio after his release: lost aura

PUNJAB

Breaking the Logjam

THE EVENTS unfolded in a great tumbling rush at the end of last fortnight and all of a sudden it began to look as if there was some hope of breaking the logjam in Punjab. The initiative which set the ball rolling was Home Minister Shankerrao Chavan's announcement at a hurriedly called press conference that eight Akali leaders, including the party President Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, were being released. Within 12 hours Longowal, rival faction chief Jagdev Singh Talwandi, SGPC Vice-president Atma Singh, former Union minister S.S. Barnala, former Punjab ministers Randhir Singh Cheema and Dalip Singh Pandhi, and Ujagar Singh Sekhwan and Baldev Singh Brar were freed from jails around the country.

The next day Chavan sprang another surprise: Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Arjun Singh was being dispatched to Chandigarh as governor of Punjab, and the Cabinet sub–committee of which he was member would visit Punjab. Thirty-six hours after his release Longowal flew into Amritsar to a surprisingly cool, unenthusiastic welcome. Barely 200 Akalis were present to receive him at the airport and an equally small number followed him around the Golden Temple parikrama a little while later.It was obvious the Sant had lost some of his aura. People present in the parikrama when Longowal completed the circuit scornfully remarked: "What can he achieve now? He ran away when the Temple was attacked." This was only to be expected in an atmosphere in which many Sikhs still seem to revere Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale as a martyr, but it also highlighted the fact that Longowal and his Akali colleagues will find it difficult to rehabilitate themselves in the public esteem. Probably because of this, Longowal announced that he would start touring Punjab to meet those injured or uprooted by the November 1984 violence. Talwandi, on the other hand, issued a combative statement to the press, making it clear that the Anandpur Sahib resolution had to be the basis of any negotiations with the Centre.

This too was expected. The Home Ministry had been warned by the Punjab Government to expect some angry steam-letting by the leaders who have spent nine months in the cramped isolation of a jail cell, unsure of the mood of their followers and the people in their home state. However at night, stopping in Delhi en route to Amritsar, a tired but composed Longowal was more circumspect in his comments. He graciously accepted the greetings of all and sundry who called on him at the Punjabi Bagh mansion of his businessman friend Paramjit Singh Sarna. This, of course included a stream of correspondents, Indian and foreign. "I have been out of touch for nine months, and three thoughts are uppermost in my mind," said Longowal, "to resettle the women widowed in the November '84 violence, relocate those uprooted and get the army deserters and the innocent youth of Punjab released from jail.The sp-

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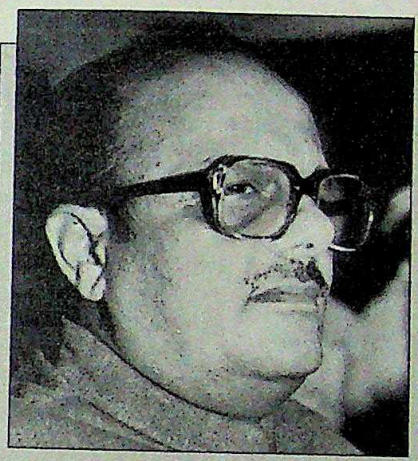
ecial courts are a great *dhakka* (assault) on the *qaum*. They are meant for Sikhs but not spies who have been selling the country down the river for 25 years."

While Longowal was talking to newsmen, elsewhere in Delhi Home Minister Chavan was again in action, announcing the replacement of K.T. Satarawala by Arjun Singh. This came as a surprise to everyone at Chavan's press conference. The Madhya Pradesh chief minister has had little or no contact with Punjab to justify his posting to the Chandigarh Raj Bhawan. On the other hand he had led his party to a handsome win in the assembly elections and only the previous day been sworn-in as chief minister. In his second term he had literally become an "*ek din ka raja*" (king for a day), as a Congress functionary in Delhi put it. More important than the debate about whether this meant a promotion or come–uppance for Arjun Singh, was the question: what does it portend for Punjab? Singh will be Punjab's fifth governor since 1983 when Dr Chenna Reddy handed over to A.P. Sharma who handed over to B.D.Pande. Pande was removed just after Operation Bluestar and Satarawala moved in.

When Longowal heard about the appointment he too was mystified, but Arjun Singh himself accepted the change with equanimity. Relaxing in his suite at the Madhya Pradesh Bhavan in Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave after a late dinner, Singh was unruffled. He was "overwhelmed" by the trust reposed in him by the prime minister. Singh beamed, belying the impression of some that he had been banished from active politics. Of course governing Punjab while the state is under President's rule is going to be a more difficult task than managing Madhya Pradesh: "I am going there with an absolutely open mind. I have no preconceived notions and I expect the same from the other side," said Singh. While only he could know the reasons behind the move, an aide of the prime minister explained that the tough Singh, who is an experienced administrator, could be expected to tame Punjab's wayward bureaucracy. Under the easy-going Satarawala the state was being run single-handed by his senior adviser R.V. Subrahmaniam, a retired bureaucrat.

It was Subrahmaniam who made the only official level contact with Longowal at an Udaipur guest-house about a month before the release. Longowal, who lost 12 kg in detention, told INDIA TODAY that Subrahmaniam had obviously come to gauge his morale. "I told him Khalsa *hangam hai, mucchh noon halle vi vat denda hai*. (The Khalsa is steadfast, and still twirls his moustache with pride.) He asked me how the tension in Punjab could be eased, the situation normalised. I told him release the imprisoned youth and deserters who fled their posts under severe emotional stress, hold a judicial inquiry and punish those found guilty of killing Sikhs. I told him these are the new issues. The Government has spoiled the atmosphere anew."

Why had Longowal and his fellow Akalis been released? Chavan described it as a "concrete gesture. The Government has taken the first positive step and now the ball is the Akali court". Whether the Akalis bounce the ball back into the Government's court to start an exchange or hit it out of play remains to be seen. The chances appeared to favour a brief waiting period while the Akali leaders consult among themselves, with the ad hoc committee, the five Sikh head priests and village level workers to gauge the popular mood and the views of the party rank and file. Only then will they decide whether or not they should open negotiations with the Government.



"I am going there (to Punjab) with an absolutely open mind. I have no preconceived notions and I expect the same from the other side."

ARJUN SINGH
Punjab governor

The first occasion for direct contact between the Akalis and the Central Government could arise when the three-member Cabinet sub-committee on Punjab comprising Home Minister Chavan, Defence Minister Narasimha Rao and Education Minister K.C.Pant visits Punjab probably on weekends during the budget session of the Parliament.

But two questions that remained in the air as the released Akalis started congregating in Amritsar were: why had the Government chosen this time to release them, and why were SGPC chief G.S.Tohra and former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal, being kept back in jail? Official sources pointed out that the Home Ministry had received reports from the Punjab Government about the sullen mood in the countryside which keeps a dangerous anti-Centre resentment on the boil. In such a mood, moderate Akalis were proving unpopular. If evidence of this was needed, it was provided by the traditional Hola Mohalla congregation at Anandpur Sahib last fortnight. Akali leaders like Surjan Singh Thekedar were faced with angry Khalistan slogans from a section of the crowd. By releasing the moderate leaders the Government had decided to test the waters and also gauge how much of a following the Akali leaders still command after a nine-month absence from the scene.

Longowal however made it clear that the Government had no option but to release them, because it had no case to justify their prolonged detention. He was released the day before his appeal against the detention came up in the Supreme Court. Longowal said the Government had gone through his speeches for the past three years and could not come up with anything objectionable. He was also confident that Tohra and Badal would be released. "The cases against us are similar to the ones the British instituted against Congress leaders. Now they (Congressmen) are doing it to us," he said.

From the other side of the fence it looked like the Government was holding the Tohra and Badal cards in reserve to play at some later stage in the game. If things work out and some kind of dialogue does begin with the Akalis, then the Government could release the remaining two leaders as a further gesture of reconciliation. But by far the most crucial question is whether the released Akalis are going to be in any kind of position to orchestrate and sway public opinion in Punjab. The alternative scenario—that the mood of alienation and hostility in the countryside has deteriorated beyond the rescuing capacity of even the Akali leadership—is too grim to contemplate.

—RAMINDAR SINGH with SHEKHAR GUPTA in Amritsar

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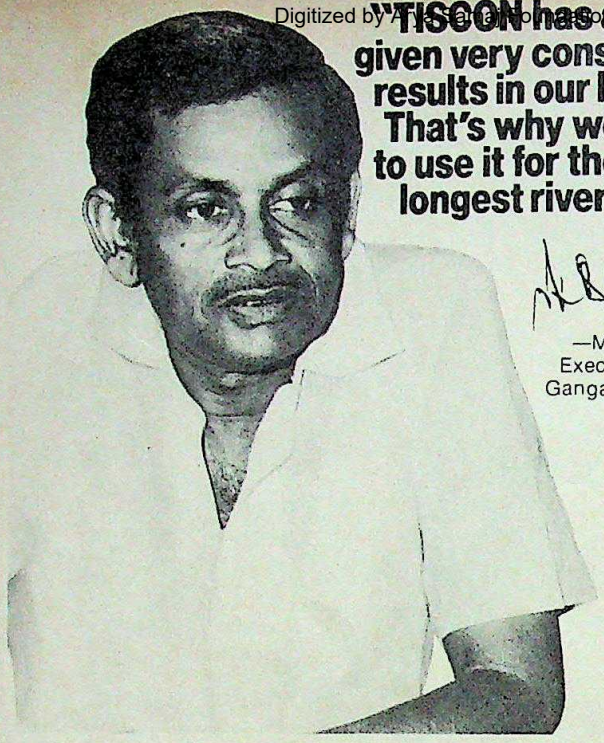

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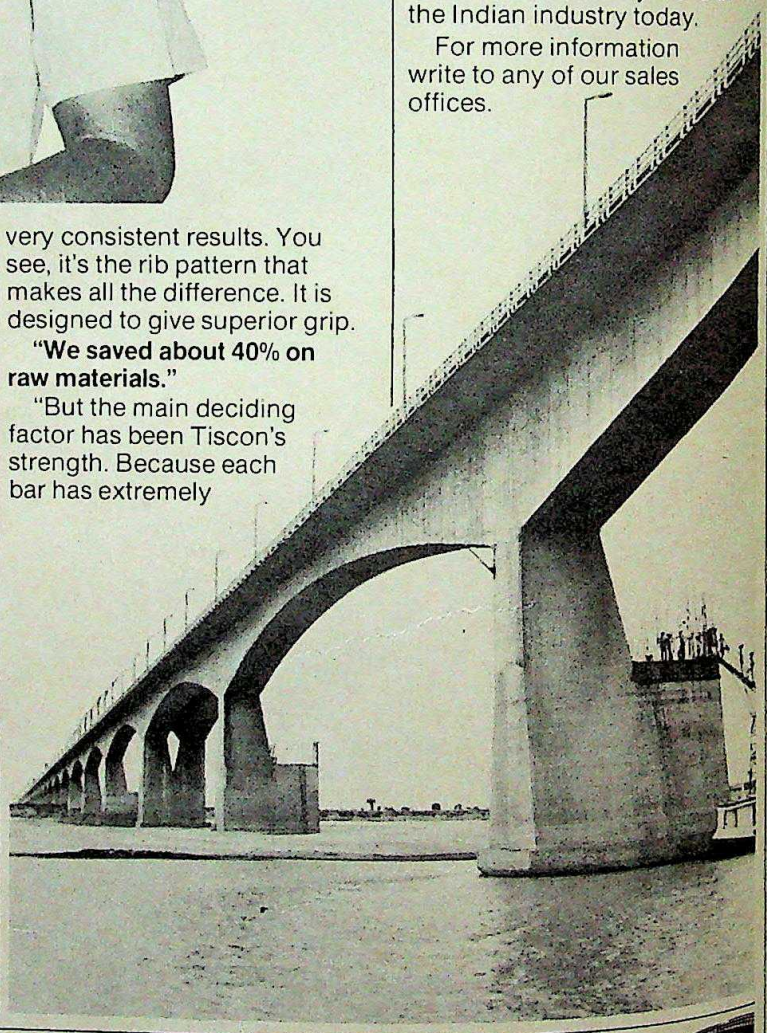

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SPY SCANDAL

Sordid Saga

AS INDIA's latest spy scandal retreats slowly into the background there is, paradoxically, an increasingly clearer outline of the entire sordid saga. According to high-level sources in the investigating team, confessional statements by some of the accused have indicated the following:

- representatives of the Polish, East German and French embassies threatened to snap commercial links with Maneklal, the company that Coomar Narain worked for, unless he supplied them with restricted information;
- that the head of the company, Yogesh Maneklal, gave Coomar Narain the go-ahead to pass on the information if it meant commercial gain for the company;
- that the first contact was made with the French in 1979 through Colonel Alain Bolley's predecessor and subsequently the Polish and East German embassies got into the act;
- that all Narain received from the three embassies by way of payment was around Rs 1.5 lakh between 1979 and 1984.

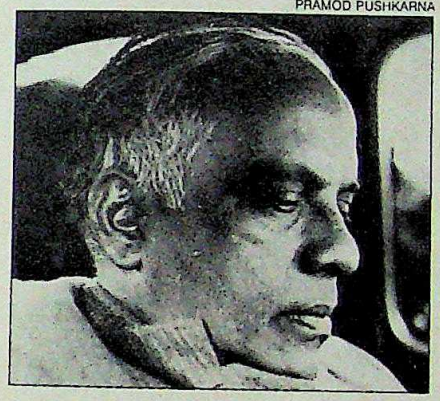
Though five members of the network in custody have alleged that they were forced to make confessional statements, investigating officials are convinced that they now have an airtight case against almost all the nearly 20 people arrested for their part, however minor, in the espionage scandal. Much of their confidence is based on the clean breast that kingpin Coomar Narain himself has made regarding the ramifications and modus operandi he employed in obtaining the vast amount of classified information.

According to investigating sources, the saga started in 1979 when Coomar Narain, as the Delhi representative of Maneklal, had one of his meetings with the then French deputy military attache, M.Morvan.Morvan made it clear that if Narain's company wanted to do business in France there would be a quid pro quo, namely, information on industrial licences, foreign collaboration, foreign investment, defence projects and economic planning. Maneklal was informed and according to investigating officers, he okayed the agreement if it was in the interest of the company.

Narain was ideally placed to supply the information.He had the right contacts including K.C.Sharma, PA to the secretary, economic affairs, P. Sarathi, section officer in the Ministry of Defence Production, Amrik Lal, PA to the defence secretary and Palaniswami, PA to the joint secretary in the Ministry of Shipping.The information he obtained from these sources were passed on to Morvan throughout 1980 when Bolley arrived and took over as receiver. The sources were paid a standard fee of Rs 300 per document which included minutes of the Joint Intelligence Committee handed over by Amrik Lal.

In 1982, the net around Narain was tightened further.On a visit to the Polish embassy, the commercial attache used the same ploy that Morvan had employed.He threatened to terminate Maneklal's business dealings in Poland unless Narain came up with information on economic policies, foreign collaboration, Indo-Polish trade prospects and marine diesel engine collaboration with the Garden Reach Workshop in Calcutta.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Narain: indicting accomplices

Pressurised for the sudden increase in the flow of information, Narain then cultivated J.C.Arora, PA to deputy secretary, Ministry of Defence Production and J.M.Tiwary, PA to the additional secretary in the Ministry of Finance. By this time, the East Germans, with whom Maneklal had considerable commercial dealings, also demanded their pound of flesh. The Germans asked specifically for information relating to the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers.

According to information obtained by INDIA TODAY, the sources in the PA network were being paid from Maneklal's company funds while Narain himself was paid around Rs 500 per document from the three embassies apart from the commissions that Maneklal was getting for increased business dealings with the three countries.

Narain's two key sources, Gopalan and Kher, arrived on the scene much later and investigating authorities say that most of the information obtained in more recent months was through Gopalan, PA to the principal secretary of the prime minister. Investigations have established the fact that Kher, Gopalan's senior colleague, used to visit Narain's Hailey Road office frequently for drinks but there is some doubt as to whether he was involved in passing on information.Gopalan, however, was the key conduit for most of the sensitive documents obtained by Narain for his foreign masters and was paid, according to investigating sources, not so much in cash but in kind, namely whisky and women.

In that context, the question that arises is exactly how serious is the prosecution case against the 17 accused so far. An analysis of the documents seized from those arrested would suggest that it is not as serious as was earlier thought, with a majority of the information being on economic affairs.There are also routine reports on countries like Libya which go to the President before he embarks on a tour to that particular region as well as analysis of political developments in countries like Pakistan and China.There were also reports on the domestic itinerary of the President which would hardly be of interest to French or Polish intelligence.

However, since the accused were arrested under the all-embracing Official Secrets Act, even documents such as these spell trouble in the legal sense. As Section 5 of the Act says: "If any person having in possession or control any secret official code, password, sketch, plan, model, article, note, document or information which has been obtained in contravention of the Act... shall be guilty of offence under this section.

Legal experts are of the opinion that the confessional statements together with the 96 documents seized from Narain's office renders the prosecution case exceptionally strong.Narain himself is said to have indicted most of the 17 arrested in his statement including his employer, Yogesh Maneklal. But for the others much will also depend on the sensitive value of the documents seized from their respective residences. Investigating officials say that one or two of the PA's may get off with a lighter sentence but Coomar Narain and the other members of his ring appear to be heading for a long spell behind bars.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

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TAMIL NADU

In Limbo

AS THE weather warmed up in Tamil Nadu last fortnight, a sleepy midsummer listlessness seemed to have seeped into politics and administration. An always quick-witted and articulate DMK President M. Karunanidhi appeared to have gone into hibernation. The dormant Congress(I), which made a magnificent comeback in the Assembly elections after its total wipe-out from the state in 1967, did not even warm up to organise any meeting to thank the electorate. And film-hero Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, who had gloriously won no less than three last ditch battles with death, looked like he was losing grip over the state Government and the AIADMK. Said a political commentator in Madras: "Suddenly everything seems to have gone adrift, particularly in the AIADMK Government and party. Ministers and leaders of both the pro and anti-Jayalalitha factions have suddenly gone into a shell. Everyone has become silent overnight, but still one hears all kinds of rumour and gossip."

The composition of the initial 17-member cabinet that MGR announced betrayed clear evidence of a pro-Jayalalitha tilt (INDIA TODAY March 15). The dropping of Jayalalitha critics like former labour minister S. Raghavanandam and former food minister T. Veerasamy from the cabinet, the sudden sidelining of the earlier high-profile party leaders like finance minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan and information minister R.M. Veerappan, and the satisfying tete-a-tete which Jayalalitha ultimately managed with the chief minister certainly seemed to indicate a mending of fences between the former matinee idol and his heroine.

And last fortnight came the crowning glory for the Rajya Sabha member and former propaganda secretary of the AIADMK. As the assembly election campaign moved into its last phase in Pondicherry, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, MGR issued a statement that Jayalalitha would campaign for the AIADMK and its electoral ally, the Congress(I), in both Pondicherry and Andhra Pradesh. He directed party workers to make all arrangements for the campaign and stressed specifically that no AIADMK partymen should criticise Jayalalitha. "I wish there would be continued peace and unity within the party," he said. That looked very much like a coup de grace for people like Veerapan and Agriculture Minister K. Kalimuthu and other Jayalalitha critics.

Jayalalitha: back in favour

However, when Jayalalitha hit the campaign trail, she arrived in Pondicherry only to find that the AIADMK workers had not been able to arrange even a single public meeting for her in any of the 30 assembly constituencies there. There were not even any posters and she was forced to address street-corner meetings from atop her van. She toured 11 constituencies and returned to Madras the same night. En route, her van was attacked and stoned and, subsequently, she was forced to call off her Andhra Pradesh trip. Said an AIADMK leader from the Veerappan camp: "The idea of Jayalalitha campaigning was not at all relished by our partymen in Pondicherry. That is why her van was stoned and she had to beat a hasty retreat to Madras. Even the few meetings that she addressed did not draw any crowds."

This was a sea change from days when top-ranking ministers and party functionaries would stand up to pay obeisance to Jayalalitha and no party leader could dare to sit beside her on the dais at any public meeting, of course, with deference to the unquestioned will of MGR. But here the party supremo's explicit orders were being openly flouted. The testimony of sources close to Jayalalitha only reinforces the point: "We don't know how this happened, but there were no proper arrangements made for Jayalalitha's campaign. That is why she wound up early and also called off the Andhra Pradesh tour."

Said Jayalalitha in a brief telephonic interview: "The public response to my campaign in Pondicherry was tremendous, in spite of the last minute invitation to me to go there. In every street and in every lane there were people waiting to see and hear me... that was why I was forced to address the crowds on every road and street that my convoy traversed. That my van was stoned because partymen resented my coming there is absolutely false. It was because of this sense of disappointment and frustration at not having been able to see me that the crowd at one point attacked the van."

In an attempt to nip in the bud any possible party revolt against the expulsion of former food minister S.D. Somasundaram from the party, MGR is taking no chances with the detractors. V.V. Swaminathan, party leader of the Veerappan camp, was made minister for handlooms and textiles. The former food minister T. Veerasamy, returned to the assembly from the Orthanad constituency in Thanjavur district, found himself elevated to the prized commercial taxes portfolio. The cabinet expansion saw another Jayalalitha opponent, getting in as minister, Anoor P.G. Jagadeesan of Chinglepet. The only supporter of Jayalalitha who got a berth in the cabinet this time was former assembly speaker K. Rajaram who got the prestigious industries portfolio. The Veerappan camp followers are critical of the inclusion of Rajaram in the cabinet, as also the retention of S. Ramachandran as electricity minister.

That the anti-Jayalalitha faction will not be trifled with and that MGR is only too aware of the fact is obvious. The Tamil Nadu chief minister had lost feeling in his right hand after the paralytic stroke he suffered. He has now mostly regained it. But whether he will also be able to regain his loosening hold on his party is still open to question.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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BIHAR

Poll Toll

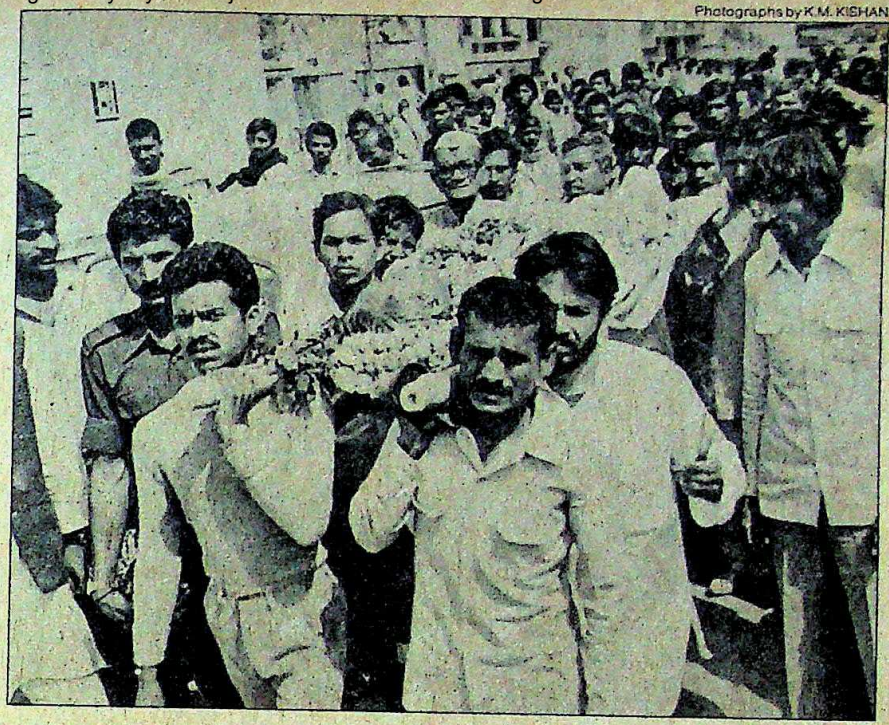
FAIR and free elections are an exercise central to a democratic system but in Bihar it has become a time where might prevails and even murder is committed to establish it. At the close of polling for the assembly elections last fortnight, 63 people including four candidates had been killed and over 200 wounded in the state, the highest ever number of casualties during any election exercise. A senior police officer admitted that every election in Bihar has been more violent than the previous one, but keeping in view the heavy security arrangements that were made no one expected this pitch of unrestrained violence.

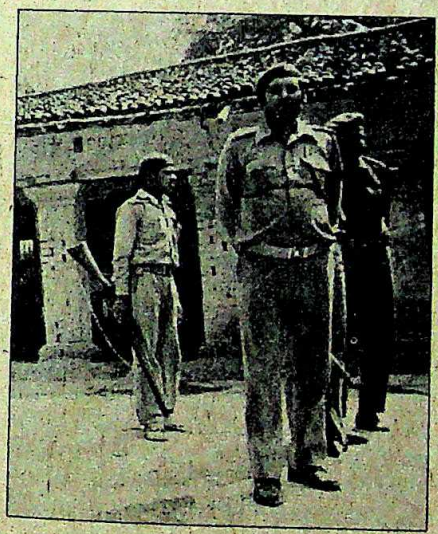
Concerned by the large-scale violence which erupted during the Lok Sabha elections in December last year when 23 people were killed (INDIA TODAY, January 15), the Election Commission marked Bihar as the most sensitive state. All the 50,620 booths were either declared as "sensitive" or "extra-sensitive". R.P. Bhalla, the commission secretary, camped in Patna during the polling to attend to complaints and oversee the elections.

The Chief Secretary K.K. Srivastava said that 200 companies of paramilitary forces, including 96 companies of the CRPF and BSF, were called out to assist the one lakh state police and homeguard force to oversee the elections. Special squads were formed and the state split into five zones kept under the charge of senior officials. Each booth was guarded by a permanently stationed force. The Centre informed the state administration that in case of emergencies more paramilitary forces could be flown in. Srivastava announced that the forces had been ordered to shoot miscreants at sight. Also, collective fines would be imposed wherever violence erupted.

The chief secretary said on the eve of the elections that notices under Section 107 CrPC were issued against about 54,000 persons and another 3,665 bound down to maintain peace. Seventy-seven persons were wanted under the National Security Act, 390 under the Bihar Crime Control Act, and 2,719 rounded up. During the polling another 1,000 were detained by the police in the unprecedented drive to keep anti-social elements away from the polling booths.

Photographs by K.M. KISHAN





Funeral procession of Janeshwar Prasad Singh and police outside a polling booth: increased violence

But in a state which has professionalised booth-capturing and has mercenaries who hire out their services, none of these attempts to check violence worked. With the slaying of four candidates, a new chapter in its established history of violence and murder during elections was written. Bishnu Mahto, leader of the Indian People's Front (a Naxalite organisation) contesting from the Hatia constituency as an independent candidate was shot dead. His wife and family members alleged that Mahto was offered money by some Congress(I) leaders to withdraw his candidature before he was killed.

In Nalanda, the state's crime capital, another independent candidate Mahendra Prasad, who had no previous police record was gunned down in his house a day before the polling. In Masaurhi Congress(I) candidate Janeshwar Prasad Singh was shot dead in his election office. His supporters alleged that the DMKP were responsible for the murder.

Banwari Ram, an independent candidate constesting from the Bokaro constituency died in his sleep in allegedly mysterious circumstances.

Attempting to control the violence which had clearly got out of hand, the police fired in at least 25 places to restore order during polling. Illustrative of the chaos that prevailed, in some places the police began firing without any real provocation, gunning down innocent, uninvolved bystanders. As many as 12 persons died during the campaigning, 29 died on the first day of polling and another 22 were killed during the second day of polling. But officials claim that only 12 died on the first day of polling—one in accidental firing, five in mob violence and six in police firings—and nine on the second day—two in police firings and seven in group clashes.

Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh blamed the Opposition, especially the DMKP, for spreading terror and instigating the violence out of frustration. Singh was reacting to DMKP leader and

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former chief minister Karpoori Thakur's irresponsible open call to his supporters to collect arms, legal or illegal, to prevent booth-capturing by Congress(I) goondas to 'protect democracy' (INDIA TODAY, January 31, 1985). But DMKP leaders privately admitted that there were a few instances of booth-capturing and violence because they claimed the people were ready to "do or die" to protect their votes.

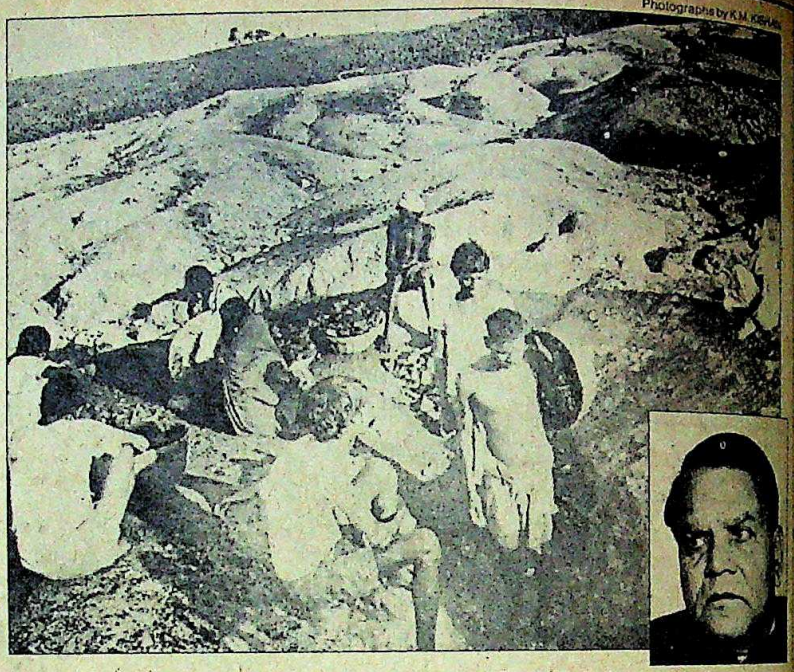
Central to the issue of violence was the conflict between the upper and backward castes. The upper caste has traditionally used force to put down the backward classes. As a result only 40 per cent of the voters turned out to exercise their franchise. "Casting our votes means risking our lives. Who knows when a bullet will fly taking away your life," said a voter in Vaishali.

Together with this was the emergence this time of widespread rigging by supposedly neutral polling officers. In the Kharagpur constituency in Munger district all the election officials at booth numbers 132, 133 and 134 were replaced and arrested for "collusive stamping" of ballot papers and putting them into the ballot boxes the night before polling. The administration, clearly pressurised by interested parties, later retraced its "official report" and said the district magistrate had communicated a wrong message. The presiding officer at a booth in Bakhtiyarpur constituency and another in Mahedpura were replaced and prosecuted on the same charge. Similarly, a number of polling personnel were detained in Madhubani and Muzaffarpur districts, and all the members of a polling party manning a booth in Benipatti constituency were detained.

Candidates were also detained by the police for carrying arms during polling. Ramashray Prasad, CPI MP and his son were arrested at a booth in Islampur constituency. In Nauthan CPI candidate Ramakant Dwivedi and his three supporters were arrested for possession of a rifle and bombs.

The proportions that violence and blood-letting have assumed in Bihar during elections is staggering. Attempting to provide a solution, a DMKP leader said: "Bihar should be isolated from the rest of the country during elections and only outside forces and officials should conduct it if rigging and violence are to be stopped completely." This is no real solution because many see the problem of violence as a Bihar way to stop elections wherever a candidate finds his position threatened. —FARZAND AHMED

Photographs by K.M. Keshav



Illegal mining in a Bihar coalfield and (inset) Budhdeo Singh: dubious dealings

BIHAR

Coal Scuttle

SCANDAL dogs the coal industry in Bihar with the regularity of a metronome. And the latest controversy to arise has only served to further taint the "clean" image of the Chandrashekhar Singh ministry. In tandem with outgoing Bihar Mines Minister Budhdeo Singh, who had been denied a ticket for the assembly elections, the chief minister ratified an arbitrarily selected list of "collaborators" for the state-owned Bihar Mines Development Corporation's (BMDC) joint coal-mining projects. So swiftly and secretly did the file move that even senior state Mines Department officials were caught unawares. "I heard about this only through newspaper reports," said one.

But the attempt to bulldoze the deal through has come up against some obstacles, not least of which is a memorandum sent to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi last fortnight by some leading citizens urging him to intervene and scuttle the deal and order an enquiry to ascertain under what circumstances the decision was taken. The memorandum pointed out that the persons selected as collaborators have cases against them ranging from coal pilferage to smuggling, illegal mining and evasion of taxes pending in various courts. The memorandum added that the norms laid down for collaboration had been "grossly violated" and that the recommendations of a high-level committee had been ignored.

However even more damning allegations came from some Congress(I) leaders, who privately called the whole affair a "farewell deal" in which much money changed hands. Industry sources said none of those selected as collaborators had proper mining leases or mine opening permission from the Government of India, and added that they had been running these coal mines illegally and been stopped several times by the authorities. Also, none of the five major criteria laid down by the high-level committee, including financial soundness and technical capability had been paid heed to. The Supreme Court has asked the BMDC to operate the mines in the joint sector in the first phase. These four included 81 coal-mines abandoned by Coal India Ltd after the first phase of mines nationalisation. These are spread over 3,000 acres in the districts of Giridih, Hazaribagh and Dhanbad.

Mines Minister Budhdeo Singh, however, refutes all charges of murky dealings, and says that everything was within the framework suggested by the high-level committee. When these mines are in operation they will fetch

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the state exchequer an additional Rs 100 crore, he says. Also, the agreement provided that over and above the profit the BMDC would get Rs 15 per tonne of coal as royalty. A rigorous clause in the agreement was that in case of losses it would only be the private parties and not the BMDC which would suffer them. Besides, he said, the Supreme Court had recently allowed the BMDC to collaborate with private parties.

Defending his choice of collaborators and the exclusion of 91 other applicants, Singh said it was natural for those disgruntled elements who had been denied the offer to spread false rumours. They had no past experience and many of them were facing income-tax cases, he said, adding: "I have written to the Government that these elements were trying to demoralise the Government in order to gain these mines illegally."

But not all of the applicants were non-deserving or controversial. Sources said that one of the applicants was the Kundori Labour Cooperative Society operating in Hazaribagh and Giridih districts with the proper licences. In a petition to the director of mines the society pointed out that it was formed to help poor Harijans and tribals and contested the claims of the other applicants, saying none of them had worked in these mines in the past on scientific lines and many owed large sums to the Government. Its claims were ignored.

Following the Supreme Court order allowing the BMDC to operate the mines in question in collaboration with private parties, the Government formed the legislative committee to set the norms under which to select the collaborators and prepare viability reports for the four mines, Khas Jageshwar, Jageshwar, Pure Murlidih and Selected Pirpratand. The committee had suggested that the Government itself run these mines. But when the last Congress(I) Government returned to power the matter was shelved at the behest of party bigwigs.

An oversight on the part of the Central Government, whose ordinances in 1971 and 1973 taking over the management of the coal-mines in the country excluded mentioning these collieries as most of them were closed then, helped the old owners. They took advantage of the lacunae in the law and started mining them under an order from the Calcutta High Court but after a prolonged legal battle the Bihar Government won the case in the Supreme Court and closed the mines. This did not deter the operators. They mined the collieries clandestinely and employed the local poor. It resulted in both loss of revenue and loss of life.

Mrs Raminik Gupta, a trade union leader who had risked her life and fought against the illegal mining, succeeded in getting her demand for a committee of the legislative council formed to go into the matter six years ago. At that time at least 45 disputes were pending in the Calcutta High Court. The committee members told the Energy Ministry that though D-grade coal was found in abundance in the area Coal India Ltd had refused to take any responsibility. Late in 1981 the Bihar Government submitted a list of 81 names to the Central Coalfields Ltd, but it too had refused to come into the picture.

Following the controversy over the latest deal the BMDC reportedly held over the file and expressed doubts about whether the collaborations should be accepted. But considering the political clout of the minister and the mine operators it appears the BMDC will have little choice but to accept the proposal. The way the deal was struck on the eve of Singh's departure has raised many questions, and it appears that the old saying that any one who touches coal will have his hands blackened has in the case of the Bihar Government proved extremely apt. —FARZAND AHMED

KERALA

Liquor Bicker

THE CLOSURE of a nondescript shop tucked into a corner of a small fishing town in Kerala may not exactly be news, but the act has created enough waves to send liquor barons in the state reeling. Following five months of intensive picketing, members of the Kerala Prohibition Council (KPC) managed last fortnight to first, persuade the people of Mattancherry, Cochin, to boycott a privately-owned arrack shop, and second, to get the Government to order the shop to pull down its shutters. Considering the enormous political clout wielded by the liquor lobby in a state that has run wet for years, this is a positive gain for the KPC's leader M.P. Manmathan, 70, who was arrested four times and jailed twice in the course of his crusade. Said Manmathan: "Liquor shops have been mushrooming all over the state and today, drinking has become the biggest social evil in Kerala. Our fight is for total prohibition to eradicate this monster from our system."

Anti-liquor leader M.P. Manmathan being arrested during his fast

This new victory for the KPC and its supporters comes on the heels of others: at Kolencherry, near Cochin, volunteers forced the closure of an arrack shop after a month-long agitation in January; at Trichur, local residents physically prevented the state-owned Kerala Beverages Corporation from opening a liquor outlet in an orthodox brahmin area dotted with temples; at the annual Sarvodaya mela near Calicut, Sarvodaya workers walked out of a meeting addressed by Chief Minister K.Karunakaran, mouths gagged, and ears plugged, in protest against the Government's disregard for the Mattancherry agitation.

However, the KPC's booster dose came in the shape of poet and president of the state unit of the Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) Professor Kumara Pillai, who went on indefinite fast in front of the Mattancherry arrack shop calling for either a categorical statement from the Government that it rejected the setting down of prohibition as one of the directive principles of state policy in the Constitution, or a change in its prohibition policy. Karunakaran was sufficiently pressurised into holding talks with Manmathan and appointing a subcommittee comprising Excise Minister

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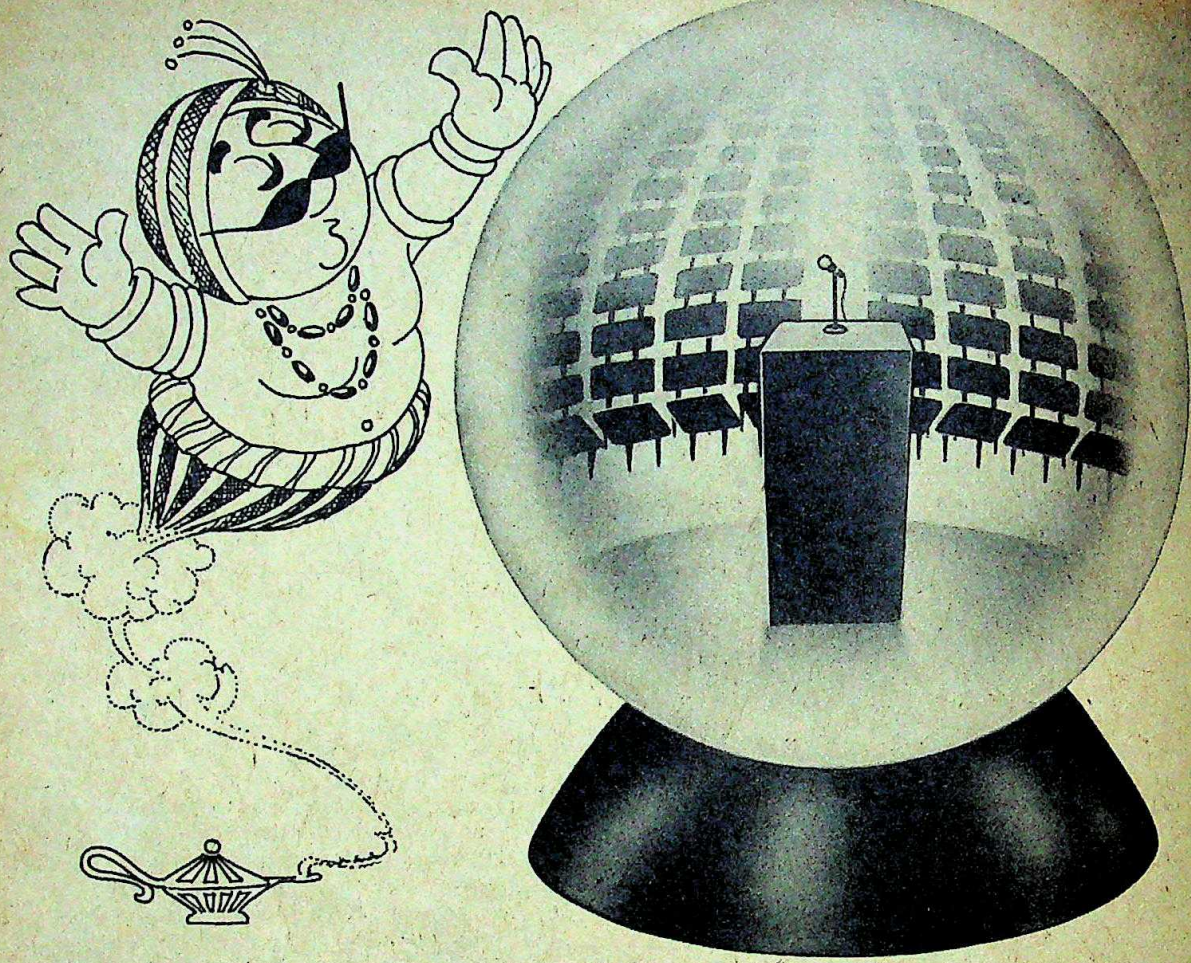

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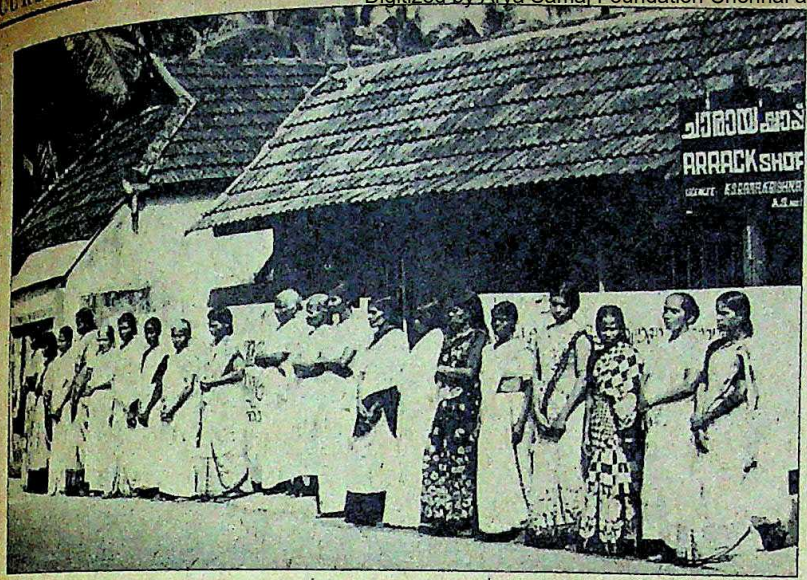

Widows of Vypeen liquor victims picket the arrack shop: new victory

N. Sreenivasan and two MLA's to look into the matter, apart from ordering the Mattancherry outlet closed.

While this set off ripples of some worry through the powerful liquor lobby, there did not seem to be any reason for panic yet, considering that the state's civil supplies corporation itself directs the sale of liquor. As K.S. Ramakrishnan, a major figure in the liquor business, and owner of the Mattancherry outlet, explained: "Manmathan and his volunteers can never stop liquor trade in the state because there are nearly two lakh people who make a living out of toddy-tapping. Above all, it is one of the biggest revenue-earners for the Government." Sreenivasan also admitted to INDIA TODAY that "there is no question of the Government introducing total prohibition in the state when finances are in shambles". With an earning of about Rs 110 crore in 1984-85, he pointed out that this akbari revenue (that earned from the sale of liquor) was the largest revenue-earner after sales tax. Echoing also the Vypeen Island liquor tragedy of 1983 when 70 people died and several were blinded after consuming illicitly-brewed liquor, he added that not only would thousands be rendered jobless, total prohibition would further encourage illicit distillation.

Manmathan and Pillai, however, are not in the mood for mollification. Said Pillai with fervour: "This is not just a puritanical fight against a few drunkards but a campaign to arouse the conscience of the people which would lead to the closure of all liquor shops in the state." To this, Manmathan added: "We believe that the liquor culture has eaten into the fabric of our society to such an extent that in the recent spy scandal, liquor was the main villain."

To the argument that it is impossible to implement total prohibition in this state, Manmathan merely points to its success story in Gujarat. As for the hazards of illicit brewing, he maintains that severe punishments are the only deterrents. As the anti-liquor agitation slowly gathers support from various quarters, including some politicians and intellectuals, Pillai has declared in no uncertain terms that if the Government fails to implement prohibition in the state, the KPC will step up its protests through "neo-Gandhi militancy". And, as things stand, it does seem as though the issue will assume Hamletian overtones in the corridors of political power —to drink or not to drink.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

KERALA

Party Games

THE PERPETUALLY simmering cauldron of Kerala politics boiled over last fortnight as the budget session started. Amid speculation of the imminent fall of the Congress(I)-led coalition, Chief Minister Karunakaran found himself in the none too unfamiliar position between the devil and the deep sea. Last month his government lost all the three-by-elections to the state Assembly and, as if to cap the losses, came the discovery that the state's finances were in extremely bad shape. What followed was a slanging match between the Congress(I) and the state Finance Minister K.M. Mani's Kerala Congress. While the Congress(I) men held Mani responsible for the state's financial woes, the finance minister was making snide remarks of the Centre not giving Kerala its due.

As the flak flew, it was Mani who had the last laugh when the two feuding groups of the Kerala Congress—Mani and Joseph groups, both constituents of the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF)—formally came together to form a single Kerala Congress marking an end to six years of bickering. Though unity talks between the two factions had been going on for some months, it was the Congress(I) hostility towards regional parties that hastened the unity. In the new set-up, Revenue Minister P.J. Joseph would be chairman of the party while Mani would be leader of the party in the Assembly.

It was, however, the defection of the Democratic Janata Party (DJP) MLA P.C. Thomas that gave the Kerala Congress the final boost to become the second largest party in the coalition, after the Congress(I). Though Mani maintains that "the unity of Kerala Congress has given the party more depth and range and has also provided more strength to Chief Minister Karunakaran and the UDF," indications are that the growing strength of his party will not deter him from staking claim to the post of deputy chief minister, currently held by the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) which has 14 to the Kerala Congress' 15 MLA's.

The leader of the three-member DJP and lone woman minister in the Karunakaran Government, M. Kamalam, has complained to the speaker over the defection—the first case of change of party by a legislator since the passing of the anti-defection bill. Thomas, however, claims that the new law requires a member to have a one-third following if he is to leave a party, which, since his party has only three members, he commands. In any case, he adds, "I joined the Kerala Congress a day before the new constitution amendment came into force."

Dark clouds always hover around whenever the Assembly meets, with one constituent of the ruling coalition or another serving an ultimatum to the chief minister. This time it was the National Democratic Party (NDP) whose three MLA's ganged up and demanded that its fourth member and Health Minister Ramachandran Nair should be

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dropped from the Cabinet. Karunakaran, with his wafer-thin majority, assured that Nair would be dropped. The problem, apparently, was that each year one of the members wants to become minister and it looks like all four MLA's would now get a chance to be minister for at least a year before their term ends.

Karunakaran had the additional headache to settle a dispute in the Congress(I) over the choice of a new speaker to replace Vakkom Purushothaman who has been elected to the Lok Sabha. In a calculated political move, Karunakaran made V.M. Sudheeran, an Antony man and one of his severest critics, the new speaker. Sudheeran, just before his election as speaker, told INDIA TODAY: "The speakership was thrust on me by the party and Antony is also very keen that I take it up for the smooth functioning of the present Government."

Sudheeran (right) being congratulated

It looks like the Karunakaran Government would be able to survive only as long as the chief minister wishes. But the cost of survival has been high so far and in the coming weeks a considerable amount of political horse-trading cannot be ruled out.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

"There is no zero hour in the rules, so how does the question of scrapping it arise?"

HASHIM ABDUL HALIM,
speaker

"Parliament and assemblies allowed a zero hour where members could raise urgent issues."

ABDUS SATTAR,
opposition leader

WEST BENGAL

Zero Ban ?

WHAT'S in a zero? Plenty really, if it happens to be the democratic, free-for-all zero hour in the state Assembly. When the Congress(I) high command decided to return "decency and decorum" to parliamentary functioning, West Bengal's Marxist Speaker Hashim Abdul Halim decided that one way to bring the same to the state Assembly would be to banish the boisterous zero hour. As it happened, this minor but significant change that Halim announced in assembly procedures last fortnight was to the Congress (I) MLA's of the state, no less than a dangerous design to "muzzle protest against the ruling Left Front".

Bowing to his Congress(I) critics, Halim agreed to continue zero hour for a while but asserted, nonetheless, that no rules had actually been broken when he originally passed his order since the rules themselves make no mention of zero hour.

While there may be no mention of the zero hour in assembly rules Congress(I) leader of the Opposition Abdus Sattar pointed out: "By virtue of convention, Parliament and assemblies allowed a zero hour where members could raise whatever issues they considered urgent." The idea was to provide a psychological outlet for opposition members to vent any frustration they may have and to prevent them from resorting to any extra-parliamentary forms of protest.

According to Halim, however, this convention was being blatantly misused in the Assembly, resulting in chaos and indiscipline. "Since accusations made in the house cannot be challenged in a court of law," he explained, "there was nothing to protect a member from slanderous attacks that could tarnish his reputation."

"The opportunities for misuse are present not just in the zero hour," Sattar argued back. Most Congress (I) members are particularly incensed by the move because Halim did not consult them before making this decision. Said Gyan Singh Sohanpal of the Congress(I): "There was no discussion, nothing. The speaker took a unilateral decision."

Halim, however, continued to be adamant. According to him the "mention hour" gave an adequately ample opportunity to members to raise any legitimate issue or charge against the ruling benches. Said he: "The accused must be given a chance to prepare a defence against the charges to be raised against him and should not be surprised by a charge suddenly sprung against him as had become the prevailing practice in the zero hour."

That, in effect, would—according to Congress(I) Chief Whip Subrata Mukherjee—make it impossible to expose any malpractices of the Left Front. "In corruption cases it is often difficult to submit a paper to the speaker since it could mean betraying the source," he said. Moreover the formal process of raising corruption charges in the assembly would require the speaker's final consent. "Not only will spontaneous protest be totally suppressed but so will the role of the Opposition in the Assembly," he asserts glumly. If the noisy zero hour really goes, it's going to be dull days ahead in the West Bengal Assembly.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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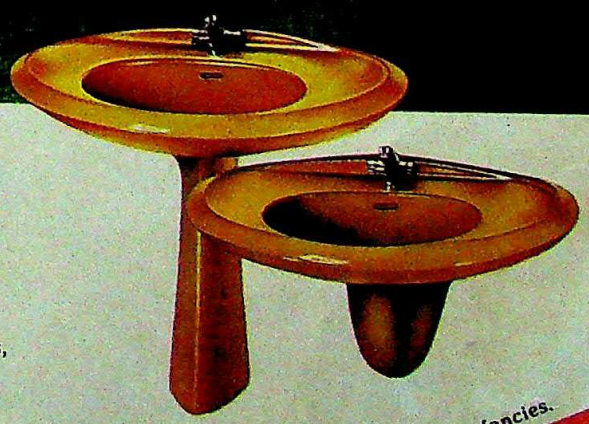

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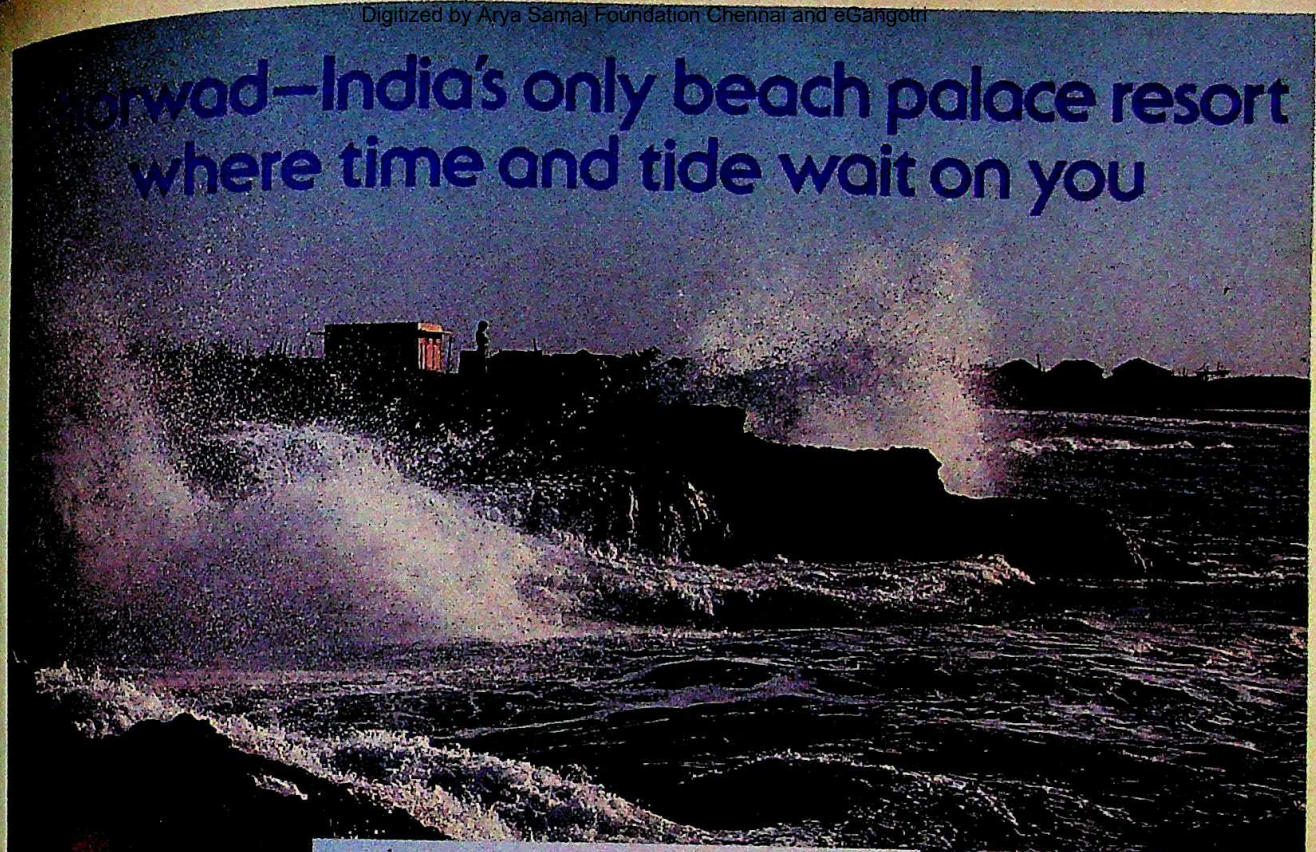

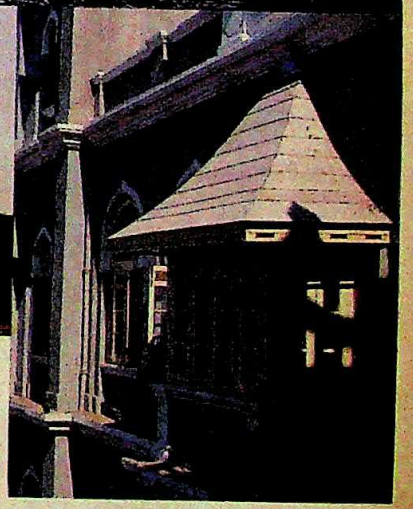

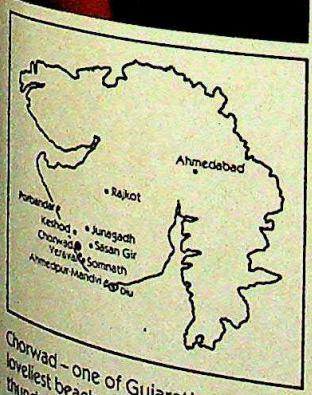

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Housing Heroin

ALL ACTIVITY on the placid waters of Srinagar's Dal Lake is not connected to tourism as the police were to learn last fortnight. It has, in fact become a key trading point for heroin. In a raid conducted by the special squad of the crime branch on the *Queen of Sheba*, a luxury houseboat moored on the banks of the lake near Srinagar, the police last week arrested Anwari Begum, husband Samad Guroo, owner of the houseboat Rasool Kotroo and three others while they were selling "brown sugar", a cruder form of heroin. All six are now being prosecuted for non-bailable offences under Section 48 of the Excise Act and under Section 8/14 of the Dangerous Drugs Act.

Anwari Begum

Samad Guroo

Rasool Kotroo

That the illegal trading was no small time racket became clear with the recovery, during the raid, of a large quantity of the drug, as also US, Thai, Indonesian and Nepalese currency valued at several lakh rupees from the possession of Anwari Begum. Her bank account also showed a recent deposit of Rs 82,000, allegedly the proceeds from recent sales. Some incriminatory documents pertaining to Anwari's correspondence with the underworld in Delhi and Bombay have prompted the Superintendent of Police (crime branch), Javid Mukhdoom, to rush to Delhi to haul in the others involved in the racket.

Masterminded by Anwari Begum, 45, who crossed into India from Abottabad in Pakistan in 1957, the trade flourished with help from Afghan smugglers who clandestinely transported the drug into Kashmir valley from across the Pakistan and Afghan border. Once across, "sugar" coated cigarettes laced with a quarter gram of the drug each, were sold for anything between Rs 30 to Rs 40 apiece. The local underground market alone is estimated to be fetching about Rs 1.50 lakh to Rs 2 lakh for every kilogramme of the drug, which has come to be increasingly in demand in the student and youth community.

In fact the growing use of the drug among youths in the region caused concern enough for the state Parliamentary Affairs Minister, G.M. Bhadarwahi, to confess in the Assembly, on February 28, that "heroin has been playing havoc with the health and morals of our young people, mostly in the age group of 15 to 25 years. Even young girls are said to have become addicts with disastrous consequences". Referring to the use of the drug, a Srinagar hotel-owner lamented: "My two young sons have become a real problem for me. One of them has to appear in the matriculation exams later this month but I've already struck off his name from the list of successful candidates." Said Omar Bashir, president of the Aquatic Tourists Traders' Association: "The foremost need should be to keep a strict vigil on the activities of the young boatmen who remain in direct and constant contact with the sellers and buyers of the drug."

While the Government may have initiated some action against the culprits, local newspapers have alleged political patronage to Anwari Begum. Indeed, a senior doctor in S.M.H.S. Hospital, Srinagar, observed that though the authorities had been informed of this menace seven months ago, "the Government agencies did not act as vigorously as they could have". There have also been allegations of police collusion with the racketeers and the *Srinagar Times*, in a report on February 26, charged that many police officers were shielding the criminals. Arrests, nonetheless, have been made. How the rest of the story unfolds and what clout, if any, Anwari Begum wields, now remain to be seen.

—GHULAM NABI KHAYAL

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PAKISTAN

A Warning Shot

FOR A brief while last month there was the promise of a new, crisp Pakistani spring. In the garden city of Islamabad, the first shoots began to appear on the plentiful but still bare trees, bearing the promise of a fresh flush of green. For democracy-starved Pakistan, they were symbolic of another renewal, heralded by the promise of a national election taking the electorate a first, tentative step forward towards freeing itself from the much despised eight-year-old stranglehold of the military.

In the end, when it was all over, it seemed as if nothing had changed. True, Pakistan now had a new National Assembly due to meet on March 23, but what powers it would have remained to be seen. There were no political parties to jockey to form the Government—parties having been banned from taking part as such in the election—and there were few takers for President Zia-ul-Haq's assertion that the Assembly would be allowed to function freely as an advisory body. After all, Zia remained president unelected, and made sure that he continued to call the shots. By fortnight's end, he gave constitutional muscle to his authority to appoint governors, the military brass and the chief election commissioner, and call or dissolve the new Assembly entirely on his own. Without con-

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Photographs by RAGHU RAI

Pakistani women waiting to cast their votes and (right) Zia at a polling booth: a loaded message

testing a thing, he won himself the right to rule for five years when his continuation in office would depend on re-election by an electoral college of senators and assemblymen over whose fortunes he would in the meantime be sole arbiter.

But no exercise of franchise, no matter how skilfully steered, can occur without some bumps and narrow misses. So it was with Pakistan's February election which saw the defeat of several central and provincial ministers. They included defence minister Ali Ahmed Talpur from Sind, widely regarded as a potential prime minister, information minister Raja Zafarul Haq, who was in the news for having greeted Sikh pilgrims to Nankana Sahib recently, and labour minister Ghulam Dastgir Khan.

It also saw the political eclipse of several of Zia's political friends and close associates, as well as the decimation of candidates from parties that supported him. The Jamaat-i-Islami, generally referred to as Zia's 'B team', backed more than 60 candidates; only 10 were successful. On the other hand, candidates who were associated with political parties but had been expelled for participating in an election boycotted by them did remarkably well. Almost all the 50-odd candidates associated with the late premier Z.A. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which along with the 11-party Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) boycotted the election, were returned to the Assembly. So were strong independents such as retired Air Marshal Nur Khan.

Clearly, the electorate had fired a warning shot across Zia's bow. Summing

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up a widespread interpretation of the result, *The Statesman* editorialised: "In many respects, the arrangement resembles the early uneasy compromises between nascent parliamentarianism and absolute monarchy," adding that it would be surprising if the system wasn't soon overthrown.

If that were to happen, it would obliterate last month's tentative first step towards democracy. And, in spite of all its imperfections, as far as the voter was concerned Pakistan's elections were free and, within the constraints, fair. Not that an Indian voter would have recognised them as such. Political parties were debarred from participating, the more than 1,000 candidates contesting the 217 National Assembly seats on February 25 were vetted by deputy commissioners and superintendents of police, and given a stamp of official approval.

There were no widely attended public meetings, no loudspeakers shattering the sombre discipline of a military-controlled, allegedly Islamic society, no raucous processions or colourful buntings. None of them was permitted by the military administration which countenanced no more than a limited number of posters in crowded bazaars and personalised, house-to-house canvassing of votes.

Candidates weren't allowed to debate great issues of state, harangue the government for real or imaginary ills, or promise if elected to solve the problems of the people. They offered neither political options nor visionary manifestoes. Instead, they stood microphone-less at street corners, addressed knots of sceptical listeners and promised to improve civic facilities. As one wag asked: "How much heat can you generate by offering to clean drains."

In the background, Pakistan's massive military machinery continued to unleash its awesome powers on helpless members of the MRD, and anyone else advocating an election boycott. Thousands were arrested or restricted to their houses, districts or provinces, sometimes hauled out of bed in the middle of the night. But the election went on.

The first crucial measure of the election's success was turnout. It was impossible to verify whether it was 50 per cent plus as claimed by the Government. But everyone conceded it was several times greater than for General Zia's December 19 personal referendum. Then, over 60 per cent are said officially to have cast their vote, basically answering questions on the desirability of Islam, which Zia interpreted as an overwhelming vote to con-

ZIA-UL-HAQ

"I have no regrets"

PAKISTAN'S elections last month weren't the tumultuous, noisy colourful carnivals that Indian elections tend to be. Certainly they caused President Zia-ul-Haq, 60, little worry. A master at the art of public relations, Zia spent polling week carrying on business as usual. Dressed in a grey sherwani and white salwar, Zia met London-based television journalist of Independent Television's Eastern Eye service KARAN THAPAR *in the drawing room of the Army House at Rawalpindi for a half-hour chat. The walls were lined with over 60 pictures of Zia with several heads of state, and the President, newly returned to power, was as usual — relaxed, calm and very well briefed. Excerpts from the interview:*

On the elections:

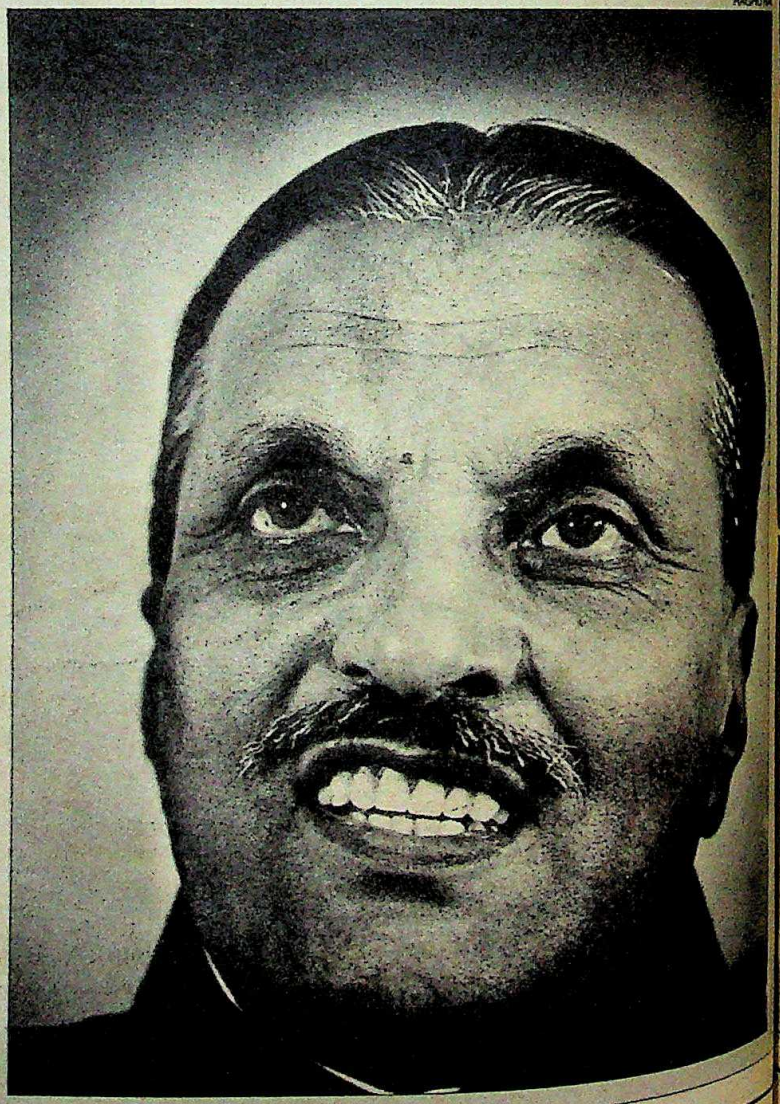
All that I have done and am doing is to transfer power from a martial or military regime to a civilian democratically elected regime, of which I would have the honour of being, for the next five years *Inshallah*, a constitutional head.

On banning political parties:

One has to deal with one's own experience. Through martial laws, (there

Zia: reviving a process gradually

RAGHU RAI



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has not been) much of a tradition in the form of political practices. So I had to give a start to a political process right from the beginning. I had two choices, either to revive the political parties in the next 10 years or to revive a process through which I could hand-create a civilian government in a lesser, shorter time. I have decided on the latter. Basically, there are two things. Firstly, my own personal view that in an Islamic system, political parties as they exist in Pakistan have no room. My second point was that I wanted to go straight to the people, and I did, and I succeeded.

On his constitutional powers:

In a sane, responsible government the head of state always acts on the advice of the prime minister. The powers are discretionary. Why must we think the prime minister and president are two forces? They are one nation, one party. Through the party system, they are one people trying to serve the people to the best of their spirit.

On dissolving the legislature:

The Parliament is generally dissolved on the recommendation of a prime minister, and a prime minister generally dissolves the Parliament if he wants to go for early elections. I see no reason to stand in their way. According to the constitution, the President has the power to dissolve the Parliament at his discretion and in case he feels that conditions (demand that it) must be left to the electorate, he can dissolve it.

On earlier election postponements:

First we wanted to hold elections after 90 days, and after 90 days my own friends and politicians forced us not to hold these elections. We tried again in 1979, and then we made up our minds to put the train back on the tracks, and that is how we started proceeding on a non-party system, trying to introduce an Islamic form of government.

On appointing a prime minister:

If you read the Constitution, you will see that the President is the constitutional head of the Government, and like all constitutions in democratic governments, everything is done in his name. When he appoints the prime minister, it does not mean that he takes it out of a hat; he appoints the prime minister who enjoys the confidence of the full house, (a person) who is humble, honest and dynamic and can take Pakistan forward.

On the arrested political leaders:

They should be released very soon, by April. Some are under detention (but) most only detained in their own houses.

On Benazir Bhutto:

This is her country, she is most welcome to come back of her own choice. We never detained her when she was here, unless she forced us to confine her to her own house. I see no reason why I should (arrest her if she returns). She is welcome to do what she likes, but... there are laws that have to be obeyed.

On Pakistan's alleged help to Sikh extremists:

All false, fabricated. There are 200,000 retired soldiers amongst the Sikh community. What is Pakistan waiting to teach them by opening camps in Pakistan? I have said on many occasions that Pakistan does not like anybody to interfere in its internal affairs. Similarly, it would be immoral on my part that I show sympathies to a segment of society in India which is up in arms at the Government today.

On US bases in Pakistan:

America has never indicated that they'll be interested in bases in Pakistan. They'd never be conceded. Why should Pakistan have bases for a country which requires them for something else? But don't forget Pakistan has friendly relations with the US and keeping (in mind our) non-aligned status (to which) we are new converts, we are very conscious of our position. If we feel that the US has certain requirements, not on bases, (and) Pakistan can help. I'll be too pleased to help them because it is an interdependent (relationship).

On Afghanistan:

I hope and pray that one day the Soviet troops will withdraw from Afghanistan and refugees will go home. We cannot find a solution militarily. It is through political means and by jingo I've done everything that is possible. And I wish I had a little bit of help from our neighbour, India, in this respect.

On the military:

I became a politician the day I took over the duties of running the country. Military men should not indulge in a profession which is not theirs, and therefore I feel that the military as a whole should keep aloof. But you cannot deny the armed forces of the country the two fundamental responsibilities that we have, guarding the building of Pakistan and the ideology of Pakistan.

On himself:

I have in 44 years of my army career learned one thing: Love your job and work hard. I have no regrets.

tinue as President for another five years!

Nevertheless, even official sources privately conceded that the claimed 60 per cent plus referendum turnout was false. Admitted one: "As a government servant I have to say it was 60 per cent. Personally I think it was more like 40 per cent. However, my mother in Sargodha says it was 15 per cent." In fact, on referendum day streets and polling booths were deserted, and no one conceded anything over a 20 per cent turnout. Even supporters and beneficiaries of the Zia regime like shopkeepers were disgusted by the referendum outcome, and for the first time turned against him.

But election day saw a fair amount of activity as large numbers of voters, especially women, went to cast their vote. Polling in certain areas of Lahore and Rawalpindi was light, but in Karachi, Peshawar and the interior of almost all the provinces it was indeed very respectable. As Mushahid Hussain, editor of Islamabad's English daily, *The Muslim*, tartly pointed out: "Political observers were quick to discern that the United States, our godfather, which had maintained an embarrassing silence on the referendum by not even sending a ritualistic message of congratulations to the President, was the first to welcome what on February 25 was a genuinely democratic exercise."

In retrospect, the turnout could hardly have been otherwise. Each of the 1,000-plus candidates conservatively spent between Pakistani Rs 5 lakh and Rs 50 lakh (Rs 4 lakh to 40 lakh) and brought out some votes on a purely personal basis. Then there were many powerful feudal lords and rich businessmen in the fray, all appealing to local caste, sect and *biradari* sentiments. One cynical Lahore journalist, trying to explain the presence of many beautiful, well-dressed women creating a veritable Meena Bazaar on election day, cattily observed: "They're doing this out of boredom. They have no other amusement in our society. It has become a social occasion."

But he was only partially right. Pakistani women are particularly infuriated about their aborted emancipation, thanks to the mullahs, Islamisation and the military regime. And they used the occasion to show it. Many others saw this as perhaps the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel.

Observed ex-Supreme Court Justice Fakhruddin Ebrahim, a bitter critic of the military regime: "When the elections came I was happy. I thought some political process will start. I also thought the MRD had made a mistake by not partici-

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Outside a polling booth: good turnout

pating." And Maulana Kausar Niazi, a former Bhutto cabinet minister but no longer in the People's Party, explained: "People wanted to get rid of martial law. They were sure it would go at election end. As a result, there were many candidates, and voters were enthusiastic. They may have been non-party elections. But they were certainly political."

The trouble was, of course, what Hussain described as the 'rules of the game' which came in the shape of a bombshell on March 2 evening. Appearing on television in full dress military uniform, General Zia rambled on about the political history of Pakistan in an 83-minute address, and then announced what he claimed were some amendments to the 1973 Constitution. In fact, despite his protestations, he had unleashed a new constitution, which not only neutralised the election but was a thinly veiled attempt at maintaining his dictatorial stranglehold.

The 1973 constitution, duly ratified by a genuinely elected assembly, had maintained Parliament would be sovereign, the prime minister head of government and responsible to Parliament, and federating provinces largely autonomous. General Zia's amendments vested all power in the President, and both Parliament and the prime minister really amounted to nothing. The president would appoint the prime minister, who then had 60 days to muster a majority in the house. He could sack Parliament at will. The President would also appoint provincial governors who in turn would appoint chief ministers on his advice and even dissolve provincial assemblies if they though it was necessary. The President would also remain commander-in-chief of the defence forces, and make all major defence appointments including the service chiefs.

As a well-known commentator not wishing to the identified said: "In the last and previous constitutions, the President had to follow the advice of the prime minister. Here the President does not. It is totally unilateral. The prime minister is an appointee." Perhaps the prime minister's new role was best illustrated by Vai Ell's cartoon in Karachi's eveninger, *The Star*. He depicted the prime minister with a havildar's stripes, squatting on the ground outside the President's office door, smoking a hookah and sipping tea.

The 60 days given to the appointed prime minister to prove his majority seemed a particularly brazen method of mustering support for favoured candidates, since the possibility of buying or blackmailing parliamentarians seemed infinite. Since many successful candidates are feudal lords or businessmen, each involved in several murder, land or cheating cases, they could prove particularly pliable. And everyone spent over the permissible Rs 40,000 during the campaign, reportedly closely watched by the authorities. Prickly members could be slapped with election petitions, where conviction could mean five years' imprisonment.

The reaction to General Zia's constitutional sleight of hand was predictable. Mian Tufail Mohammad, president of the Jamaat-i-Islami, and hitherto a close Zia supporter, termed it a confiscation of the elected Assembly's rights. He said the amendments should have been presented

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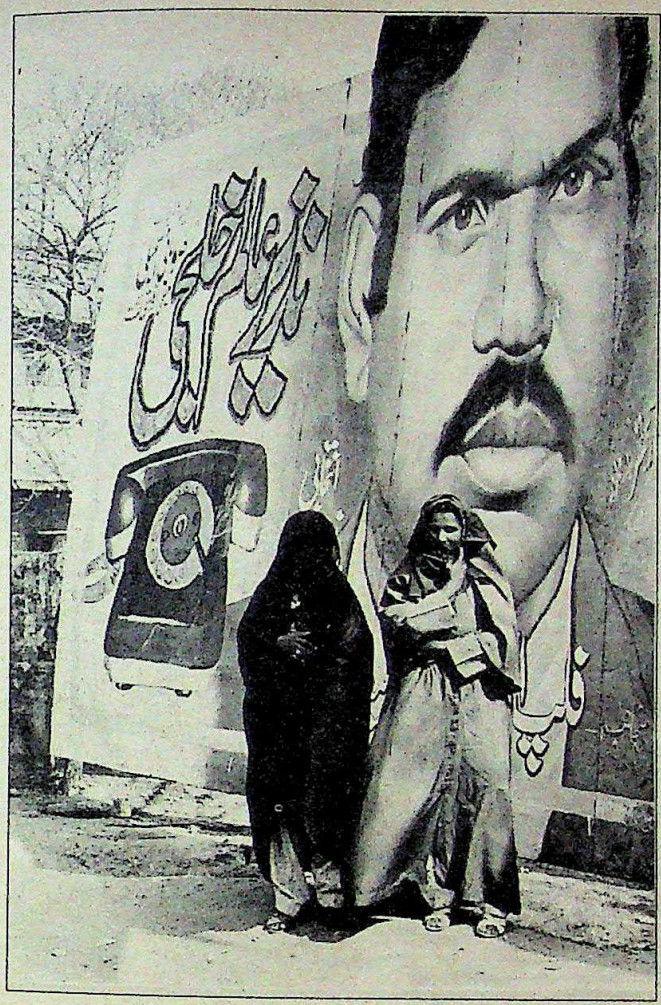
to Parliament in the form of bills. His deputy, Professor Ghafoor Ahmed, was more forthright. "It is a misnomer to call these amendments," the courtly, soft-spoken vice-president fumed in an interview. "It is a new constitution imposed on the country by a martial law regime, which has no right to even amend the 1973 constitution, never mind make a new one." He was particularly annoyed that all powers—judicial, executive and legislative—had been concentrated in the hands of the President, without accountability to Parliament. The Constitution also puts him above the judiciary. "The new constitution of 1985 has virtually made Parliament a debating society," he said.

The crucial question is whether in fact General Zia-ul-Haq is at all authorised to amend the constitution. Even before the amendments came, former Supreme Court Justice Fakhruddin Ebrahim went on record saying he had no power to do so. "In fact, you cannot legitimately call this the 1973 constitution" says Ebrahim. "It has changed radically. I would call it the 1985 constitution given by one solitary individual. These amendments are not going to come up before the National Assembly for ratification. They are a fait accompli. Today this is the constitution of Pakistan, with the amendments."

But there are some who regard these constitutional amendments as an intermediate tactical position. Recently elected Air Marshal Nur Khan (Retd) was privately furious but said: "I regard the amendments as a negotiating position rather than final. It is for the Assembly to show unity and fight for its rights. The military cannot govern indefinitely. Martial law cannot remain much longer. The National Assembly will have to be entrusted with power."

Given all these complications, why did Zia agree to have elections at all when he seemed to be sitting pretty? Some Pakistani analysts believe the answer lies in US pressure. There was difficulty passing economic and military aid through the US Congress. The watershed was US Vice-President George Bush's visit some months ago, when both he and Pakistan



Passers-by at poll hoarding

Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan almost simultaneously announced resumption of the Pakistani democratic process. The Americans obviously carry extraordinary clout in Pakistan, and with the military regime in general. President Zia in particular is deeply be holden to them. Just after the election private receptions in honour of US Ambassador Dean Hinton were being held so he could to meet the newly elected parliamentarians, which tells its own story.

General Zia's immediate task now is to select a prime minister. There had been talk earlier of candidates from the minority provinces like Sindhi industrialist Ilahi Bux Soomro, especially following the large Sind turnout during the election. However, since the prime minister will only be 'consulted' should the contingency arise, rather than have his 'advice' acted upon, that is not in any case a major issue.

If there is any possible challenge, it is from Zia's own power base, the army, which he has headed for the last decade. His ability to relinquish that crucial post and also dismantle martial law depends on finding trustworthy people for key positions, who will not do what he did to prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. How much anyone can be trusted in that kind of environment is always moot. A key player is expected to be General Rahimuddin Khan, chairman of the Joint chiefs of staff and a close relation of former Indian President Zakir Hussain. With his daughter married to General Zia's son, he is said to be less of a threat than anyone else. Several provincial governors are slated to get the chop.

With General Zia leaving Army House, there are also bound to be many changes in the military, and many ambitions thwarted. The cumulative effect is difficult to foresee. The still undefined role of the crucial National Security Council (NSC) remains a big question mark. Zia has often reiterated his was not an attempt to transfer but share power. The NSC will reportedly be the military's ultimate weapon to safeguard its interests; indemnify itself against all past constitutional violations; and legitimise future extra-constitutional intervention.

Army interests could be threatened in several areas, for instance, by a foreign policy which reduces its pre-eminence in national affairs or threatens the enormous amount of military aid it receives from Pakistan's allies ; reductions in defence spending (which makes up 60 per cent of the budget) or neglect of the petty interests of the huge servicemen's lobby, like its demand for land in Sind.

But for the moment, it is Zia and the army that have the upper hand. Most of the political leadership is unfortunately locked up in jails across the country, though Zia says he will release them by April (*see interview*), but there seems to be little possibility of concerted political pressure building up inside Parliament or outside until the rules of the game are changed. That means lifting martial law and tolerating public debate and even dissent. If that happens, Pakistan will indeed move towards democracy. If it doesn't the February election will be an aborted political spring.

—ARUN CHACKO in Islamabad

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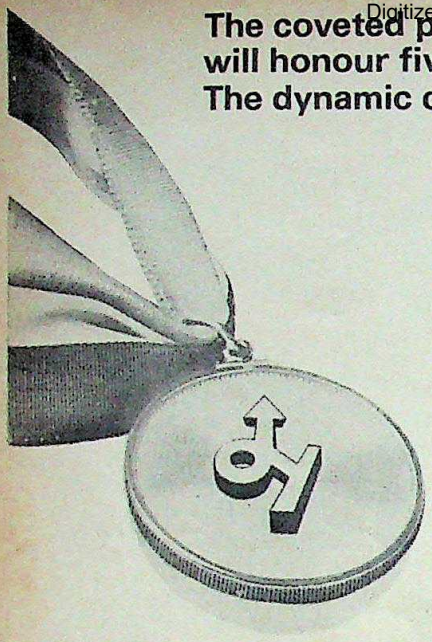

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PAKISTAN

Explosive Links

WASHINGTON's reaction to the most recent evidence of Pakistan's continuing global clandestine efforts to obtain essential components for making an atomic bomb is a frightening illustration of the Reagan Administration's pathetic inability to curb the nuclear ambitions of a renegade ally.

This volatile issue exploded into the American public consciousness last fortnight with the airing of an hour-long television documentary made by Pulitzer prize-winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh in which he revealed that a 33-year-old Pakistani agent named Nazir Ahmed Vaid—posing as an innocent businessman—had illegally tried to smuggle 50 timing devices, that are used to trigger nuclear bombs, out of the USA at the behest of the Pakistani Government.

The devices, known as krytrons, resemble tiny, odd-shaped light bulbs and are manufactured only in America by a company named E.G. and G. They are considered to be such high-technology, sensitive items that their sales are restricted and licensed and their purchase by outsiders must be considered piecemeal by the state department. INDIA TODAY has learned that the total krytrons in commercial and other uses in the entire industrialised world number less than 100. Vaid's attempt to obtain 50 of them at one go raised a forest of red flags within E.G. and G. Vaid was placed under surveillance and nabbed by customs agents last June in a classical 'sting' operation when he tried to export the krytrons in a box deceptively labeled "bulbs and switches". He was tried, found guilty of export violations, given a mild sentence and deported to Pakistan.

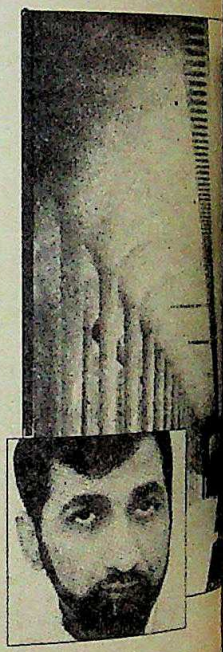
These events have once again riveted world attention not only on how much time remains before Pakistan blasts its way into the nuclear club but also on whether the US has the will, determination or, even the ability, to carry out its professed public policy of preventing nuclear weapons proliferation.

Among the disturbing questions now being raised is whether the Reagan Administration bent over backwards in an attempt to avoid any overt embarassment to Pakistan which is the recipient of a $3.2 billion arms aid package from the US. Earlier news accounts of Vaid's arrest and subsequent trial had painted him as a misguided, and overzealous businessman. But according to the latest revelations, documents recovered from Vaid link him solidly and directly to the Pakistani Government.

What is even more startling is that these documents—exchanges of letters between Vaid and Pakistan's top atomic energy commission officials, S.A. Butt and Colonel Dar—regarding Vaid's surreptitious purchases here were seized by US government authorities on the day of his arrest. "Customs officials knew from day one of the arrest that Vaid was linked to the bomb through the documents," Hersh said. And this information was passed on to the state department and the justice department. Still, Vaid was prosecuted only as a negligent businessman rather than as a spy under the atomic energy act.

The prosecutor in the case admitted having seen the "smoking gun" documents but said that he did not recognise the significance of the Butt and Dar connection because he did not know who they were. Hersh identified Butt as the key Pakistani official who negotiated secret deals in Europe in the 1970's for procuring centrifuges and other materials for use in the production of enriched uranium in Pakistan.

Observers see an irritating *deja vu* in the reaction to the latest Pakistani nuclear caper from all sides. Pakistani officials immediately, and steadfastly denied that they had an interest in developing or exploding a bomb and reiterated their public position that their atomic plans were peaceful and research-oriented and that their businessmen were being maliciously smeared for internal political reasons. And they denied any connection with Vaid. Notwithstanding the existence of the seized documents, the state department and the White House simply repeated Pakistan's "assurances" that it is not developing a bomb. Vaid insisted that he did not know what krytrons really were and that he was simply fulfilling an order for research purposes for the University of Islamabad. And members of the US house and senate once again made noises about cutting off all arms aid to Pakistan. Powerful senators like former presidential candidates Alan Cranston and John Glenn have tried to cut off aid to Pakistan in the past over this issue but their efforts have been defeated by the onslaught of powerful lobbying from the White House.



The newest attempt in this direction is from Congressman Steve Solarz who has just introduced a bill stipulating that the US should cut off all arms aid to Pakistan if any of its agents are caught ever again trying to smuggle bomb components into Pakistan from anywhere in the world. Experts predict that this measure is doomed to failure because powerful right wing senators like Jesse Helms insist on widening the dragnet to include economic sanctions against all nations—including Israel—who are engaged in similar activity. Most members of Congress are loathe to equate Israel with Pakistan or to "punish" their staunchest Mid-East ally.

Also, the Reagan Administration is hesitant to take any precipitous action against Pakistan for fear that cutting off arms would make Zia a reluctant ally in sending arms to Afghan guerillas in the American-Soviet confrontation in Afghanistan.

But the US Government has been expressing deep anguish over Pakistan's nuclear adventurism in private. According to reliable sources at least a dozen top presidential assistants and emissaries have visited Pakistan over the last year to quietly arm-twist Zia and his government. The administration is convinced that Pakistan has the capability to produce several nuclear weapons. And intelligence agencies have confirmed that Pakistan was starting to produce plutonium as well as small amounts of enriched bomb-grade uranium. Sources said that the one of the specific purposes of presidential envoy Vernon Walter's recent visit to Islamabad was to tell Zia to "knock off" all production of fissionable materials.

Even though Zia and his government insist on telling visiting American VIP's that all Pakistan has "is a couple of sputtering centrifuges", they have reportedly agreed to halt production of enriched uranium and have not been operating their re-processing plant in recent months. Members of Congress have received this information in top level secret briefings from American intelligence sources.

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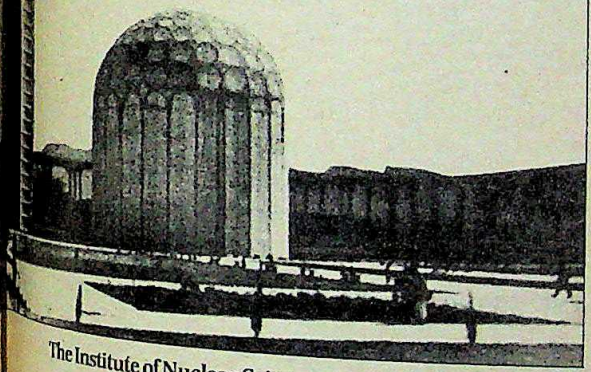
These secret briefings to Congress on Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme—based on an extensive and elaborate American intelligence operation directed at Pakistan's nuclear facilities where no international inspections are allowed—are in the nature of a White House compromise. Under current law US aid to Pakistan can be cut off only if Pakistan explodes a bomb. But last year the senate tried to pass a measure under which the US president, in writing, would assure the US Congress that Pakistan was not actively making a bomb, before further aid to Pakistan could be renewed. The measure was defeated at the behest of the White House. But under an alternative, unofficial arrangement, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and related agencies regularly deliver classified information on Pakistan's nuclear designs to selected committees of Congress. Based on these briefings and notwithstanding Pakistan's recently-botched attempt at smuggling the krytrons, some members are convinced that Pakistan has for the time being halted production of fissionable materials.

There is likely to be another, powerful, outcry from US senators to halt all aid to Pakistan only if they learn through intelligence sources that Pakistan is again developing fissile materials. But one thing seems certain. The senate is likely to delay or even deny Pakistan the sale of new weapons it is seeking such as the sophisticated EC-2 Hawkeyes in relation against that country's clandestine operations in this country and Europe for obtaining parts for its off-again-on-again nuclear programme. And the White House is unlikely to fight too hard against such a ban.

Another view among administration circles is that Pakistan's real intentions may be one of politico-nuclear chesmanship to keep everybody guessing and at bay. These sources say that Pakistan, by design, deliberately and openly advertises its intentions of procuring parts for development of the bomb but stops short of actually exploding and designing one. The Vaid case they point out, was too obvious. He looked like a Pakistani, talked like a Pakistani and was in full Pakistani dress when he personally ordered the 50 krytrons. The game—if it is indeed one—signals to India that Pakistan has matched India's technological capabilities in this field and thereby deters India's from exploding another nuclear device that could 'justify' a similar explosion in Pakistan. It also feeds Pakistan's own nationalist pride and keeps domestic pressures on Zia in abeyance because he is not publicly perceived as kowtowing to American pressures on him not to build a bomb and while this posture keeps Americans nervous it also assures continuation of American aid to Pakistan because American policy-makers believe that their aid gives them the 'leverage' with which to arm-twist Pakistan out of building and exploding a nuclear weapon.

The issue exploded into American public consciousness when a television documentary revealed that a Pakistani agent had illegally tried to smuggle 50 timing devices, used to trigger nuclear bombs, out of the USA at the Pakistan Government's behest.



The Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology at Islamabad and (inset) Vaid

Whether the question of to-explode-or-not-to-explode may or may not be a brilliantly conceived game plan in which Zia is having the ultimate laugh, the existence of Pakistan's nuclear capability is a fact. Former Congressman Lester Wolfe, who headed a house foreign relations subcommittee said that as early as 1978 he "saw hard evidence of Pakistan's assembly lines for centrifuges. We knew at that time that Pakistan was getting nuclear material for large-scale production of the bomb. They had already spent $100 million in production".

Briefly, under the Carter administration, the US cut off all aid to Pakistan under the Symington amendment prohibiting assistance to any country engaged in developing a nuclear bomb. But despite Pakistan's refusal to sign the no-proliferation treaty or to submit facilities to international inspection, the Symington amendment was waived when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and arms aid to Pakistan was resumed.

But throughout this period, as Senator Glenn remarked: "Pakistan has engaged in world-wide effort involving clandestine transfers of nuclear technology, equipment, and materials whose purpose is specifically geared to produce large quantities of weapons grade materials." Arrests similar to that of Vaid have been made in several countries during the past:

► In 1980, the Canadian police arrested two Pakistani agents trying to ship US-built inverters used in uranium enrichment;

► The following year Pakistani agents were able to persuade Turkish firms to divert American-built inverters from Europe to Pakistan;

► In 1983, Dr Abdul Qadir, head of Pakistan's nuclear programme, was convicted in Amsterdam in absentia for stealing blueprints of a Dutch uranium enrichment plant while working there as a consultant;

► During the same period Pakistani agents were arrested again in Canada and the US for attempting to smuggle materials such as zirocomium that is used in nuclear reactors;

► Last year the state department learned that Pakistan had a graphite purification plan as a source of plutoniun.

Critics of the US policy argue that the failure of the US to exercise the 'leverage' it claims to have with Pakistan will definitely lead to the production of a bomb. As one official put it: "The Pakistanis have nothing but contempt for us and they are using us." Paul Warnke, former US director of arms control recently stated: "There may be some benefits for close US relations with Pakistan. But is a nuclear-armed Pakistan a better ally? The Russians would see a nuclear Pakistan a better target for destabilisation. They would seek to destabilise Pakistan and turn it into a Soviet ally."

Several administration sources, however, believe that the only way to defuse Pakistan's nuclear intentions is to persuade India to take new bilateral initiatives toward Pakistan aimed, ultimately, at securing a no-bomb pact between the two countries. Such a no-nuclear detente between the two countries would be backed by guarantees from the United States, the Soviet Union and China.

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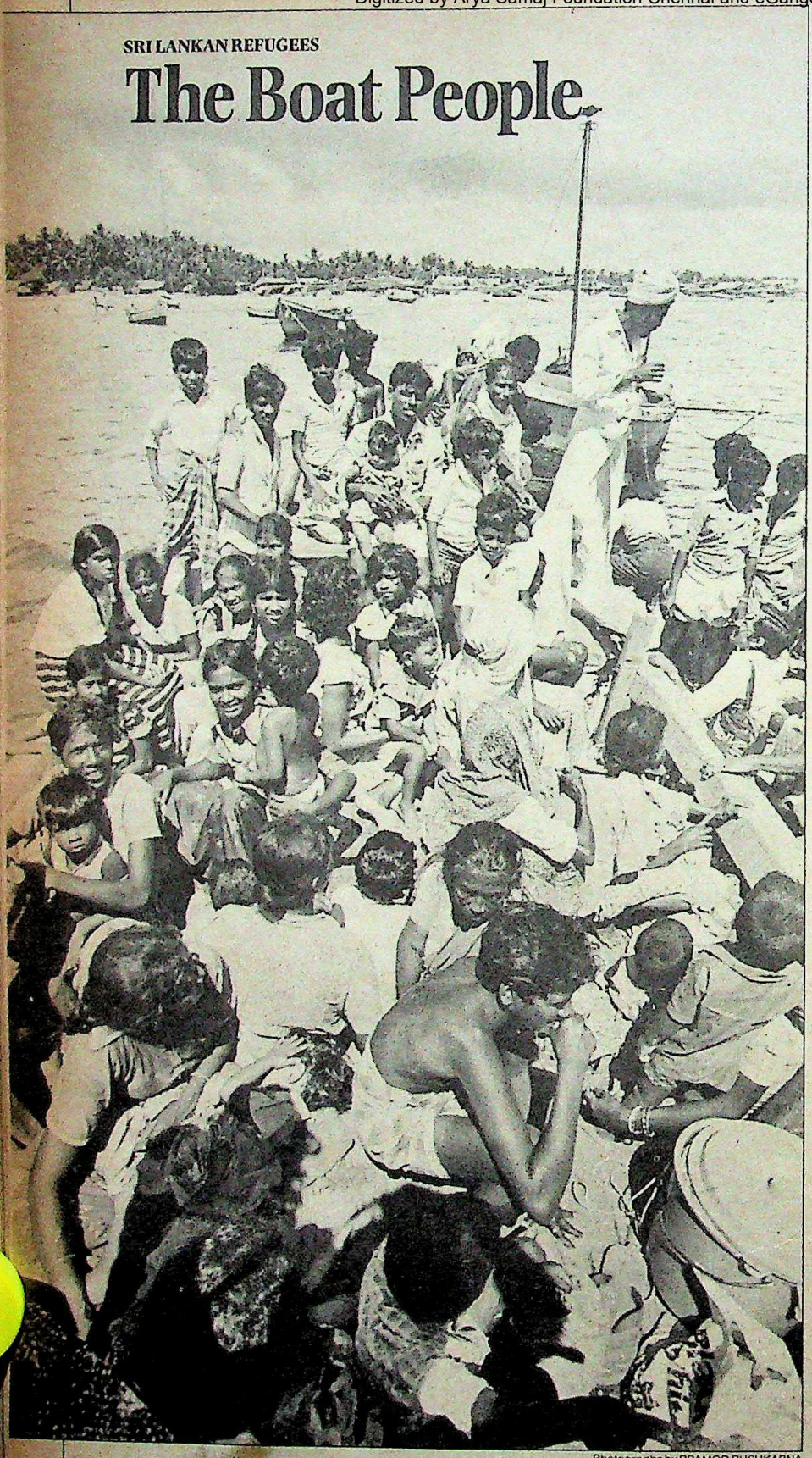
SRI LANKAN REFUGEES

The Boat People

TAMIL leaders have been warning of "another Bangladesh" and by last fortnight with the influx of refugees from Sri Lanka into coastal Tamil Nadu crossing the 50,000 mark, their words carried a prophetic ring. Over 12,000 refugees have made the hazardous crossing since early February to a new and uncertain beginning having lost their livelihood and abandoned their homes in the face of the reign of unbridled terror unleashed by Sri Lankan security forces. In the process many families have been separated with no hope of being reunited in the near future. Though local authorities have managed to cope with their rehabilitation, their arrival poses other problems that will not be so easy to solve. INDIA TODAY's *Madras Correspondent* S.H. VENKATRAMANI *was on hand when the influx was at its peak. His report.*



Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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HIS CLOSE cropped hair is white and his anxious face wrinkled with deep furrows. Thommai, 65 years old and a rugged fisherman who has learned over the years to cope with adversity, looks pale and lost as he squats on the ground with his wife Sesudiya, four sons and three daughters. He has reason to be distraught. One night last fortnight Thommai and his family slipped into a boat and left their home in Talaimannar town in Sri Lanka's north-western district of Mannar and made a perilous crossing to Rameswaram island, the nearest bit of Tamil Nadu's Ramanathapuram district from Sri Lanka. From there it was a short journey to the Mandapam repatriates' transit camp, 18 km inland where they are now installed.

Thommai is representative of the new wave of Sri Lankan Tamils who have been fleeing from their homes across the Palk Straits since last month, seeking security and safety in India from what they describe as terror unleashed by the Sri Lankan armed forces. As a result, Mandapam looks less a transit camp and more a refugee camp. Sesudiya, who speaks in a staccato voice and wears long ear-rings which have significantly distended her ear lobes, says that for the last six months, Talaimannar fishermen have scarcely been able to venture out to sea to fish "thanks to the day and night vigil on the sea by the Sri Lankan navy". In a contrasting, flat monotone, Thommai mumbles: "We don't have any other skills, we have been starving. Even starving is alright, but the Sinhalese army is always on the prowl and huge contingents keep descending on Tamil areas." The army suspects every Tamil, he adds, because every young Tamil is a potential extremist. "They loot our homes, rape our women and burn down our houses."

Mannar district has not been as hard pressed as areas further north where the Tamil population is much larger. Of Mannar district's one lakh people, some 30 per cent are Tamil-speaking Muslims, 60 per cent Tamil Christians and 10 per cent Sinhala. But Tamil militants who had earlier confined their operations to Jaffna in the north, had apparently started getting active around Mannar in January. Apart from stray incidents, a few soldiers and policemen were killed in

Refugees arriving in crowded boats at Rameswaram: tales of terror

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Mannar in January. According to official Colombo sources, terrorists killed a Methodist minister of a local church and a couple of policemen travelling in a car and National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali lays the blame for the killing of 52 people in Mannar including Father Mary Bastian of the Mannar church squarely on the militants.

So severe were the military reprisals to these militant attacks that the Tamil residents of Mannar were left with very little choice but to flee the island to Tamil Nadu. But it was some time before they actually managed to get across to Ramanathapuram. Says Selvaratnam, a 38-year-old clerk working for the Talaimannar village council—a government job—who came over with his wife and four children and paid Rs 100 per person to make the crossing: "We are profoundly relieved to have been able to reach the safety of Tamil Nadu." Selvaratnam says that all four clerks with the council have fled because "it has become impossible for Tamils to live in Sri Lanka. You are not safe even inside your own house and any day Sinhalese soldiers may attack your home and burn it down, arrest your sons and torture them." He has no regrets at having exchanged his middle class existence in Talaimannar with the status of a penniless refugee in Mandapam.

Like thousands of others, Selvaratnam, Thommai and their families had obviously decided enough was enough. They piled their small but strong reinforced fibre fishing boats with a few essential belongings, and with 50 people packed into a boat which ought to take no more than 20, set out to sea. There was company because it is safer to travel in numbers, and although the crossing is a mere 21 km at its shortest, the boats charted a circuitous course to escape a confrontation with the Sri Lankan navy and air force which patrols the seas between India and Sri Lanka. As Mannar fisherman Thambipillai Fernando, 40, who escaped to Rameswaram with four children said: "We had to seek out the shallow waters and steer our boats through them because the Sri Lankan naval ships cannot come into these shallow waters."

The fear is, actually, a carry-over of their experience at home because the Sri Lankans make no real determined attempt to prevent the fishermen from leaving. The Sri Lankan navy and air force are on the prowl for what they believe are terrorists and supplies heading for Sri Lanka from India or escaping to India. Fishermen making the crossing are searched and often harassed, but seldom stopped. There have been a few instances of firing on boats from helicopters. Said Imlian, a 31-year-old turbaned fisherman who has shuttled between India and Sri Lanka ferrying refugees and who remains jovial in the face of hardship: "Only once was there firing in our direction from a helicopter so we sped back to Talaimannar and again set out at night. There was no further problem." Though there have been unconfirmed reports of vessels being sunk and bodies being recovered, there has been no serious attempt by the Sri Lankan navy to discourage or deter the Tamils from fleeing.

Understandably so. The Sri Lankan navy is hardly strong enough to effectively police the waters between the two countries, but more important, the Sri Lankan authorities are not exactly averse to the idea of Tamils leaving the island nation for India. Appapillai Amirthalingam, secretary-general of the Tamil United Liberation Front, provides the most radical view of the exodus. Talking to INDIA TODAY, Amirthalingam charged that the Sri Lankan Government "wants to convert Mannar district into a Sinhala-

An expectant mother being helped to shore: nightmare crossing

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majority area and that is why it is depopulating the district of Tamils".

Mannar district has a Tamil Christian population of 60,000 and about 10,000 Sinhalese. Amirthalingam argues that if 30,000 Sinhalese can be resettled it would even things out and provide a strong deterrent to the suspected traffic in arms and terrorists across the Palk Straits. This, the authorities believe, can ease the terrorist problem because although there are more than one million Tamils in Jaffna district further north, the distance from India is much greater—almost three times as much as from Mannar—and fishermen cannot make the trip as easily without being detected.

But Talaimannar is very different. A shopkeeper from Talaimannar who some day hopes to return and would not divulge his name, said that he and his family were the last to leave from his part of town. While they were waiting for some fishermen to take them across, they were accosted by some soldiers who asked them why they hadn't already left. "I explained to them I was waiting, for a boat to take us across," he said citing this as evidence of the army's eagerness to see the last of them. "But for the dividing sea between the two countries, Sri Lankan Tamils would have swarmed into Tamil Nadu just as refugees came into Bengal from Bangladesh in 1971," he added.

Two sisters cling to their remaining belongings: lost livelihood

Indeed, the official ferry service run by the Shipping Corporation of India, which ceased last winter because of the growing violence and insecurity in northern Sri Lanka, has been replaced by an unofficial "ferry service", run by fishermen who take people across for payment or against supplies of fuel or food. The latest wave started last month after the military crack-down, and the first boats hit Rameswaram in the pre-dawn hours of February 5, having been in the water a good nine hours. That day, five families of 21 people landed. The exodus peaked four days later on February 9 when, according to official figures, 363 people landed at different points on the Rameswaram-Dhanushkodi coast. Averaging around 300 to 400 a day last fortnight, the final tally had crossed more than 12,000 a month after the exodus started.

The refugees continue to pour in, and the Mandapam officials are anxious that at this rate it won't be long before half of Manner district's Christians flee to India. Their stories are distressingly similar, of army atrocities, fear for their lives, their livelihood gone. Fishermen who can't fish, shopkeepers who can't open and workers who can't work. Sivamali, 22-year-old fisherman from Talaimannar who arrived with a wife and child maintains an anxious vigil for his parents, brothers and sisters. "We couldn't fish, so it was hard to survive. And the army would shoot young men at random."

Fearing that the Sri Lankans would accuse them of operating an illegal ferry service the Indian authorities at first seized all incoming boats. This policy was quickly changed when the Sri Lankan Government began to allege that the Tamil Nadu Government was spiriting away Lankan Tamils. Now, on orders from on high, local officials look the other way when the boats commute between India and Sri Lanka ferrying refugees.

Indeed, the refugees couldn't hope for a friendlier welcome. Even as their boats touch the sands of Rameswaram, Indian fishermen, who have themselves been unable to go out and fish freely in the last six months for fear of reprisals from the Sri Lankan navy, help the refugees disembark and unload. Riding the few bullock-carts, the refugees are then taken to the 'Mohabeer dharamsala' in Rameswaram. At this veterinary dispensary converted into an entry point for refugees by

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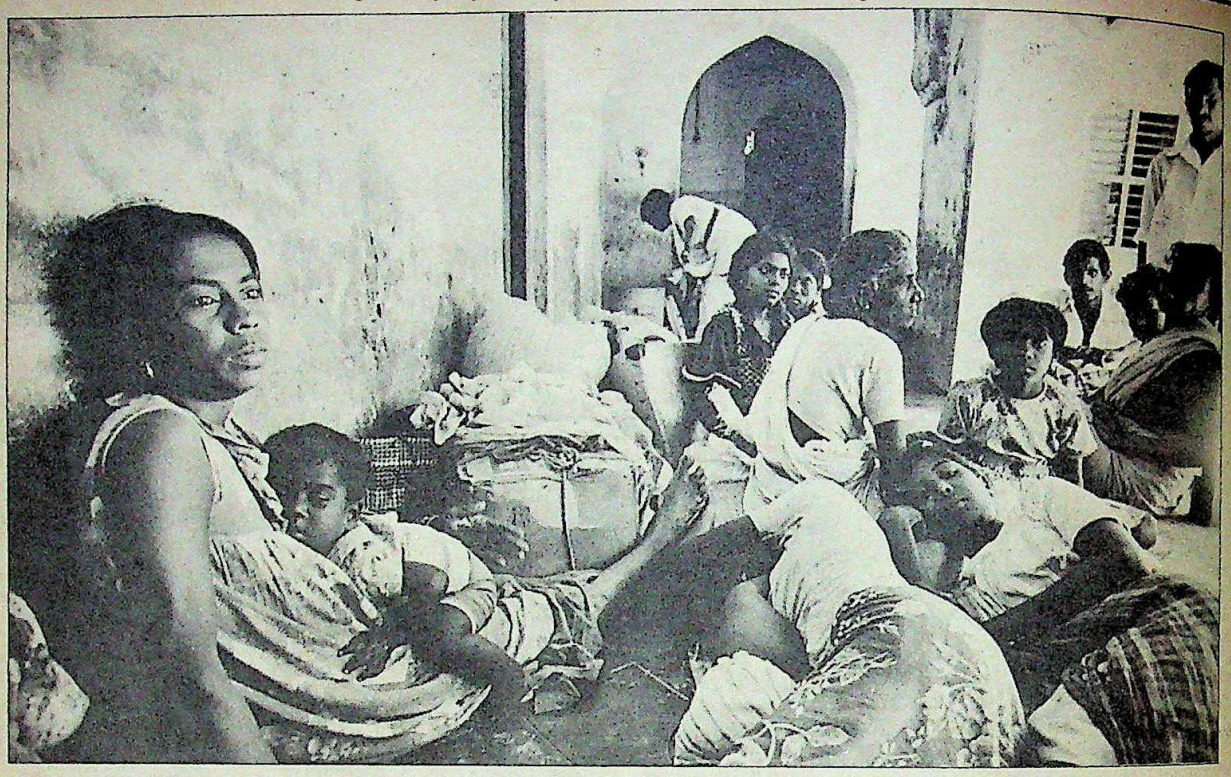

Refugee families at the Mohabeer camp: relief and rehabilitation

District Collector S. Gurumurthi, each refugee is made to fill out a disembarkation form—which gives some legal sanction to their presence—and innoculated with anti-cholera vaccine and tested for possible malaria. The refugees are then distributed between four different dharamsalas in Rameswaram and fed and housed for two or three days.

Their next halt is the Mandapam camp, which was the Sri Lanka authorities quarantine centre for Indian labour heading for Sri Lankan tea estates in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and which the Indian Government bought from Sri Lanka in 1966 for Rs 26 lakh to use as a transit camp for repatriates returning to India under the Srimavo-Shastri pact of 1964. At the camp, which now accommodates more than 700 families construction work is under way to increase capacity to 1,000 families, to be completed at a cost of Rs 15 lakh by the end of March.

Explains Gurumurthi: "At the Mandapam camp, we identify every refugee as a safeguard against an Assam type of problem later on." Each refugee is required to fill in a detailed identity card and photographs of family members are affixed to it as well. A refugees register is maintained. Once this process is over, each family is given some covered space—some 200 square feet for 12 to 15 people—and helped make a new home. Each family is given clothes, a set of aluminium utensils, blankets and mats. An average family, according to officials, costs about Rs 657 to maintain.

Beyond that, each family gets a cash allowance of Rs 110 to Rs 357 per month depending on its size, and the refugees are entitled to subsidised rice at 57 paise a kg and firewood at 80 paise a bundle of two kg which in the market would cost Rs 2. The state Government covers the firewood subsidy; the Centre pays for the rest. Gurumurthi estimates that the recurring cost of maintaining an average family is around Rs 1,100.

Mandapam is not the end of the trail for Sri Lankan refugees. In lots of 80 to 100 families, after an average stay of a week, they are scattered for settlement in all of Tamil Nadu's districts except Madras, Nilgris and Kanyakumari where repatriates have already thronged in large numbers. Not surprisingly, the refugees are elated. Says Alexander, a fisherman from Manner, "We are being looked after very well. We only look to the Indian Government to pressurise Sri Lanka to solve the Tamil problem speedily. Then we can go home again."

But this is not going to be quite so easy. For Ramanathapuram district has in the past been notorious for its caste and communal tension between the economically backward Hindus and Christians, Hindus and Muslims and between the Thevar and Harijan communities. Added to this Ramnathapuram is one of the most backward, impoverished and chronically drought-affected areas in a state where the monthly per capita income is as low as Rs 114. It is in these conditions that the Centre is maintaining thousands of refugees at a total of Rs 1,100 per family. Since the refugees unlike repatriates cannot be given jobs and absorbed into the national mainstream, they will have to depend on the Government's charity.

While the local populace has not expressed any resentment to the large influx of refugees, there is every possibility that problems are likely to arise. The predominantly Tamil Christian fishermen coming in from Sri Lanka will definitely upset the communal balance in the area which is not exactly going to go down very well with the Hindus. While everything is just hunky-dory at the moment with the general mood being one of overwhelming sympathy for the refugees, as more and more of them come pouring in, this could very easily cause the all too easily provoked passions of the volatile populace to erupt and add a new dimension to the already distressing problem.

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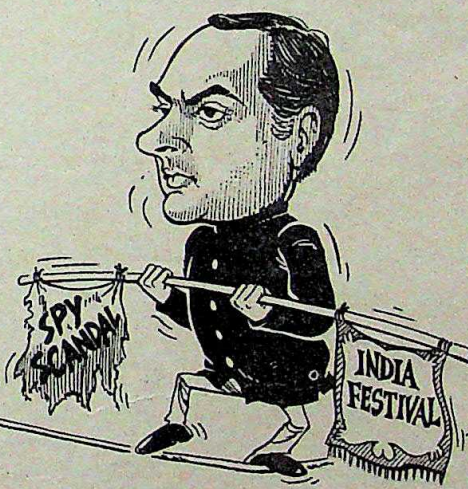
INDO-FRENCH RELATIONS

Back on the Rails?

THE FORMAL announcement that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi will arrive in Paris on June 6 on a four-day official visit when he will also inaugurate the extensively designed L' Anné de L' Inde-1985 (India Year) has stilled weeks of speculation that surrounded the Parisian leg of his five-nation voyage. The agreement for the visit was effected some time ago when it was tentatively decided that Mrs Indira Gandhi and President Francois Mitterrand would jointly kick off the Festival of India (INDIA TODAY, April 15, 1983 and June 30, 1984). When French Prime Minister Laurent Fabius visited India to attend Mrs Gandhi's state funeral, he renewed the invitation to Rajiv Gandhi. Now the young prime minister and the French president will jointly inaugurate the nine-month extravaganza at the sprawling Trocadero Square against the backdrop of the Seine river and the Eiffel Tower amidst an Indian "*mela*", folkdancers, fireworks and live television coverage.

No doubt, it would be a stately occasion full of panache, dazzle and splendour. But the blithe, radiant elation and the clink of champagne toasts in ritzy 'salons' will hardly camouflage the stark fact that Indo-French ties—buoyant and upbeat just eight weeks ago—have retrogressed sharply and been devalued by the ruinous espionage affair. As the mass-selling newsweekly *L'Express* in a recent analysis entitled 'France-India: The Vanishing Dream' pointed out the "L'Anne de L'Inde-1985 in France has already got off to a rather bad start".

Despite the flawed political tenor between New Delhi and Paris, observers here are confident that the Indian prime minister's visit would be the perfect opportunity to put the derailed Indo-French ties back on the track. A part of the optimism appears to be generated from the fact that even Polish Premier General Jaruzelski—hardly an engaging figure in France where Western Europe's most potent Solidarity faction functions with forbidding efficiency—could pull off a "modestly successful visit in India" despite the fact that one of his diplomats was squarely implicated in the spy scandal. The argument goes considering Indo-French political and commercial ties have a broader base and scope, there is far too much at stake for the two countries to let matters go to seed. However, by the same token General Jaruzelski had promised to investigate if the diplomat at the Polish Trade Mission was involved in espionage and depending upon the outcome, "appropriate action" would be taken. During his press conference in New Delhi, to remove any doubts, the Polish premier had added that "anything that will harm India will harm Poland".



Extraordinary as it may seem, despite the damning indictment of Colonel Alain Bolley by Coomar Narain and his low-level bureaucratic buddies, French officials have maintained a dour and uncompromising silence. Taken under the wings of the Ministry of Defence, the French deputy military attache has been kept under tight wraps, even as criticism and questions have mounted: To what extent was Bolley culpable? Does he think he was framed? Did he work for the French external intelligence network—the Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieure (DGSE) or did he pass on information to CIA spooks? What do his superiors have to say about the incriminating evidence piled up against him? Is he being asked to explain his role or reprimanded? Have the so-called "consultations" as announced by the French Government ended and if it has, what is the outcome?

No clues are being offered—the Elysee spokesmen, the Ministry of External Relations, the Ministry of Defence or the sleuths of the DGSE are all maintaining a frosty silence over whether Colonel Bolley had indeed attempted to suborn Indian businessmen to obtain classified information. It is almost as if this deafening silence will obfuscate the affair and it will just go away in the course of time. This large dose of self-delusion apart, it is with difficulty that the French—especially those in the private sector with commercial interests in India—seem to reconcile to the fact that the country's trust and confidence had been shot to pieces by this scandalous affair. Little wonder then, disquieted by the official silence, the afternoon daily, *Le Monde* questioned in a front-page editorial the wisdom of such a "prudent attitude".

The baldest assertions which are made here are that it is difficult to target the grey areas between those considered "sensitive" by the host nation and run-of-the-mill jockeying for commercial and defence information. The other favourite theory that is bandied about is that the French have been "taken in" by their proverbial competitors—not just the Soviet Bloc but also by the British.

What is perhaps more illustrative and to be borne in mind is that the record of French weapons manufacturers abroad (most of the lions in the arms industry are now state-owned) is hardly pristine and is riddled with intrigue and dispensation of *pots-de-vins* (bribes). The problem became so corrosive that a previous gov-

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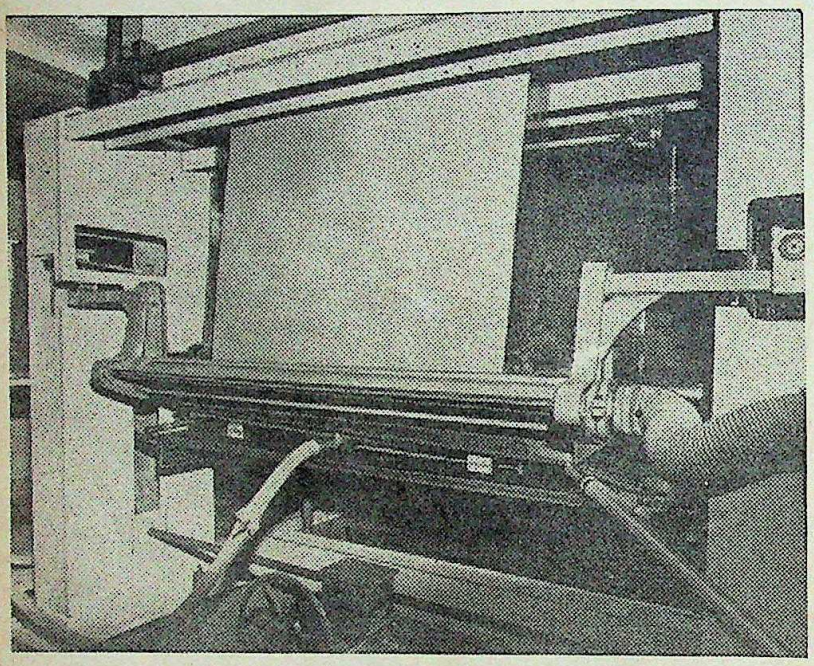

The new film coating plant at HPF, designed and commissioned with indigenous talents and resources, has accelerated the coating speed several times over. Yet another instance of HPF's R & D capability.

Speeding towards self-sufficiency

The R & D projects at HPF are conceived and carried out with a single objective: to maximise indigenous input both in terms of technology and content.

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ernment was forced to order a top-secret investigation of the state's role as a manufacturer and exporter of arms —the most celebrated being the Pierre Mayer Commission of 1976 ordered by President Giscard d 'Estaing which the French Ministry of Defence tried to quash. The stunning 135-page report came up with disturbing evidence that the French state was unwisely exposing itself by underwriting operations it should not be assuming responsibility for, and covering up transfers of money, that is bribes, that would be subject to severe criticism should they become public knowledge.

Besides the soft-pedalling on the Bolley affair, the only occasional statements attributed to him are those which have appeared in the press. One such statement attributed to the controversial Bolley quoted him as saying that he was "just an ordinary 'militaire' leading a boring life in India". Speculating about his future, one wag remarked that after his Indian escapade, Bolley could in all probability be "promoted".

The allusion is to the promotion of the French Ambassador to India, Serge Boidevaix, "recalled" by the Foreign Office back to the Quai d'Orsay. At a time when Indo-French relations took a steep nosedive, it must come as an exquisite surprise to the ambassador to be planted into the number 3 spot in the ministry—after the impressive new minister for external relations, Roland Dumas and the secretary-general Francis Gutman. Boidevaix who takes over from Jacques Martin as deputy secretary-general at the Ministry of External Relations a week before Rajiv Gandhi's arrival in Paris, has worked with such well-known French political luminaries as Michel Debre, Michel Jobert and Jacques Chirac and was formerly his country's ambassador to Poland in 1977. Against all accepted norms of diplomatic practice, his successor's name —Jean-Bernard Merimee—at the Delhi mission, has already been leaked.

At 50, Merimee, who like Boidevaix, is an "enarque" (products of the elite Ecole Nationale d'Administration), whose confirmation by New Delhi appears certain, could become one of the youngest French ambassadors to India. Merimee has worked as a first secretary in London during the late '70s, as chef de mission for cooperation in Abidjan, as chief of protocol and is currently the French ambassador in Australia. Even as the new French ambassador readies to shift from Canberra to New Delhi, the

Alain Bolley: a low profile

Indian ambassador, Narendra Singh, has returned to India having retired from the diplomatic service after a long and effective stint. Given the erosion in political relations, the presence of an experienced and senior ambassador for the Paris mission seems to be quite in order.

And it was just five months back that Rajiv Gandhi had abruptly cancelled his visit to Paris when he had travelled to Geneva to address the European Management Forum (EMF). His Paris itinerary had included a meeting with topflight French industrialists, an interview on France's channel-one television and a press conference. Apparently, he was scheduled to meet Minister for External Trade and Industry, Edith Cresson.

Will Indo-French ties quickly regain their zest and salubrity? Time-honoured diplomatic strategems are now in progress. A solicitous phone call from Laurent Fabius to the Indian prime minister. Francois Mitterrand despatching his brother, Jacques, former chairman of Aerospatiale, now heading Gifas, to New Delhi with a "special message". Studied speculation that before Rajiv Gandhi's June visit, Mitterrand or even Fabius might even stop by in Delhi as a gracious, fraternal gesture during one of their periodic trips abroad. A first indicator as to whether matters are back to normal will be the outcome of the massive 155-mm AUF-1 gun deal being evaluated by the Indian Army which the French were well-placed to clinch before the espionage scandal became public.

However, there is plenty more at stake. Beyond such imperishable media favourites as the Mirage-2000s and enriched uranium, aluminium plants and electronic switching gear, lie an extensive range of fields where there has been ongoing cooperation or areas coming under scrutiny. These encompass Airbuses and ATR-42s, Dauphin helicopters and Matra Missiles, hydel power projects and coal mines, oil exploration and railways, space research and atomic energy, data processing and main-frame computers. Two absorbing ideas concern the Indo-French Institute for Promotion of Advanced Research focussing on renewable sources of energy, informatics that includes fibre optics and computer application, biotechnology including genetic engineering and preservation of "patrimony". The second project hanging fire concerns a Viral Vaccine Institute in collaboration with the world-famous Institute Merieux.

Indo-French trade for instance stagnates at ludicrously low levels: the bleak figures speak for themselves —the volume of trade in recent years show the French share of India's total international trade at 2.27 per cent whilst India's share is 0.25 per cent. The French gripe about the ancient demons —strangulating red tape, language barrier. The Indians chafe at such tripwires as the use of the French language in all export documents. Last October, Harish Mahindra leading a high-powered delegation from the Indo-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry to Paris deprecated the sluggish trade and asked everyone from Prime Minister Laurent Fabius to the omnipotent bosses of the CNPF: "India's plans in the Seventh Five-Year Plan contemplate an investment of $ 320 billion. I ask what greater stimulus can be offered to French participation than these vast economic programmes supported by an enormous market which presently barely amounts to 100 million consumers of factory products out of a total population of nearly 730 million?"

A rapid mend between Paris and New Delhi will no doubt prove lucrative not only to France's eager arms peddlars, corporate executives and hungry investors but also to the beleaguered Elysee. Inveigled and short-changed by Colonel Gadaffy in Chad, thwarted by the impasse in New Caledonia, an additional foreign policy set-back especially in an area touted not so long ago as one of the "three pillars" of the socialists' Third World policy, could well nigh be unaffordable. Which is why it is being hoped that having swept the murky dealings of a maladroit Colonel Bolley under the carpet, the corruscating effulgence of an India Festival will revert Indo-French ties back to its former enchanted state.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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BANGLADESH

Predictable Patterns

WHEN Lt-General H.M. Ershad, president of Bangladesh and its chief martial law administrator (CMLA), withdrew the offer last fortnight to hold elections to the Parliament, there were not many who were surprised. The only subject for speculation was the general's next move. But Ershad's next manoeuvre, that of playing the tough guardian, turned out to be equally predictable: he had set the pattern himself in two similar situations since he overthrew an elected government to take over the controls three years ago.

Following the cancellation of the decision to hold the polls to the 300-seat *Jatiyo Sangshad* (parliament), which had been scheduled for April 6, the martial law administration hardened. The zonal and sub-zonal martial law authorities, temporarily ordered out by the CMLA as a "token of goodwill", were back with their summary powers. A ban was imposed on political activity, "both indoor and outdoor", thus forbidding even closed-door meetings of party committees. The country's six universities, long distrusted by the army as "hotbeds of indiscipline", were locked out indefinitely and students evicted from their hostels.

But the military's biggest onslaught was directed at the politicians, specially Sheikh Hasina Wajed, president of the Awami League and leader of the 15-party alliance, and Begum Khaleda Zia, chairman of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) who leads the other alliance of seven parties. Both were placed under house arrest: Hasina, in her husband's house in Dhaka's affluent Banani area, and Khaleda in her residence inside the Dhaka cantonment. Over 50 politicians belonging to both the alliances were detained by the military and civilian police while over a hundred went into hiding.

Ershad himself went on the air on March 1, beginning his speech with a reverentially intoned *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*, laying the responsibility for the cancellation of the polls entirely at the doors of politicians, and, at the end of his tortuous speech, divulged his new game-plan: to hold a referendum on March 21 which will decide if the nation supported his policies and programmes and wanted him to carry on as President till the elections, whenever he chooses to hold them now.

The March 21 "Yes-No" voting, even if allowed to be held in an atmosphere where anti-martial law sentiments are running high, is unlikely to yield any verdict other than 'yes' because of the country's questionable election procedures. But Ershad needs the prop, however rickety, of a direct mandate to push the parliamentary elections down the unwilling throats of most of the political parties. So far, both Hasina and Khaleda have spurned the offer to participate in the elections.

Ershad needs the prop, however rickety, of a direct mandate to push the parliamentary elections down the unwilling throats of most of the political parties.

Both Ershad and leaders of Jana Dal, the synthetic party sponsored by him, have criticised the two women for their "obstinacy". But their stand has been logical. The main plank of their appeal has been to label Ershad as an "usurper", and the martial law as "illegal". But the elections, if held under the suspended 1979 constitution, would still ensure Ershad's sway over the parliament and he may refuse to hand over power to the elected representatives.

Moreover, Ershad's motives were suspect. While he was professing neutrality, and had even removed Jana Dal members from his cabinet, he nevertheless began a barnstorming tour across the country. Convinced that the elections were a trap, Khaleda Zia told a rally last month: "We would not take part in the election under the illegal government of Ershad." A day before the new army crackdown, Hasina virtually derecognised the Ershad regime when she said: "This man (Ershad) has no right to legalise his illegal rule by holding a farcical election; if he wishes to expiate for his sins, the least he can do is to step down from office."

Hasina and Khaleda have obvious political differences. But both women have established substantial followings among students, lawyers, workers and women. In fact, Ershad got a handle to hold back the promised polls because doctors had been on strike, lawyers had stayed away from courts, women were overcoming religious inhibitions to demonstrate on Dhaka streets, and students became violent because a pro-Awami League student was shot dead in the university campus by student-supporters of Ershad.

Ershad hopes that the resentment against his virtually unilateral holding of, first the referendum, and then the parliamentary and presidential elections will not spark off an unmanageably large resistance. This is because of the dramatic upturn taken by the economy—once regarded as an "international basket case"—in recent years. The growth rate, after being stagnant around 3.5 per cent for three years, touched the 4.5 per cent mark in 1983-84 and, according to unofficial figures, has inched up to 5 per cent this year. Foreign aid still holds the key to Bangladesh's economy, but it is progressively coming down and, significantly, project aid has overtaken both food and commodity aid. But the most startling success of the Ershad regime has been in the power and gas sector where a whopping 21.4 per cent rise was recorded last year.

But economic growth has not always been a sure guarantee against oppressive regimes. Like the late Ziaur Rahman in the past, and President Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, Ershad is also anxious to don the civilian garb before it gets too hot. If he is successful in holding the March 21 referendum, it will mark his victory in the first major battle. But the outcome of the war will depend on the emotional hold the two bereaved women continue to enjoy over the people of Bangladesh.

—SUMIT MITRA

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STUDENTS AND FREEDOM MOVEMENT

NEW DELHI: The Chief Executive Councillor, Jag Parvesh Chandra has announced that Delhi Administration has instituted prizes worth Rs 4.50 lakhs for the best three manuscripts for a book on "History of the Freedom Movement" (1857 to 1947) for students of secondary and senior secondary schools. Details of the prizes are listed below:

1ST PRIZE-
Rs. 1,50,000 (One for English and one for Hindi)
2ND PRIZE-
Rs. 50,000 (One for English and one for Hindi)
3RD PRIZE-
Rs. 25,000 (One for English and one for Hindi)

The prizes have been declared State Awards by the Finance Ministry. As such they have assumed greater prestige besides rendering the award money exempt from income tax.

The basic purpose of writing such a book is to keep the younger generation of our people fully informed about the freedom movement. Accounts of the heroic role of freedom fighters in the various mass movements will instill a sense of love of country among the young citizens. This will promote secular outlook and strengthen national integration, which is the very condition of our national survival.

Manuscripts will be accepted either in English or Hindi and may contain about 40,000 words. Authors should send three copies of their manuscripts typed in double space under registered acknowledgement due cover by 31st December, 1985, to Secretary to the Chief Executive Councillor, Delhi Administration, Old Secretariat, Delhi-110054.

A panel of eminent writers and reputed historians will screen the manuscripts.

Delhi Administration will hold the copyright of the first-prize-winning manuscripts and the right to translate, print, publish and sell the book in any Indian language besides English and Hindi and incorporate such changes as it deems fit. The second and third prize winners and other authors may get their manuscripts printed by any private publisher.

For further clarifications please write to the Chief Executive Councillor, Delhi Administration, Old Secretariat, Delhi-110054.

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SMUGGLING

Tightening the Net

WHEN the blue and white mechanised boat *Al Saras* anchored at Bedi Port in Gujarat last month, the local Customs authorities took hardly any notice since it was reported to have brought in a consignment of dates. But a red alert from the Bombay Customs quickly changed all that. Over a dozen Customs officials searched *Al Saras* and discovered hidden cavities in the rear portion and an 'L' shaped beam in the cargo hold containing 11,610 tolas of gold, watches worth over Rs 30 lakh and other contraband. The total haul was worth over Rs 3 crore, one of the biggest seizures in over a decade.

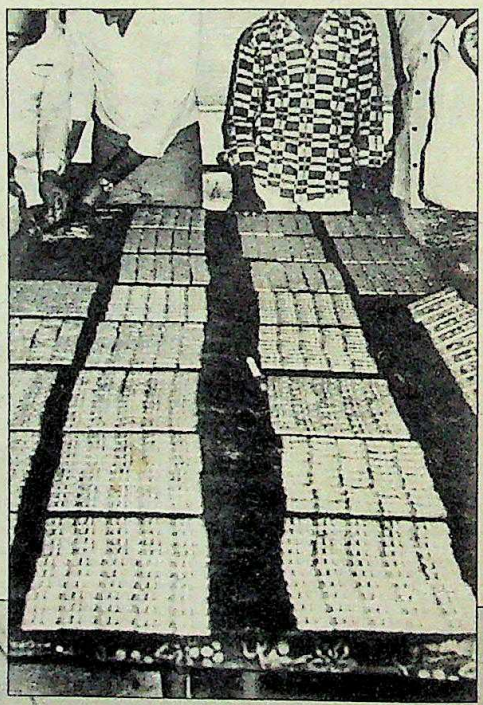
More excitement was in store a week later, this time in Bombay, when Customs divers went 35 feet down into muddy waters in the early morning hours (when the tide was receding). Forty-eight hours later, after roping in a dredger to help, the Customs men brought up two bags containing gold worth more than Rs 4 crore. The gold had been dumped into the sea earlier by the crew of a vessel that had sailed in from Dubai. The record haul included 12 gold bars of one kg each and 1,565 gold biscuits of 11.6 gm each, plus 1,000 Japanese wrist watches. Said P.K.Kapoor, collector of Customs (Preventive) in Bombay: "This is one of the biggest hauls in living memory. Our boys have done a wonderful job because not only did we get advance intelligence, we have also recovered the goods at great risk."

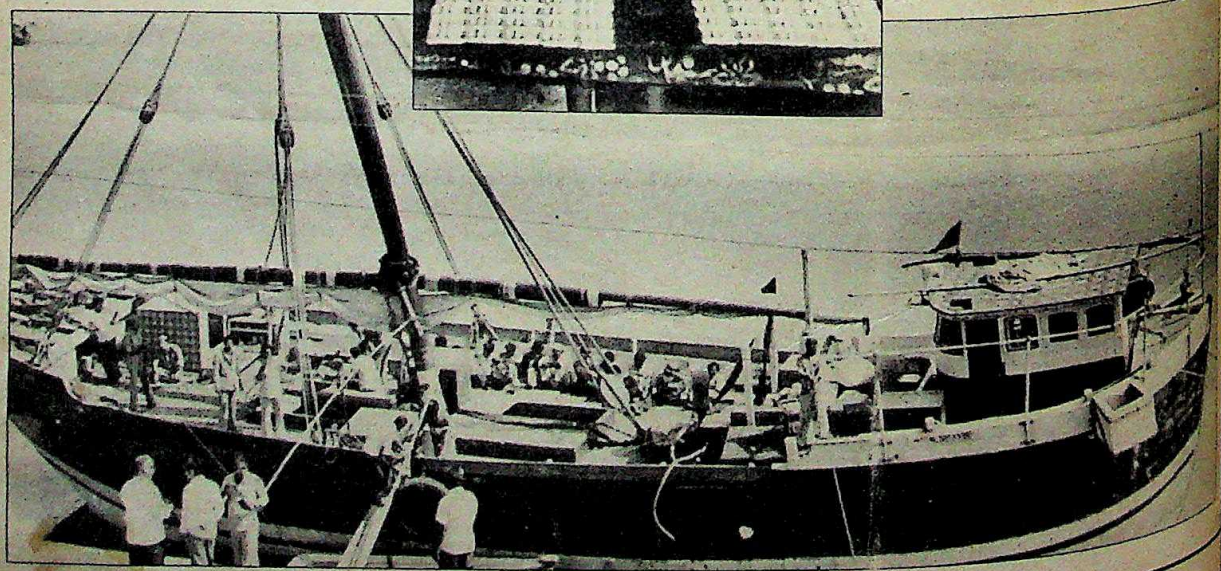
The jubilation should however be tempered by the sobering thought that such mammoth seizures indicate a renewed boom in gold smuggling. Gold has accounted for barely 10 per cent of total smuggling activity during the last decade, a business now estimated to be worth Rs 2,000 crore annually. But in the last two months, the share of gold in the smuggling business is estimated to have climbed quickly to 60 per cent. The simple fact is that gold smuggling has suddenly become far more lucrative.

Since 1980, the international price of gold has nosedived from over $ 800 per ounce to barely $ 300 now. At the informal rates of exchange prevailing in the Bombay *hawala* market, this works out to Rs 1,638 for 10 gm. Meanwhile, in the domestic market, the price of gold has increased in the last five months from around Rs 1,800 per 10 gm to over Rs 2,100. Almost overnight, therefore, the profit margins on bringing gold into the country have multiplied. Throughout 1983, the difference between the domestic and international gold prices was about Rs 160. This has now increased to more than Rs 400. More profits, more smuggling: that is the sobering truth behind the sudden spurt in large seizures.

The recent spurt in gold smuggling is primarily related to the widening gap between the supply and demand for gold. And coupled with a whopping profit due to the rise in domestic prices, gold smuggling has become a most lucrative business. According to the Bombay Bullion Association (BBA) over 10,000 licensed gold dealers and 2.50 lakh certified goldsmiths in the country handle over 100 tonnes of gold worth over Rs 2,000 crore annually. Only 50 per cent of this gold is procured through domestic sources by way of melting old gold ornaments for recycling into new ornaments. The Government-owned gold mines supply only 2.5 tonnes, that too for only industrial use. In the absence of any official supply, the gold industry

Contraband gold biscuits and seized smugglers' dhow *Al Saras*





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meets its demand through unauthorised channels to keep its business going.

Dubai has always been the main springboard for smuggling gold into India, and the figures of Dubai's gold imports buttress the conclusion that smuggling into India has witnessed a quantum jump. During 1983, Dubai officially imported 45,737 kg of gold. Last year, however, this rose to over one lakh kg. And intelligence estimates say that during the last two months alone over 18,000 kg of gold has reached Madras.

The trend in gold seizures is in line with this trend. Through all of 1983, the Customs seized no more than 230 kg of gold, valued at Rs 4.18 crore. In 1984, this more than doubled to 515 kg, valued at Rs 10.09 crore. But in February alone, the gold seizures were valued at a staggering Rs 11.56 crore.

This alarming trend has been accompanied by a complementary development that has serious implications in terms of rapid outgo of foreign exchange. For traditionally, gold smuggled into India has been paid for by the smuggling of silver out of the country. This has not been possible for more than a year because the international silver price has been depressed, making the smuggling out of silver unattractive. The Government estimates that silver smuggling became unattractive after September 1983. Thus, in the first nine months of 1983, silver seizures totalled a staggering 31,300 kg. This dropped sharply to no more than 853 kg during the last quarter of the year. And in all of 1984, no more than 697 kg of smuggled silver was seized.

But with gold smuggling growing rapidly, something had to replace silver as the mode of payment. And the substitute so far has been hard currency—US dollars—and the dreaded heroin, adding a dangerous edge to the business.

Last December and January, Finance Ministry officials were shaken by a sudden and almost unprecedented drop in the country's foreign exchange reserves. Reserve Bank figures show that the reserves dropped sharply by almost 10 per cent in just six weeks, from Rs 5,331 crore to Rs 4,830 crore, a drop for which there was no immediate explanation possible—other than the illegal use of dollars to pay for gold imports. Certainly, the unofficial dollar exchange rate on Bombay's *hawala* market reflected an increase in the demand for dollars.

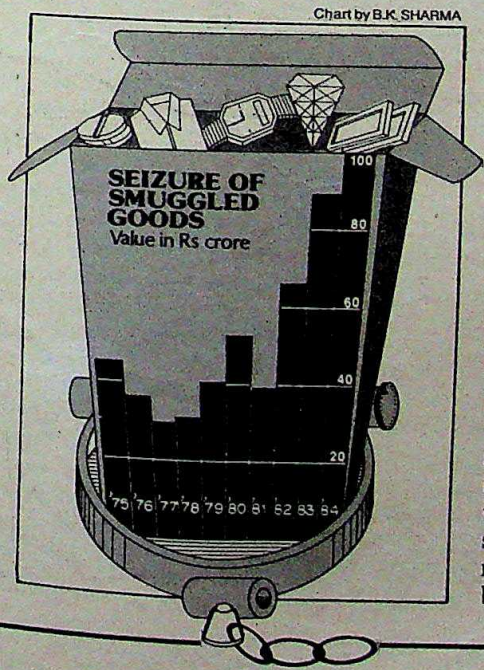
Thus, the *hawala* rate for the US currency in September 1983 (when silver smuggling became unattractive) was higher than the official exchange rate by just 17.24 per cent. This rose quickly to 26.50 per cent by December 1983, and then climbed still further to 31.81 per cent last December and then a record 42 per cent in February. Between September 1983 and February 1985, the official rate for the dollar has increased by only Rs 2.61, but the *hawala* rate has jumped by Rs 5.60. Clearly, a lot of dollars are being sent out of the country as payment for the increased quantities of gold coming in.

The rapid growth of narcotics smuggling has been a parallel and equally worrying development. Since December 1984, the authorities have seized drugs worth Rs 5 crore from people who have strong links with smugglers based in both Dubai and Pakistan. On January 10, once again, BSF personnel seized 40 kg of light quality heroin worth Rs 2 crore from two people coming in from Pakistan.

Alarmed by these trends, the Government has now decided on firm action. Finance Minister V.P. Singh told a meeting of senior Customs officers last month that the campaign against smugglers must be stepped up. Said Singh: "I am on probation for six months in the Finance Ministry. My performance is under close scrutiny by the prime minister. If I lose my job after six months, I will not go alone, many others will also go with me."

That warning was well heeded. In the next six weeks, Customs officials recovered contraband worth Rs 21 crore, over a dozen international flights were subjected to 100 per cent Customs check and each vessel entering Indian ports was watched. Over 25 per cent of them were thoroughly searched. Said Manmohan Lal Wadhawan, director-general of revenue intelligence: "I am completely conscious of the fact that there has been a sharp increase in the smuggling activity, and the number of seizures indicates this. But we have geared ourselves to combat this evil."

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



The Government's anti-smuggling drive is now multi-pronged. During the last two months, the Finance Ministry arrested 48 people under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act (COFEPOSA). Then, in a major announcement, the finance minister increased the rewards available to officials for seizing contraband. Against the earlier limit of Rs 2,500, which applied even if the seizure was over Rs 1 crore, the new list raises the reward limit from 10 per cent to 20 per cent without any monetary ceiling. Reacting to complaints that the rewards frequently do not reach the officers because of cumbersome procedures, V.P. Singh further ordered that half the reward money should be disbursed on the spot. Also, between 1 and 5 per cent of the value of the goods seized would be used to create an employees' welfare fund and another fund for augmenting the anti-smuggling infrastructure. Said Singh: "Why shouldn't the staff believe that their efforts and risks will not be ignored?"

In a third major step, the Government announced a new policy package aimed at making smuggling non-remunerative. Going along with the premise that smuggling would cease to flourish if it became financially unattractive, the Government reduced the duties on domestically manufactured watches. Further measures are on the anvil, including the liberal import of electronic goods, the import of gold through banking channels and the reduction of Customs duties on a variety of imported goods. Said a senior official in the Finance Ministry: "Smuggling is a form of economic warfare, and it has to be fought on that basis."

Meanwhile, Customs officials have taken note of changes in the pattern of smuggling: changes in the goods smuggled and changes in the kind of people involved in the business. One new trend is the involvement of a new category of people, urbane and educated men and women, some of them functioning as tour operators and clearing agents who have started using tourists as carriers. Wadhawan goes as far as to say: "Gone are the days when people with proven criminal records were the only people involved in smuggling. Hoteliers, industrialists and even philanthropists are now suspected of indulging in smuggling because of their extensive knowledge of

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international finance." Interestingly, even schoolchildren are being used for smuggling in electronic goods. A Delhi Customs official last year nabbed a woman who was using a group of schoolchildren for bringing in items like video cassette recorders, electronic watches and synthetic textiles from Thailand. The modus operandi in this and other cases is for air tickets and other arrangements to be made, and the carriers would be given 'gift packs' to be delivered to contacts in India. Customs officials say that there are no dossiers on the past activities of many

Bags of watches in *Al-Saras*' planks

UNDERWORLD TRADERS

The New Godfathers

IN THE world of smuggling the old order continually changeth, yielding place to new. Over the years, the nature of the contraband has diversified the people who carry them into the country, sneaking across a customs barrier through bribery or guile. The smugglers' dens, which admitted only the hardened criminals of a particular community from the back alleys of Bombay, are now wide open for urban people of large variety, many of them city-bred youngsters with an impeccable social background. The wares of their trade have also undergone a change: it is no longer the gold bars and ingots alone. The new commodities in the Rs 2,000-crore smuggling industry include a mind-blowing variety of quartz watches and calculators, snake skin, high-value textiles—not to speak of narcotics, heroin and cocaine.

The modes of transportation too have changed with the times. Arab dhows are now fitted with advanced radio equipment that crackle on hidden frequencies and enable the boat's occupants to dodge their pursuers. Commercial flights too have been opened up for big-time smuggling.

Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA sifted through the dossiers of the 100-odd new 'godfathers' compiled by the intelligence agencies and put together this profile of some:

Taher Tayab Mohey Aldeen, alias Taher Tayab Sony: In July 1983, when Tayab, a resident of Bandra in Bombay, acquired a ship, MV Maguli, little did he know that the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) had been closely watching his movements. The ship was intercepted on the high seas and 442 packages of watches, electronic goods and textiles, all contraband and valued at Rs 1.05 crore in India, were recovered. Tayab has since been detained under COFEPOSA (Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act), though his brother, Taher, who lives in Dubai and allegedly helps Tayab, has so far escaped the long arm of law. The DRI claims to have ripped through the Tayab gang which is rudderless without the leader.

Rajan Bakshi: Bakshi is the prime example of the recent entry of the upper middle class into this lucrative trade. A graduate from Delhi's prestigious St Stephen's College, and an LL.B. from Delhi University, Bakshi according to the DRI, drifted into the colourful world of dope-runners after allegedly being involved in an espionage case. He is still being tried in the court of an additional sessions judge in Delhi on the charge of having passed on classified information to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

He was apprehended after DRI sleuths surprised him one night last November when they stormed into the room booked under his name at Hotel Searock in Bandra where a man and a woman, both allegedly appointed by Bakshi, were waiting with a cargo of nearly 6 kg of heroin to be carted off to Italy. The heroin, valued at nearly Rs 6 lakh in India, would have fetched Rs 1 crore in the international market. Bakshi was arrested on January 20.

K. Srinivasan, alias Chettiar, alias Venkatesh: Srinivasan, operating from his home town Madras, is the underworld king of an unusual item, snake skin. Customs officials at Madras airport last July detained an export consignment and discovered 30,925 pieces of snake skin valued at a little over Rs 6 lakh in India. Srinivasan was detained four months later, but the documents seized from his office indicated that several snake skins had already been despatched to Singapore and Europe. It also came to light that he had been operating from behind a facade of export firms in fictitious names. His detention under COFEPOSA has been confirmed by the Central Advisory Board.

Govind Kara Toranta, alias Govind T.T: Operating along the Saurashtra coast in Gujarat, Govind's prosperous career as a landing agent for importing wrist watches, fabrics and electronics items suffered a jolt in October '83 when three of his trucks, loaded with contraband valued at over Rs 27 lakh, were stopped and rummaged by the police. Customs men apprehended a second convoy, carrying contraband worth Rs 25 lakh, and then a third and a fourth, valued at Rs 18 lakh. Further investigations led to the information regarding Govind's fleet of boats that regularly ferried contraband between Gujarat and Bombay. Govind was ultimately detained in December '84.

Ravindra R. Vaghani, alias Bala Kala: A top-drawer smuggler with links in Hong Kong and Kathmandu, operates along the Indo-Nepal border. His alleged carriers were stopped at the Calcutta airport while going through the green channel after disembarking from a

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of these people, so that they will not normally be suspected of involvement in smuggling. Revenue intelligence sleuths have also discovered that exporters have been under-invoicing their export consignments and receiving the balance in cash abroad. This money is then used to pay for goods smuggled into the country.

But in the final analysis, no drive against smuggling can succeed unless the Customs officials are supplied modern equipment and more men. The total budget of the Customs Department is Rs 50 crore, and the department spends only 50 paise to recover Rs 100 worth of revenue for the Government. Admitted a senior Customs official in Bombay: "We are no match for the well organised gangs of the underworld, who have a faster and more modern communications network."

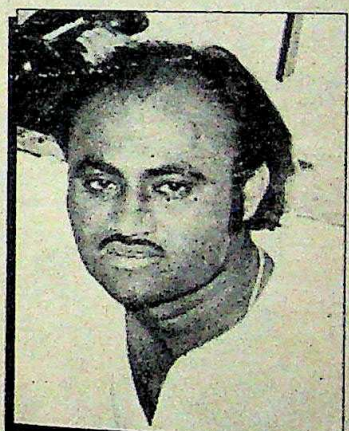
During the last few years a large number of noted smugglers have also succeeded in exploiting technical flaws in their detention orders to get releases. Others have been let off with minor punishment. Last month Geeta Purushottam Dass was given only three month's imprisonment for allegedly bringing over 1,000 tolas of gold from Dubai. While the Customs Act provides a minimum of one year's imprisonment for smuggling in gold worth over Rs 1 lakh, the court took a liberal view on the plea that it was her first offence. In another court, yet another noted smuggler secured his release from COFEPOSA detention because nine others with similar names appeared in the court and the customs authorities could not prove that they had detained the actual smuggler.

The Government, however, is now alive to these and other problems. And the new drive for reducing the attractiveness of smuggling, the offer of higher rewards for officials and the promise of better equipment may well make a dent in the largest organised illegal business in the country.

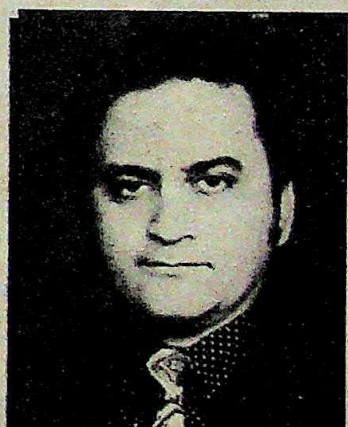
—PRABHU CHAWLA

Bangkok flight in June '84. Their bags contained watches and watch parts valued at nearly Rs 6 lakh, which were finally linked to Vaghani. He had reportedly been trying to develop an alternative route to India for bringing the smuggled goods in direct from Hong Kong instead of through Nepal. Intelligence agencies say he is in Nepal, evading arrest.

Devi Vallabh Tandel, alias Devji Boss: Devji's specialities are silver and currency. Silver, which costs less in India, is for the outward traffic, while foreign currency is meant to be brought in. An operator along the Daman coast in Gujarat, Devji's line was to cart off the contraband in small powerful crafts to mother vessels lying in anchor on the high seas. In October '83, his vessel, *Hariprasad* MS-2932, was intercepted by the Muscat police who seized 203 bags of silver and currency notes from the boat. Devji was finally apprehended last November.



Kadar Ahmed Wagher



Mohey Aldeen

Mohammed Sumar Haji Kasam, alias Sumar Bottle: Sumar is a Pakistani national—who shuttled with his contraband along the golden triangle between Karachi, Kutch and Bombay. An operator who long survived off the grey area between smuggling and the world of intelligence agencies (Sumar allegedly used identity cards issued to him by unnamed intelligence agencies to give the slip to Indian customs), he was involved in a seizure of 16 kg of heroin (Indian price in 1983: Rs 13 lakh) in Kutch by the Border Security Force (BSF). His detentions in 1982 and '83 were revoked on court orders, finally he was detained in August last year. Suspected to be involved in the smuggling of fake Indian currency, Sumar's stocks-in-trade are gold, heroin, watches and textiles, and an occasional cargo of silver.

Nazir H. Dingmar: A resident of Nani in Daman, Dingmar is reputed to be one of the most daredevil landing agents in the Daman area. He and the customs authorities first crossed paths when a vessel, *Naranprasad*, was searched by Gujarat Customs off Mahuva and 139 packages containing contraband fabrics, electronic goods and wrist watches were seized from it. A sizeable portion of it reportedly belonged to Dingmar. He was later found to be involved in a case of seizure of 15 kg of silver at Surat. He was detained in July.

Jivan Dhanji Patel: A diamond dealer whose diamond cutting and polishing factory at his residence in Surat was raided by the customs people in July 1983, had four packets containing 4894.32 carats of rough (uncut) diamonds valued at over Rs 20 lakh seized. He allegedly smuggled them into India, to be polished and sold in the country's largest value-adding industries. Patel was booked in July last year.

Sayed Mohammed Arif Bawamiya, alias Arfat, alias Puja, alias Harshdev: Bawamiya, essentially an exchange racketeer, or a *hawala* operator, has so far managed to escape detention. His exchange company, Syed Exchange and Hawala, still flaunts its name-board at Deira market in Dubai, UAE. He first figured on the list of men wanted by the Customs in March 1983 when an outgoing passenger was stopped at Bombay Sahar Airport and Indian currency worth Rs 20 lakh, along with some UAE dirham, found in his possession. The Indian currency was ostensibly intended to be handed over to Bawamiya in Dubai. His other activities included smuggling of snake skins, jewellery, diamonds, precious stones and, of course, gold.

Kadar Ahmed Wagher, alias Ibrahmi, alias, Mohamed Akhtar Hussain: Kadar, who was apprehended in Ahmedabad and was found to be in possession of foreign gold biscuits valued at Rs 1.40 crore and an American made weapon, has been convicted to seven years imprisonment for having smuggled 1,67,000 tolas of gold valued at Rs 30.89 crore and illegally exporting 1,435 silver bars valued at Rs 12.61 crore during December '81 and April '82.

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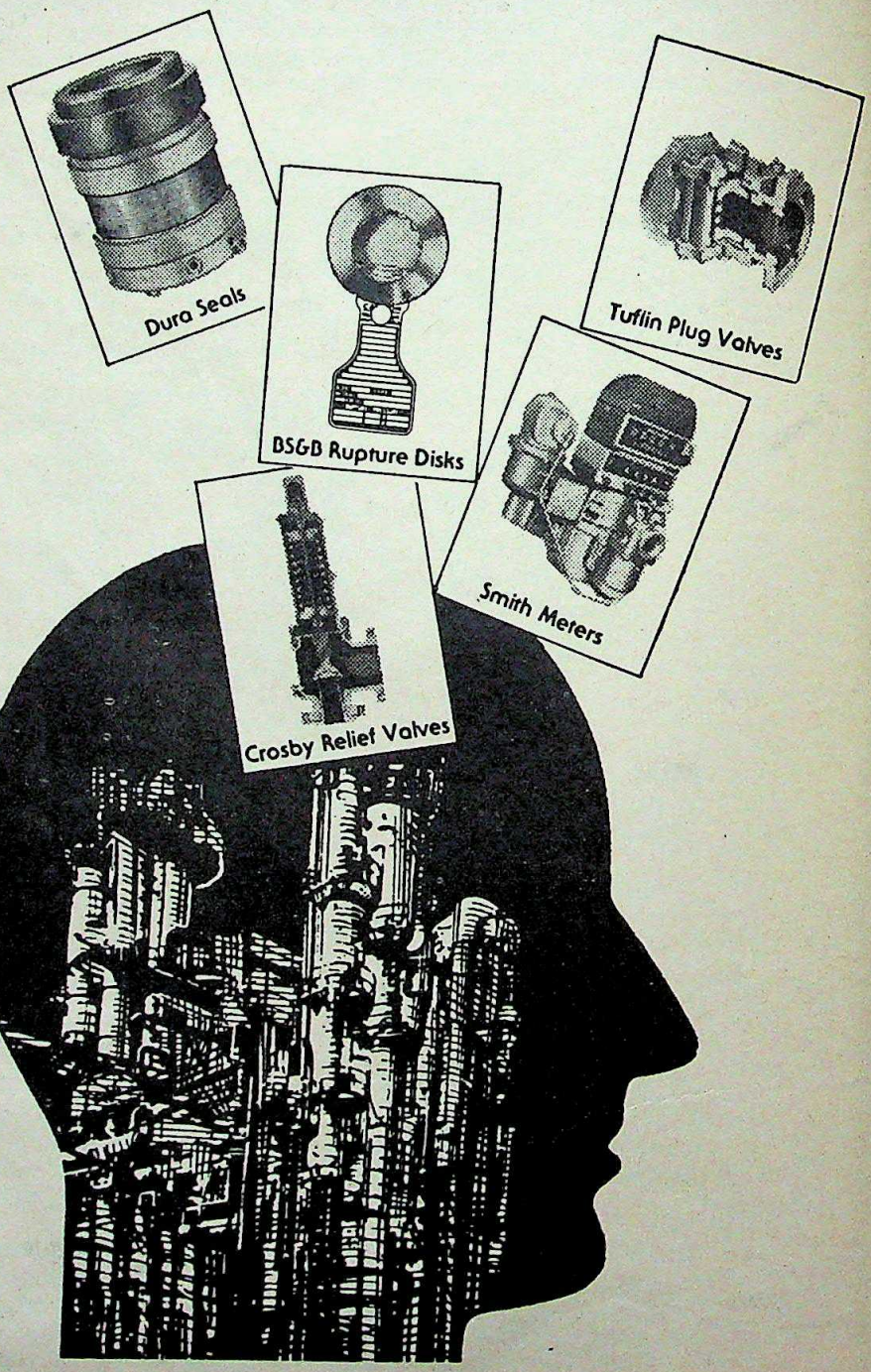

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REMEDIAL RESTRICTIONS

AFTER the ruckus concerning the nationalised banks and their loans to the Sethia owned Esal Commodities in London, the Government is considering a number of measures to prevent a recurrence of banking scandals. Earlier, the banks had rushed abroad because of large and relatively easy profits on international operations, but the possibility of equally large losses has now got the Government thinking afresh on the subject. One particularly hardline option that has been mooted concerns a proposal to severely restrict the international operations of Indian banks since large losses on loans could threaten the very stability of the banks. However, this will be resorted to only as a last option. Government officials are also looking at ways of ensuring that Indian banks do not go after high-risk business provided by ethnic businessmen. They are looking at the possibility of strengthening the banks' capital base as one way of improving their ability to attract high-quality custom. Yet another remedy that the Reserve Bank is already looking at is the question of tightening supervision and controls so that managers of branches abroad do not take questionable decisions without keeping their head offices fully informed. Whether these will have the desired results remains to be seen, but the Government at the moment is determined on a clean-up operation.

TOP TUSSLES

THE TUSSLE for the succession in DCM continues, with two board meetings in the last month failing to determine the precise roles that will be played by Bansi Dhar, who has been designated senior managing director, and Vinay Bharat Ram, designated managing director. The immediate point at issue is whether Vinay Bharat Ram will report to Bansi Dhar or directly to the board. Yet another board meeting is due to be held but if a settlement again proves elusive, the two present managing directors, Bharat Ram and Charat Ram, will probably continue beyond the end of their present tenures, which expire this month.

DELAYING DECISIONS

THE MUCH-AWAITED decision regarding a change in the Government's financial year may not finally come through. Veteran administrator L.K. Jha had been asked to look into the pros and cons of a change, of the financial year beginning from April to October or November, because the post-monsoon period can give a better indication of crops, downstream industrial activity and tax revenues. But government departments tend to spend most of their annual allocations towards the end of the year, and if the fiscal year ends in October the year-end spending will be made difficult by the monsoons, which reduce the pace of economic activity. Jha is trying to work out solutions to this problem.

CORNERING CONTRACTS

SNAMPROGETTI, the Italian fertiliser giant, has tied up yet another major deal in India. It has signed up a Rs 150-crore turnkey contract with Indo-Gulf Fertiliser, which is to set up a fertiliser project at Jagdishpur in Uttar Pradesh. However, there is competition for Snamprogetti in relation to Zuari Agro-Chemicals' fertiliser project at Sawai Madhopur in Rajasthan. Snamprogetti had agreed to contribute a part of the equity capital for the project. But Toyo Engineering Corporation of Japan is now understood to have made a comparable offer to Zuari, which is considering the offers.

CATCHING UP

RELIANCE Textile Industries has climbed still higher in corporate rankings, and is now poised to overtake the long-standing corporate leaders—Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) and Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO)—on at least some counts. In 1983-84, according to *The Economic Times*, Reliance stood third (behind the two Tata giants) in terms of total capital employed, net sales and gross profits. Its gross profits, at Rs 61 crore, were only marginally lower than TELCO's Rs 62 crore and TISCO's Rs 64 crore. And its profit after tax is higher than both the corporate leaders' but second to the Associated Cement Companies, which earned Rs 39.36 crore against Reliance's Rs 39.14 crore.

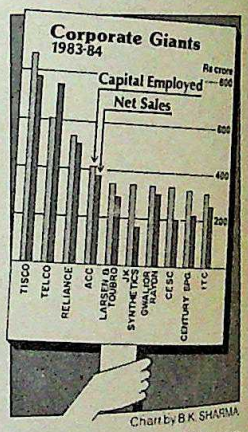

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

DRUG DEBATE

THE ORGANISATION of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) is making a determined pitch with the Government for a more liberal policy on pharmaceuticals production and pricing. OPPI mainly represents the foreign-managed drug companies, which would like the Government to avoid any discrimination between them and the wholly Indian-owned companies. The rival drug lobby, representing the wholly Indian-owned companies, has also become active. The Indian Drugs Manufacturers Association (IDMA) is arguing that it is harmful to treat foreign drug companies who have diluted their foreign shareholding to 40 per cent as Indian companies. This new round of lobbying means an end to the modicum of unanimity that had been reached between the different lobbies through the meetings of the development council for the industry. The effect will be a delay in framing a new drug policy.

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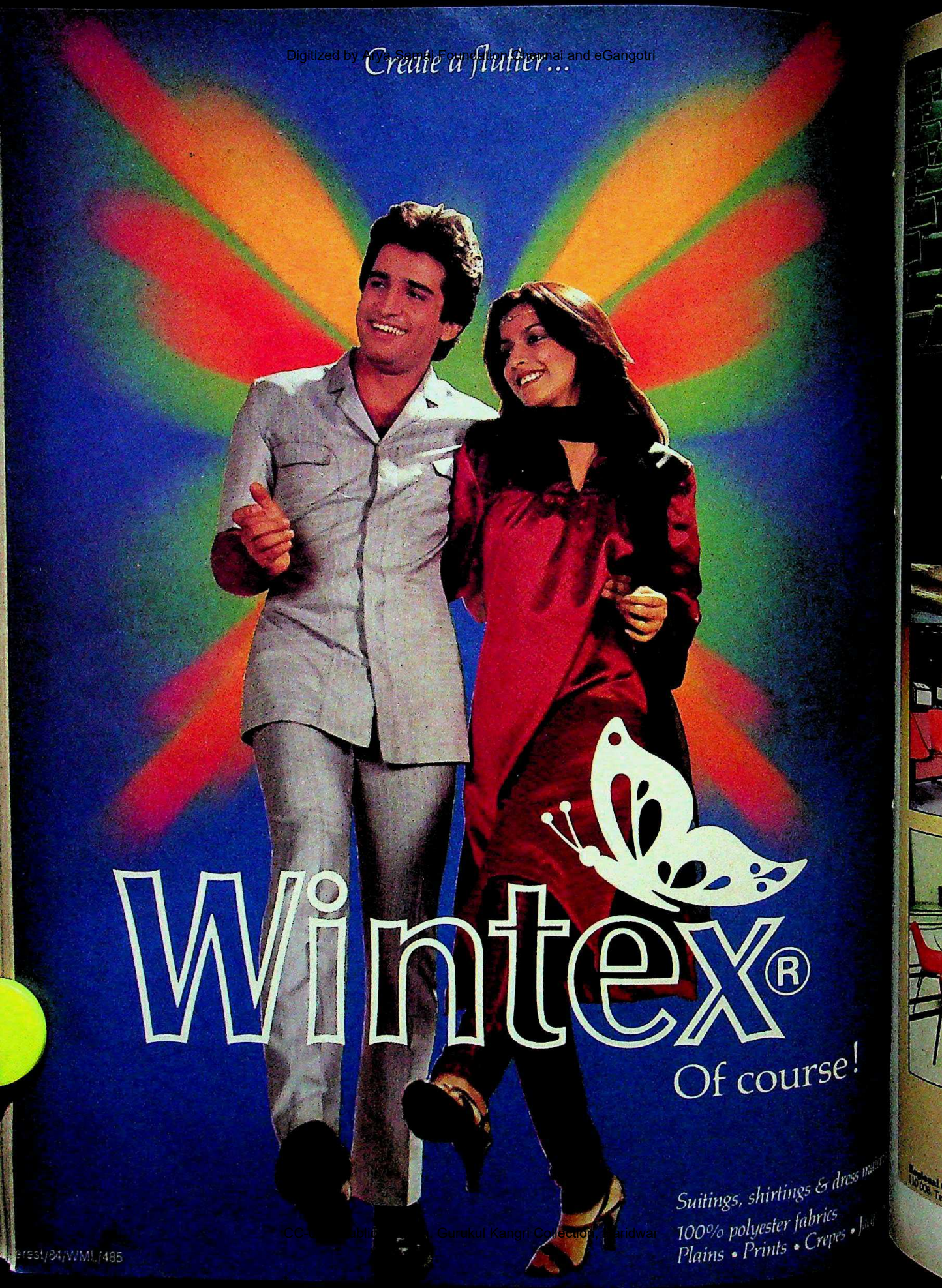

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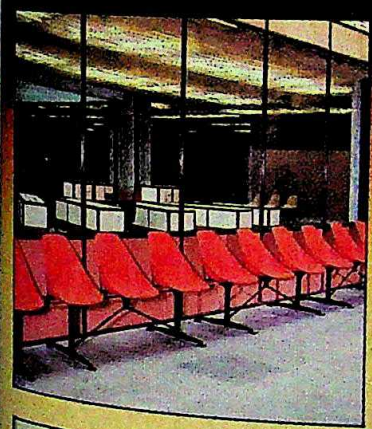

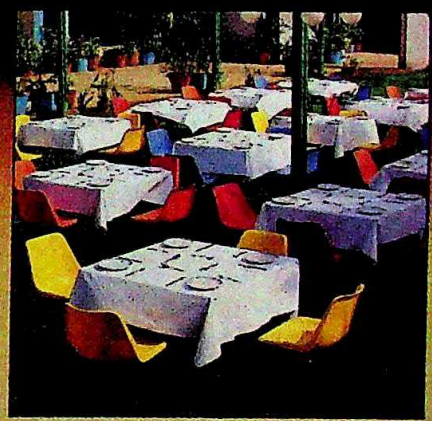

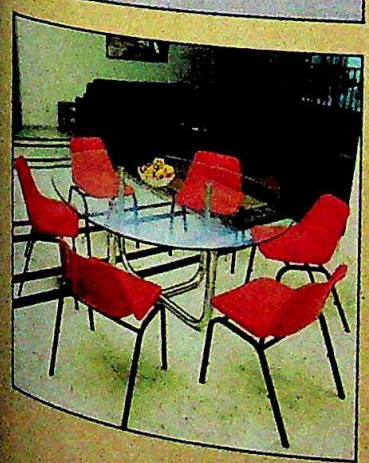

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INDUSTRIAL CONTROLS

The 'Liberty' Movement

THE LATEST vogue word is 'liberalisation'. Industrialists and businessmen are sold on it, and so are sharebrokers, which explains why the stock-market is edging upwards as budget day approaches instead of marking time as it usually does at this time of the year. The prime minister's quotable phrase: "We should do away with controls but not lose control of the economy" is on everyone's lips, though it is not quite clear how you can do away with controls and yet keep tabs on what is going on. Anyway, it is easy to say 'liberalise' but liberalise what? And where does it take us?

It should be admitted right away that controls did not materialise overnight nor did they creep on us by stealth. They are part and parcel of our model of growth or modernisation, if you wish to use another vogue word, and will not go away unless we do away with the model that we adopted three decades ago. The three constituents of this growth model are regulated economic development on the basis of certain national priorities; self-reliance; and direct participation of the state in all economic activity including industry. And all our current problems flow from this model.

Regulated development brought in its wake all kinds of controls but it also helped India become one of the leading industrial nations in the world. It made the country self-reliant, but only up to a point. We are self-reliant in almost everything except modern technology which we still have to borrow or buy from time to time. We had to pay a price for all this, however. The economy has got itself entangled in a vicious circle of low growth rates, low consumption and low employment and has to be helped out or 'liberated' from this messy tangle.

There are two ways of tackling this problem. You can go the whole hog and open up the economy to foreign competition and to modern sophisticated technologies. You can also do away with industrial licensing and MRTP and knock down the barriers that prevent the entry of newcomers into profitable industries. As regards the public sector, chunks of it can be 'privatised' as Margaret Thatcher is doing in Britain and controls on prices removed. The state can be barred from entering new areas of economic activity and its presence in old areas reduced substantially. The industrial sector can thus be entirely restructured and modernised so that it can face the challenges of the future.

But no one seems to have worked out the cost of this kind of restructuring in human and other terms. No matter how it is carried out, modernisation is ultimately related to productivity and technology, or rather higher productivity through technology, and the net result is almost always a slowdown if not a sharp reduction in employment generation in the short term. The closing down of old industries—and of companies engaged in such industries—will throw out labour in large volumes. It is true that new industries will open up new avenues for employment, but there is always a timelag in such things and secondly, the new opportunities will not be for the same type of labour. A loader in a textile mill or a tin can factory cannot be absorbed in a computer processing bureau as you don't need loaders there, not in such large numbers anyway. That is why despite the fact that there is something of a mini-boom in industry in and around Bombay, the millhands thrown out by the two-year-old textile strike are still jobless and cannot be absorbed anywhere at the old wages. You have this problem in every country going through the process of modernisation but other countries have ways of dealing with it. They have doles and other social benefits to take care of the shock. In India, we have nothing.

> **There is no need in the new set-up for a public sector and a private sector, for MRTP and FERA companies, for large houses and small.**

Actually, liberalisation should mean much more than just doing away with industrial licensing or import controls. We should take a fresh look at the entire industrial framework as it has developed over the years and replace it with a new one. There were certain social and political reasons why we went in for a powerful public sector, why controls were necessary and why a closed economy was considered essential for laying the foundations of industrial power without too much disturbance from the rest of the world. These reasons are not valid any more and we have to deal with an entirely new set of circumstances. There is no need in the new set-up for a public sector and a private sector, for MRTP and FERA companies, for large houses and small. The best course is to have three groups of industries, namely:

- Industries producing basic goods and services like steel, aluminium, cement, power, etc. These should be produced at the lowest possible cost using the best and the latest technology available. The criterion should be cost, not employment or anything else. This group of industries will maximise capital, a resource in short supply.
- Industries producing consumer goods like paper, TV sets, bicycles, etc. They should be geared to maximum output, and since they will be operating in an open market, they will have to produce quality goods for survival.
- The remaining industries, where the stress will be on employment. These are what are known as small-scale industries, but they need not be. They will differ from the second lot in the technology they use and it may be necessary to assist them with a proper package of fiscal and monetary incentives. This particular sector will be the only one to be regulated, but regulation will be fiscal and monetary, not physical.

There should be no bar on anyone entering any group, and no reservations of any kind, for ultimately it will be the market, not the babus sitting in Udyog Bhavan, who will decide whether a particular industry thrives or not. If Tatas can double the production capacity of their Jamshedpur steel plant from 2 million tonnes to 4 million tonnes, they can go ahead with it, and will not have to sit at the feet of steel ministers and secretaries for the dhobi mark. They will sell steel in competition with the Steel Authority of India (SAIL) and if SAIL cannot stand the pace, it will just go under and will not be bailed out by the taxpayer. This will be a real liberty movement with a capital 'L' and everything else will fall in line once the Government decides that it has the necessary political will to push it through. Does it?

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FAST FOODS

Cashing in on the Boom

WHEN Ajay Singh Banga, an executive at a multinational company in Delhi, steps out of his office for a quick lunch, he often heads for one of the many quick service food outlets that have sprouted in the capital. Abha Dayal, a travel agency executive, also makes a bee-line for a fast food parlour. Explains Dayal: "Food is served quickly, an important consideration when lunch time is limited."

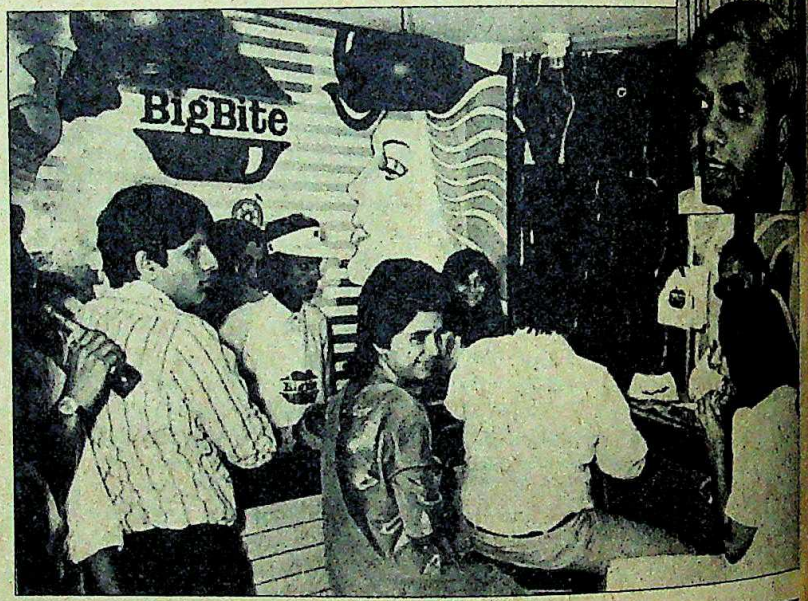
What unites the two executives with thousands of men and women across the country is a desire for clean food, served and eaten quickly—a phenomenon that is exciting big business like never before. Bent on seizing the main chance in a greenfield area, an impressive roster of firms is launching fast-service food outlets or expanding existing small networks in urban India. The list ranges from those new to the business such as Parle and the Senator Group of Makers Development Services, the construction people, and fledglings in the industry like McDowell & Co, Anil Nanda's An Enterprise and Wimpy Fast Foods, to fast-service food pioneer Nirula's.

All have metropolitan and national chains on their drawing-boards. By this month, Parle will have franchised 30 outlets under the Big Bite label to sell for Rs 4 and Rs 6 U-shaped "pitta" breads filled with chicken or vegetables. Soft drink tycoon Ramesh Chauhan says: "I'm shooting for 300 outlets in Bombay." He plans to franchise 12 more in nearby Pune by April or May. The Senator Group will spend between Rs 2 crore and Rs 3 crore on setting up five fast food parlours, three in Bombay and two in Delhi. Three of the five will be franchised out. Company officials are cagey about the menu but allow that Indian and western food priced at Rs 13 is on the agenda, though in separate outlets.

Those with a foothold in the industry are going national. Nanda runs nine outlets in the capital that sport the Hott-Potatos name. Nine more will open in April for Bangalore residents who will fork out Rs 5 to Rs 8 for hot potatoes with vegetable, meat and cheese stuffings, chow mein, hamburgers and pizzas. Other cities will sample Nanda's wares later.

Other companies also have ambitious plans. UK-based Avtar Singh Selhi's Wimpy Fast Foods will vend hamburgers for Rs 6 to Rs 22 at seven more Wimpy parlours in the capital, in addition to the one it already operates. Selhi has a target of 200 Wimpy outlets nation-wide, none of which will be franchised. Vijay Mallya's McDowell, which runs three Pizza King outlets in Delhi, will make a foray into Pune (one parlour) and Bombay (four) by May. McDowell is aiming at 10 new outlets by year-end and 100 nationwide in the long run. The company will also open in Delhi and Bombay four or five Pizza King Express outlets whose hallmark will be more rapid service than at the present pizza eating houses it runs. And industry pathbreaker Nirula's will "partially franchise" four more fast food houses in Delhi this year, before branching out to Bombay with two parlours.

So the fast food industry is plainly readying for take off. In fact the industry has been around for years. Nirula's opened a fast food outlet in 1972 when members of the family returning from abroad wanted to introduce it here since they saw a potential in it. Both Bombay and Delhi have had other outlets: Open House and



Chauhan and Big Bite (top) and Nanda with his Hott-Potatos: going national

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Rs 300 Rupees respectively. But the real fast food people are the traditional chatwallas and others. Organisation in this sense has come to the food business only now. But why now? The answer, from a chorus of voices, is that the time is ripe. A market research organisation executive points out that incomes are rising (nearly 31 per cent of urban India has incomes of over Rs 700). More women are working now, the pace of life has quickened and, as a corollary, more people are eating out in big cities. Finally, a mini westernised society is around the corner as a result of the new economic climate the Government is fostering.

For corporations, the sheer market size and profits are irresistible. A survey commissioned by Delhi's Wimpy showed a Rs 300-crore market waiting to be tapped, with a vacuum in between five-star hotels and roadside vendors. Not all accept such assessments of course. Argues Kisan Mehta, president of McDowell's foods and beverages division: "It is extremely difficult to pinpoint and quantify the market when you're working on a hunch that the time is right." But even those who question such figures are calculating that companies which get in on the ground floor will establish a lead time over competitors—and possibly sew up the entire market.

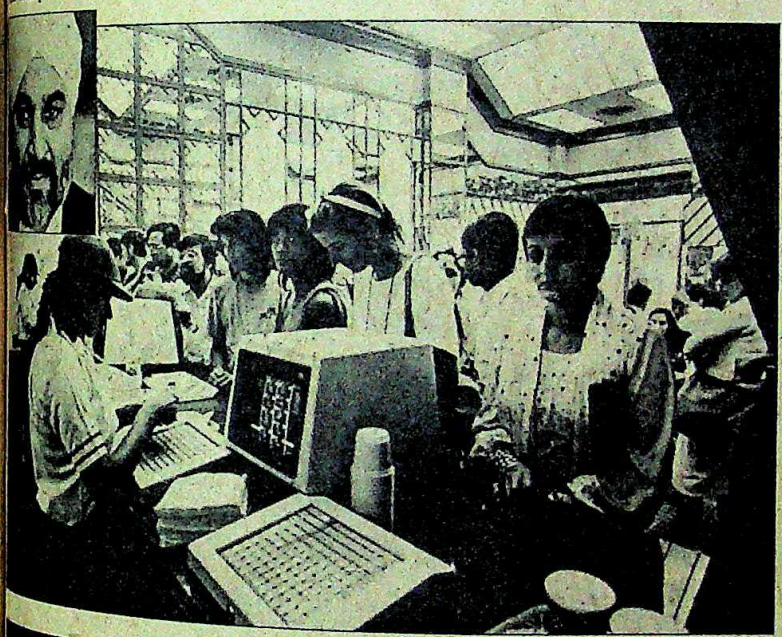
The money also is a lure if mass production techniques are married to the food business. Profit margins range from 12 to 25 per cent but, as Senator Group President Surendra Nath Gadhoke puts it, "The money lies in how quickly you can get people past the counter. The name of the game is volume." Not surprisingly, Senator has set itself a 3.5 minute per customer goal.

Market size and profits apart, fast food chains offer companies many promises. Multiproduct firms see advantages in putting their names up front on the street. A fast food chain hawks company names or brand names, not merely food, opening the door to selling other wares more easily. Making a big splash is also cheaper than venturing into an outlet or two: bulk buying for a number of food parlours cuts material costs sizeably, and overheads can be spread out more thinly.

Individual compulsions are propelling others into retailing foods. For Parle, the food business is a logical extension from soft drinks. About 12,000 outlets in Bombay sell the company's aerated drinks and small food counters can be tagged on to them with minimal bother. Anil Nanda confesses that he had always wanted to enter the food business, while Selhi cites as reasons for seeking a presence in India the privileges now on to tap non-resident Indians, the vacuum in the market here and the uncertain economic and political climate in the Middle East to which he used to export frozen foods.

And a move into fast foods need not be pricey for those looking to the low end of the market. Much of the equipment is available locally, sometimes for less than what a buyer would have to pay abroad, and investments in outlets are not chunky for downmarket firms that use limited space. Parle sunk Rs 40,000 in microwave ovens and decor in each of the first dozen Big Bites; future franchises may not be so lucky and may have to dip into their own pockets. Nanda started off with Rs 2 lakh of his personal funds (An Enterprise is not affiliated to Escorts or Goetze) and invested about Rs 30,000 in each Hott-Potatos outlet. The story is of course different for the industry's glamour boys, many of whom have sunk fat sums into prime locations. Industry men estimate that Wimpy invested Rs 40 lakh to Rs 50 lakh in its Connaught Place parlour in the capital.

The entry of so many into a fledgling industry is bound to have a number of singular consequences. First, it will give a push to a nascent ancillary foods industry. While some firms make their own



Selhi and Wimpy (top) and Mallya of Pizza King: ambitious plans

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sauces, mustard and even jams, they draw the line at cheeses and spices. Nirula's has encouraged farms to grow spices and others to produce Mozarella cheese, as has McDowell. And the packaging industry will be helped along by the surging demand for wax sheets to wrap hamburgers in and cardboard boxes to carry them home (35 per cent of Wimpy burgers sold are carried out).

Secondly, some in the industry say that the publicity widens awareness of fast food products and hence the market. Claims Lalit Nirula, managing director of Nirula's, "An odd thing happened. When Pizza King advertised pizzas, our pizza sales went up." Certainly, new entrants to the business are faring well. Wimpy sales peaked at Rs 50,000 plus one day not long after it opened its doors. The parlour rakes in around Rs 6,000 every hour. But the spurt in sales could be due to initial consumer interest in trying out new eating places.

Thirdly, the emerging competition is forcing companies to protect their flanks by rethinking product strategies. Trends are not yet clear, but some firms that specialised in products may widen their menu ranges. Last fortnight, Hott-Potatos launched hamburgers and may soon include pizza slices in its menu. And industry men talk of McDowell setting up burger parlours, though McDowell's Mehta declines to comment on the subject. For upscale firms with pricey products in particular are worried that the market may not have enough "depth". A fast food company executive observes: "There is room for one or two chains selling a particular item, but not for five or six." Widening the product range may bring in more customers, but the competition on the horizon is leading even those with lengthy menus to move in other directions: Nirula's has plans to introduce a limited package of items tailored to the tastes of the community in which the outlet is sited.

Some of these moves could pose a dilemma to the industry. A wider product range makes it more difficult to enforce quality standards and standardise procedures, so important to a business that runs on mass production techniques. Referring to the industry in general, Lalit Nirula warns: "It's the toughest business going." He adds that fast food chains operate on the principle of quality, providing service, cleanliness and value for money.

The key to success in the industry lies in acquiring the right locations and in organisation, or what one industry executive calls "the systems approach". K.I.C. Food Product's American Pie in the capital is yet to take off almost three years after it opened because, as the company's joint Managing Director Sunil Lamba explains, flats surrounding the Asiad Village complex in which it is located are still not fully occupied. And the industry does offer complex logistics problems. Most chains have central food factories or kitchens to process enormous amounts of bread, meat, sauces and so on. (Nirula's uses up every month a breath-taking 15 tonnes of meat, 5 tonnes of cheese, 12 tonnes of cabbages, 10 tonnes of sugar, 15 tonnes of flour and 1.25 lakh eggs.) At its factory on the outskirts of Delhi, Nirula's bakes bread and portions meat to burger size after checking fat to meat ratio consistency and adding spices, chills the meat and sends them on to its outlets where the cooking is done. Wimpy freezes its meat and buns at its Okhla factory.

But conveyor belt systems are tailored to high volume business and the industry's Cassandras suspect that the volumes may not be large enough to sustain hordes of fast food chains. The industry plainly cannot compete with roadside vendors who sell food for Rs 2 to Rs 4. Thus the Senator Group is steering clear of south Indian food. Admits Edmund D'Souza, the firm's general manager for marketing, "We can't take on the Udipi restaurants." And because companies cannot handle the wayside competition they have taken the path of least resistance: westernised food. Deepankar Barat, marketing manager of Milkfood Ltd, which runs a fast food outlet in Amritsar, questions the trend. Says Barat: "Just because a certain concept is popular in a certain part of the world, why borrow both the concept and the cuisine?"

Meanwhile, industry outsiders point to the dangers inherent in eating "junk food". Warns C. Gopalan, president of the Nutritional Foundation of India and a former director-general of the Indian Council for Medical Research: "There is a nutritional danger if people stick to a limited number of foods, but the bigger danger is the temptation to recycle leftovers if sales slump on some days." That could happen at franchised outlets, but industry officials protest that outlets are fed daily in step with the previous day's sales. Any leftovers are destroyed, and audit teams swoop on franchised parlours to conduct surprise checks.

But a far bigger hazard to the industry itself is the possibility of overcrowding. Worried by the looming competition, industry men inevitably predict the shakeout that thins out the players in most fast growing fledgling industries. Still, that may be a long way off. So long as the cash registers ring up sales, companies will continue to enter the business. And Banga, Dayal and countless others like them will have a wider array of eating options at lunch time.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

HARI OM GULATI

Fast food pioneer Lalit Nirula (inset)

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HBJ PIPELINE

Building up Pressure

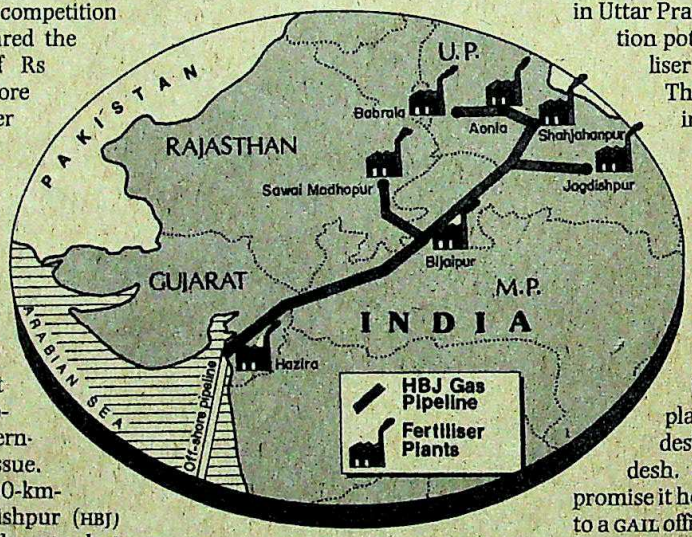
IT MAY wind up being the deal of the year. The run up to it has the excitement of a thriller. The big boys of the business have been snooping around, keeping tabs on government meetings (a public sector official gets a phone call at home at 9.00 p.m., barely two hours after an official meeting, asking him "not to take a rigid stand") and lobbying in the corridors of power for a piece of the hottest action in town.

The stakes are high—a Rs 1,100-crore pipeline contract, the largest now going in the world. That amount is not small beer for companies vying for business in a depressed global pipeline and construction market. The competition and price cutting have pared the original cost estimate of Rs 1,700 crore by Rs 600 crore—possibly the only silver lining to a sorry tale. The qualifications to bid for the job have been eased, companies that were knocked out have been brought back into the race, and a bitter debate rages over whether the work should be assigned "piecemeal" to different companies or to a single block of bidders, with the Government itself divided on the issue.

The race for the 1,730-km-long Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) pipeline contract is still wide open, but the crowd in the running has been essentially thinned to four. Leading the pack are India's Dodsal Pvt Ltd, Japan's Nippon Kokan (NKK), and a consortium of firms led by Japan's Toyo Engineering Company and France's Spie-Capag. But the dark horse coming up from behind is the state-owned multinational Snamprogetti SpA of Italy.

Snamprogetti has attracted much of the flak so far because its bid was handed in more than a month after the tender deadline passed by, and at least some officials in the Petroleum Ministry and the public sector companies concerned have preferred jettisoning the Italian firm's offer. Also, the company's bid is $50 million more expensive than the cheapest piecemeal offers, though the two offers are strictly not comparable (Snamprogetti has offered some additional services), and the Italian company is in any case willing to reduce its price-tag.

But there are also officials and ministers who prefer the Snamprogetti offer, partly because a turnkey contract makes sense when the Indian consultancy firm that will supervise the work has no previous experience with pipelines and may therefore not be able to do a proper monitoring job. Ottavio Quattrocchi, Snamprogetti's powerful, long-time representative in New Delhi, argues that the Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL), the public sector body set up last year to oversee the nation's gas resources, initially estimated the total pipeline cost at Rs 1,700 crore, whereas the figure should actually have been no more than Rs 1,100 crore. Says Quattrocchi: "This shows the lack of experience with pipelines."



When the contract was first mooted, a host of pipeline and construction industry stars lined up at the starting line. They included NKK, the Toyo-led combine, a consortium consisting of Canada's Nova and Alberta Corporation, Majestic Construction Ltd and India's Larsen & Toubro's (L&T) construction wing, Mexico's Condux, Singapore's Italmontagi, S. Korea's Halla Construction, India's Punj and Sons, Continental Construction and Dodsal, and the public sector Equipment and Projects India Ltd and Bridge and Roof. But many fell by the wayside because they were too expensive, failed to qualify technically, applied for very limited portions of the job or had not received official blessings for collaboration agreements in time.

The HBJ pipeline will snake across 15 rivers and four states and may eventually form the spine of a natural gas grid stretching to Orissa in the east and Andhra Pradesh in the south. The line will initially feed 18.2 million cubic metres of South Bassein natural gas every day to six fertiliser plants that are to sprout up along the route, besides two at Hazira on the coast of Gujarat. The country imports some Rs 1,400 crore worth of fertiliser annually and the gas will take it down the road to fertiliser self-sufficiency. Explains L.R. Talwar, managing director of Indo-Gulf Fertilisers & Chemicals Corporation, which is setting up a fertiliser plant at Jagdishpur in Uttar Pradesh: "The country's irrigation potential is going up and fertiliser consumption is on the rise. There may be problems in getting fertiliser from abroad, not enough naphtha is available to cater to the needs of the country, and gas as a feedstock requires fewer processing steps than naphtha."

The pipeline will also supply gas, much of which is now being flared, to two liquefied petroleum gas plants at Guna in Madhya Pradesh and Auriya in Uttar Pradesh. But the equally attractive promise it holds out is power. According to a GAIL official, the gas will run captive power generators at the fertiliser plants and the Karnal refinery, and drive three other 200 mw power plants in a region hungry for power. And the line will open out the economies of Madhya Padesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh to further industrialisation and create more jobs. Best of all, the Government could recover the investment in the pipeline in eight or 10 years. Says the New Delhi representative of a foreign pipeline laying firm, "The Government is looking at one hell of a gift horse."

But the immediate question is: when will it get going? The Government has deferred a decision on awarding the contract at least twice, overshot its January 1985 deadline for the work to begin and postponed the completion date by nine months to July 1989. Officials attribute the delay to Mrs Gandhi's assassination, a new government coming to power and

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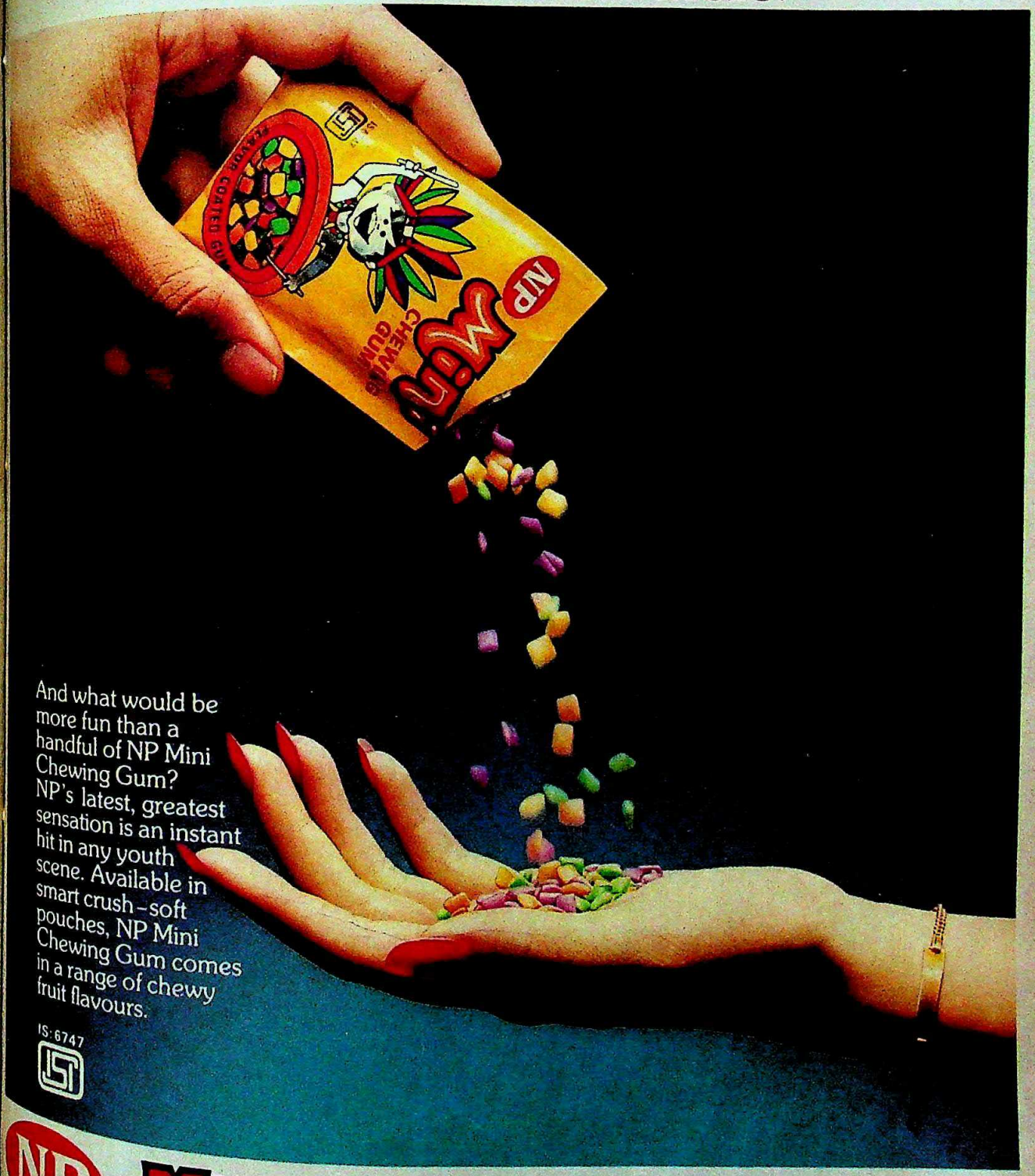
Often, fun is measured in handfuls.



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LIFE EXTENSION

HOW TO DECELERATE THE AGING PROCESS.

By Dr. Padam Singhvi
Leading Surgeon and Advisor,
Body & Beauty Care Magazine, Bombay

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

"Medically speaking, no one dies of old age. The body will continue repairing and adjusting itself, unless and until there is some major failure or defect in one of its life-supporting mechanisms. And it is this major breakdown (a heart attack for example) that results in the cessation of life — what we call, death.

Today, life expectancy is on the increase. A normal healthy male can hope to live till he is 70. But surely, everyone wants to live longer. And that brings us to the subject of this article — how to reverse or slow down the biological clock. Let us first take a quick look at the aging process.

AT 30 PLUS:

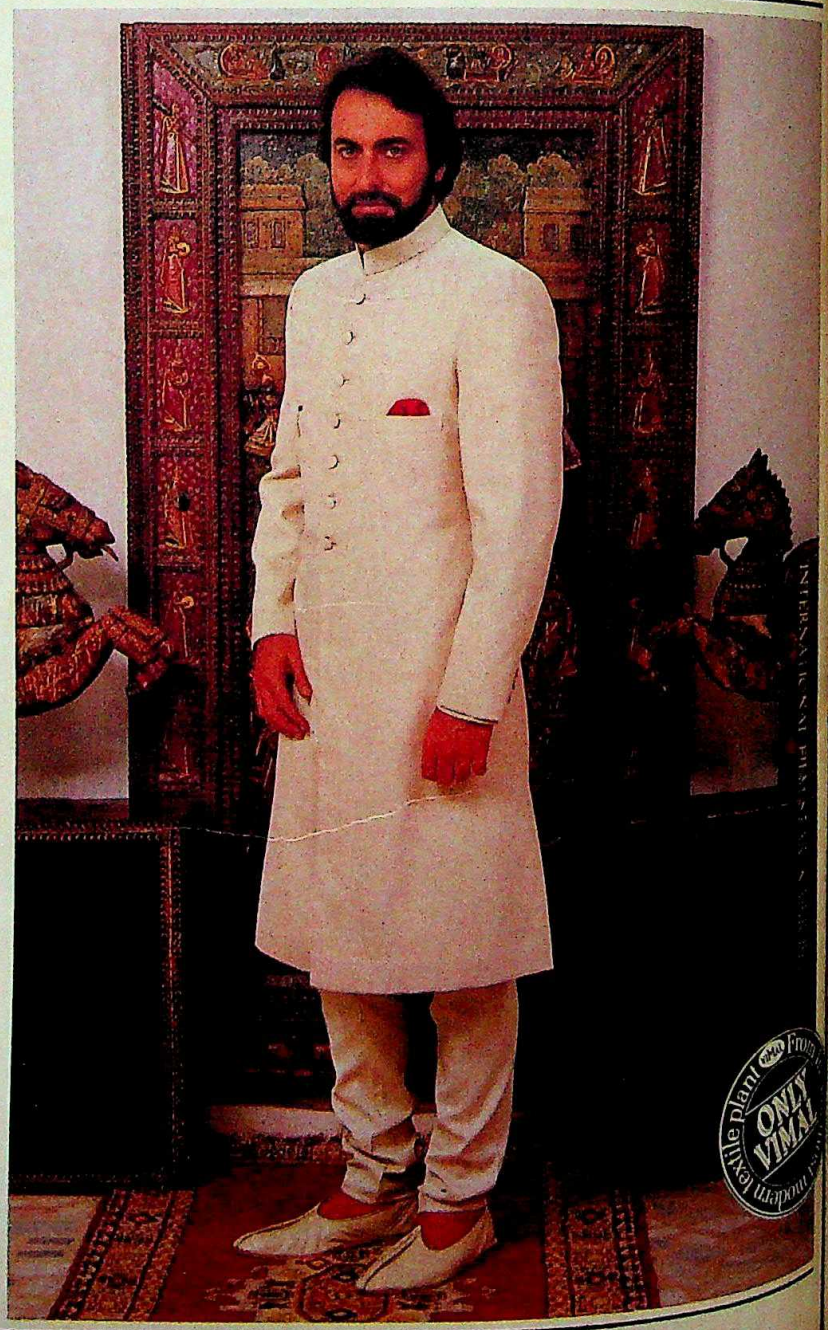
Your system starts becoming inefficient by about 1% every year. Hearing and vision problems slowly appear. The skin becomes drier and the first wrinkles make their debut. Hair starts greying and teeth decaying.

AT 40 PLUS:

The body becomes less resistant to fight tumour cells. Bones become weaker. And you tend to sleep less.

AT 45 PLUS:

Digestion problems crop up. Arteries harden and you find it's harder to breathe. By the time you are 60, your body shrinks by an inch or so, and muscles lose their elasticity. Your eyesight diminishes and you find it takes longer to get ready for sex.



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HOW FAST YOU AGE DEPENDS ON YOU

Although a lot depends on your genetic heritage, how fast you age is also determined by your lifestyle. Tapping the fountain of youth consists in keeping things from going wrong in the first place. Remember, fitness does not mean absence of illness.

THE GOLDEN RULES

Worrying about growing old will only make you age faster. Instead, do what Grandma told you a long time ago. Let me refresh your memory.

1 EXERCISE

It's never too late to start exercising. Experiments have proved, regular exercise helps improve blood circulation (a physically fit person has more chances of surviving a heart attack) helps you handle stress, keeps your weight under control and tones up your system. And reduces your chances of attracting diabetes, ulcers, heart disease and other ailments.

2 STOP SMOKING — RIGHT NOW!

If you are smoking as you read this, stub out your cigarette — filter or no filter. Give up this life-threatening habit and see the difference: In just twelve hours, carbon monoxide in your blood will rapidly decline. In a couple of weeks you'll breathe more freely. In a few years, the risk of cancer of the lung, larynx and oral cavity will decrease. Plus, you'll be less prone to premature heart disease. Result: longer life.

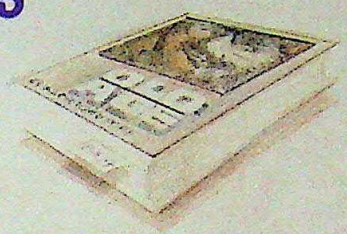
3 KEEP YOUR WEIGHT UNDER CONTROL

If you are more than 30% overweight, both your health and life are in danger. Ask any doctor or insurance agent and they will tell you, obese people live less longer. And are prime targets for diabetes and high blood pressure. Eat moderately but no crash diets. Reduce saturated fatty foods and increase vegetables, grains, fruits and cut down salted, cured, smoked and pickled foods. If you drink, exercise moderation. Because excessive alcohol (particularly combined with smoking) is associated with higher risks of lung and digestive tract cancer.

4 SLEEP WELL

The amount of sleep required, varies from person to person. But it's important that you feel refreshed and not sulky and restless when you wake up. Problem-sleepers should not pill-pop. Check with your doctor. Drink a glass of warm milk and let your mind relax. Sleeping at the same time every day helps.

5 LIVE ENERGETICALLY



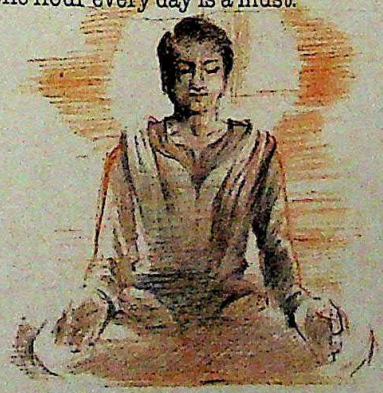
In his book "Old Age" published in 1904, Elias Metchnikoff presents a cheerful picture of old people he had studied in Russia and France. According to his accounts, most of them remained active to the very end. So, live each day to the full, forget your past errors and future uncertainties.

6 KEEP YOURSELF WELL-GROOMED

Particularly, take care of your skin. As you grow older, the sweat and oil glands decrease their activity and the skin stretches. Avoid alcohol based astringents and toners.

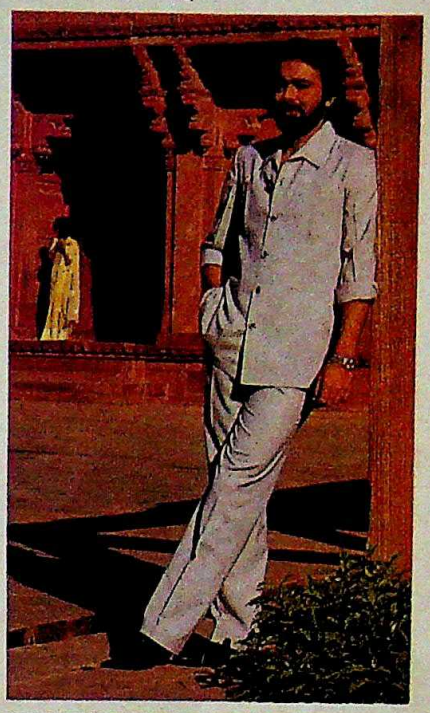
7 MEDITATE EVERY DAY

Research in America has indicated a significant connection between younger biological age and the length of time meditation has been practised. Those who had been meditating longer than five years, appeared 12 years younger than their chronological age. When you meditate, your mind stops running, allowing the body's natural self-repair mechanisms to work by themselves. Because the stress and strain of everyday life hasten the aging process, meditation for at least one hour every day is a must.



8 THINK YOUNG

To quote Dr. Joseph Murphy, author of "The power of your subconscious mind" — "You grow old when you lose interest in life, when you cease to dream, to hunger after new truths, and to search for new worlds to conquer. When your mind is open to new ideas, new interests, you will remain young, regardless of the chronological age."



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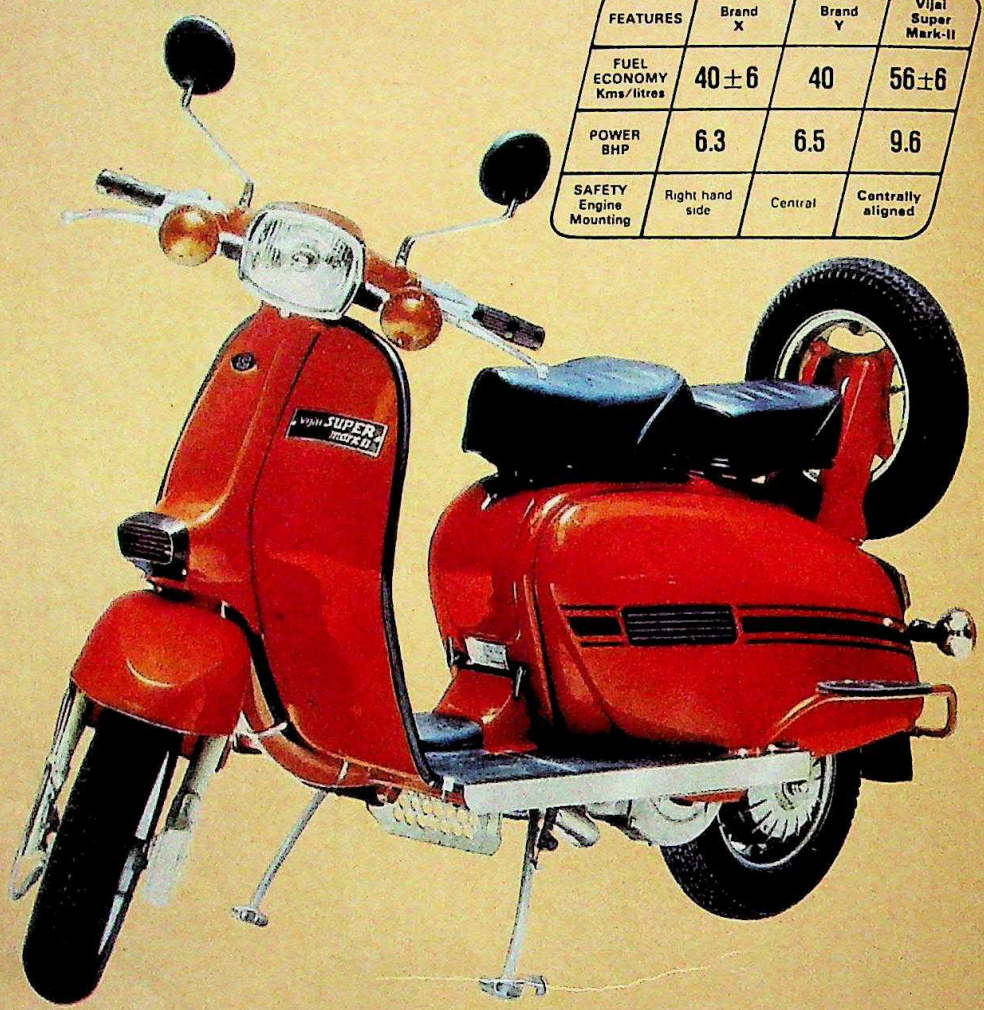
THE NEW

Vijai SUPER mark II

Scooters India Limited

There's no 150 cc scooter to match it for ECONOMY POWER SAFETY.

FEATURES	Brand X	Brand Y	Vijai Super Mark-II
FUEL ECONOMY Kms/litres	40±6	40	56±6
POWER BHP	6.3	6.5	9.6
SAFETY Engine Mounting	Right hand side	Central	Centrally aligned



Its here. New Vijai Super Mark-II. The latest model from Scooters India Limited — successors to Innocenti of Italy. Pioneers in scooter manufacture. Vijai Super. The winner of Grand Prix in India and abroad.

Super Economy: 56±6 kms per litre

A new variable venturi carburettor, improved cylinder design, increased compression ratio and modified gear ratio impart optimum fuel economy. SAVING FUEL.

Super Power: 9.6 BHP

Goes from 0 to 60 kms in 12.75 seconds flat. Negotiates gradients with ease. And keeps ahead of others.

Super Safety

Centrally mounted engine, low centre of gravity and wider wheel base make it safer even at high speeds, on curves with load.

Super Durability

Modified material composition of cylinder, chrome plated piston rings and the use of solid lubricant enhance engine life. That is why it carries a warranty of 15 months or 10,000 kms (whichever is earlier) — the longest on any two wheeler.

It undergoes over 1,000 quality checks before it leaves the factory.

Vijai Super Mark-II. Distributed and serviced countrywide through 225 outlets.

Exported to many technologically advanced countries including Italy — its birth place.

THE NEW

Vijai SUPER mark II

The best deal on wheels

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the elections. Finances for the project had to be sewn up, and the very scale of the project calls for measured decisions. These arguments certainly hold water, but behind-the-scenes manoeuvering and the debate over whether to go piecemeal or turnkey have also served to drag out the drama.

The pipeline has been dogged by controversy almost from the word go, from the companies eligible, to the bids, to the materials involved. After the Public Investment Board cleared it in February last year, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) invited contractors to bid for the job. The ONGC specified separate work schedules for three different sections of the main pipeline.

Three contracts are basically involved—for the pipes, fittings, and for laying and coating the pipeline. In addition, the public sector Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd has been tipped for the job of installing four "compressor stations" to help the gas move through the pipeline, as well as a "cathodic protection" system to prevent the pipes from corroding.

Tenders for the contract to lay the pipeline were opened in July—and that's when the tale began to take its twists and turns. Bids were first scrutinised for eligibility. To qualify for the pipeline contract, companies had to have laid at least 1,000 km of pipeline over a seven-year period, with some of it being across rivers, GAIL and Engineers India Ltd (EIL), the public sector consultant to the project, picked four companies for their experience—Condux, NKK, Bridge and Roof, and the Majestic-L&T consortium. But the Petroleum Ministry asked GAIL and EIL to review the bids of 13 of the 16 companies that had put in tenders. (The ousted three—a Russian firm, Punj and Sons, and Continental Construction—were knocked out because they bid for small portions of the total work, which was found unacceptable.) This move specifically helped bring the Korean company, Halla Construction, back in the running after it had been rejected because it sought a longer completion time than the ONGC's 18 months. Following the review, GAIL and EIL went on to recommend Halla for the second section of the line from Bijaypur to Auriya, but it was dropped when its record did not stand up to scrutiny. Eventually, seven of the 13 qualified for the first (Hazira to Bijaypur) section, and Dodsal was recommended for the first half of it when prices were examined. The Toyo-Spie-Capag led consortium was recommended for the second half, NKK for the second (Bijaypur-Auriya) section and Dodsal for the remainder.

Differences of opinion also exist over the material to coat the pipeline. The US firm Raychem quoted almost 20 per cent less than competitors for its pipeline coating material Rayclad-HBJ (named after the HBJ pipeline). But in a memo dated July 30, 1984, H.A. Kruijtbosch and D. Koster of the Dutch firm Gascunie Engineering BV, EIL's back-up consultant, recommended a different coating.

Questions have also been raised about the Rs 300-crore contract to supply special steel pipes for the pipeline. Brazil's Petrobras quoted 30 per cent less than the rival Japanese consortium of Sumitomo, Nippon Steel, NKK, Cobe Steel Company and Japan Steel Works. But in the expectation that the Brazilians wouldn't be able to do the job, the Petroleum Ministry preferred the Japanese. A joint secretary in the ministry was sent to Brazil to inspect the Brazilian company's ability to deliver. He reported that while the firm might not be able to supply all the pipes on time, it would be able to supply most of them. But the ministry decided not to split the order, which would have been cheaper, and recommended the Japanese. That suggestion was shot down by the Finance Ministry.

Ottavio Quattrocchi, Snamprogetti's powerful representative in India, has argued for a turnkey contract, but this has led to a bitter dispute within the Government.

Another explanation for the Petroleum Ministry's tilt to the Japanese could be the project financing: he who pays the piper calls the tune. The World Bank has come up with a $ 150 million-offer, but last March the Government formally requested the Japanese Government for aid to cover the project's foreign exchange cost (now estimated at Rs 680 crore). In June, Japan agreed at the Aid India Club meeting to fork out 55 billion yen (Rs 245 crore) in soft Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund credit—but only for the Hazira-Bijaypur section of the pipeline. The loan has a proviso tagged on: it can be used only if orders are placed on Japanese companies or those from the less developed countries. Argues Atul Punj, president of Punj and Sons' construction division: "The agreement between the lines reads that Japanese companies must be favoured. The Japanese are viewing this as a test case for economic relations between India and Japan to be stepped up. It takes two hands to clap." That may be so, but Japanese pipe suppliers seem confident of bagging the contract for pipes. They have cut prices by only 2 per cent while rival suppliers have offered up to 25 per cent discounts.

The financing has had another fallout. It has led companies into marriages of convenience. Toyo's forte is not pipe laying (it is not a member of the International Pipeline Contractors' Association), but it is a Japanese company. So it has tied up with Spie-Capag of France, which has the knowhow. So also, Snamprogetti roped into its consortium C. Itoh, a Japanese trading company, and Japan Gasolene Company.

Underlying all this are two perceptions on awarding the contract that have been vying for supremacy—the piecemeal and turnkey approaches. Government officials and committees have so far favoured splitting the pipeline contract on the ground that this would be cheaper and that a turnkey deal would not help Indian engineers assimilate the technology to build future pipelines. Nor are they keen on the country placing all its eggs in one basket. But on the other hand, companies like Majestic and Snamprogetti have advanced the turnkey approach because, Quattrocchi argues, the quality of work will be better, there will be no cost overruns and, in the case of his consortium at least, the offer is flexible and negotiable.

Snamprogetti broached the turnkey idea to the Government in 1983 and the consortium made a formal $ 736-million bid for the contract in August 1984, one month after the other tender bids were opened, though before the prices quoted in the tenders were examined. Snamprogetti followed this up by slashing its price for the job by $100 million. As a sweetener, the Italian Government signed an agreement to provide

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$160 million as aid for the project and verbally promised to raise the ante to $250 million or more if the turnkey approach was adopted. And to undercut the argument that the turnkey approach will leave no room for Indian companies to acquire knowhow, Snamprogetti has been talking to the Birla-owned Texmaco, Bridge and Roof, Triveni Engineering and Dodsal to provide an Indian presence in its consortium. Says Quattrocchi: "Dodsal must be included in our consortium. It has the maximum pipeline experience in India. And Engineers India can be fully associated with the project." The Snamprogetti offer cannot therefore be dismissed lightly, but it has divided opinion within the Government. So bitter has the dispute become that at a meeting of a panel of secretaries to examine the issue, a participant was sufficiently provoked to launch a public attack on Quattrocchi.

The winner in all this will be Dodsal, because it is guaranteed a major role as a sub-contractor. But Dodsal has fallen behind schedule on a feeder pipeline that it is building from Umrat to Hazira because a dredger sank in a tidal river, and therefore is under fire from the competition. And Majestic has pressed home the point to the Government that Dodsal's oil pipeline from Assam to Barauni started leaking just five years after it was laid. In contrast, Majestic's 25-year-old pipeline built for Oil India in Assam is in fine fettle. But Dodsal may also be behind schedule on the Umrat-Hazira line because the ONGC did not supply material in time, the oil pipeline to Barauni may have been poorly maintained, and the firm has a good track record in the Gulf countries. Says Indo-Gulf's Talwar: "Dodsal has an excellent international record."

Two factors emerge from this welter of blasts and counter blasts. One, the sniping may get worse. Two, a decision on awarding the contract cannot be postponed much longer. Most people in the construction business believe that although the delay in implementing the project has not significantly pushed up costs, this could change if the dollar continues to soar.

Piquantly, the situation may be compounded if the Government buys the turnkey line. Those who lose out could well demand a fresh round of tendering—which would open a Pandora's box of more delays and possibly higher project bills. But the Government may plump for one line or the other in the next few days—triggering off a new storm.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

RAJENDRA SETHIA

The Loan Ranger

I KNOW that I am on the road to greatness. I may not get there for 15 years, and I may have to crawl on hands and knees through a long tunnel first. But I'll get through it," Rajendra Sethia had told a newspaper reporter last November from his hide-out in a rented Spanish villa.

Last fortnight, Sethia—the biggest bankrupt in British history—was no closer to the sought-after greatness. And even though he was not crawling on hands and knees, he could hardly have been very comfortable in a dingy office room of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Two days earlier, he had been lodged in an expensive suite in New Delhi's Maurya Sheraton hotel. And the story of Sethia's shift from the Spanish villa to a hotel suite to the CBI office is typical of the flamboyant bankrupt's daring style of operation.

Fleeing from criminal action on fraud charges a year ago, the 37-year-old India-born alumnus of the London School of Economics had left England for Spain, where typically he started business all over again even as court action began in England for liquidating his Esal Commodities group of companies. Sethia had in fact bragged that he was striking new deals in sugar, California peas and electronic components, and talked airily of repaying all his and Esal's debts, estimated at over Rs 350 crore.

Then, unannounced, Sethia showed up in Calcutta—an audacious move when three Indian public sector banks were trying to recover over Rs 250 crore from him. Sethia started trading in jute in Calcutta, and armed with a false passport managed to get an air ticket and a visa for the United States (where he continues to hold substantial assets). But in early March local newspaper reporters tracked him down, and Sethia disappeared yet again, only to surface in the Maurya Sheraton hotel in New Delhi's diplomatic enclave as R. Sethi.

The CBI, was now on his tail and quickly got the banks concerned to lodge a formal complaint—astonishingly, no such action had been taken till then. Sethia was finally nabbed in his hotel and produced in court. Said a confident CBI official: "With his arrest, the curtain is going to be lifted on one of the biggest bank frauds in the country."

Though the final trial will begin after CBI winds up its preliminary investigations, its advocates and Sethia were already locked in a verbal duel on the merits of the case. CBI counsel charged that Sethia had manipulated documents, acted in collusion with the employees of the concerned Indian banks, and under the garb of exporting consignments to non-existent African companies taken loans worth over Rs 150 crore from the Punjab National Bank (PNB) and over Rs 100 crore from the Central Bank of India and the Union Bank of India. CBI lawyers also contended that Sethia did not give proper securities for procuring these loans. In court, they argued that since Sethia did not possess enough assets of his own to repay his debts, he should be placed under police remand in order to help identify various Indian and foreign beneficiaries of his money.

Sethia argued his own defence as his advocate could not reach the court in time, and said in a low voice that "there was no illegal action on our part. Even now we are trying to repay the bank loans. In fact, I have come to India in pursuance of my efforts to collect funds from various sources for repayment to the banks." Sethia's lawyer claimed later that of the Rs 250 crore loans that were outstanding against Sethia's name, over Rs 60 crore had already been repaid. Sethia himself maintained that he had merely had a bad business season, and that he had paid off other debtors during the last few months. Specifically, he mentioned the securities that he had offered to the State Bank of India's branches in London and the United States. And he added that he would have cleared all his loans if the rescue package worked out by the consortium of Indian banks concerned had not collapsed because of opposition from London and Overseas Sugar Company (LOS), to whom Sethia owed Rs 20 crore.

In fact, the insolvency proceedings began against Sethia in London on the strength of an LOS petition. Said LOS's David Dean: "As long as there is any breath in my body, I shall follow Sethia. It is a very sad case." But in one of the endless twists and turns in a headline-hitting case, LOS itself faces liquidation proceedings that have been initiated by the Punjab National Bank.

In yet another sidelight to the main

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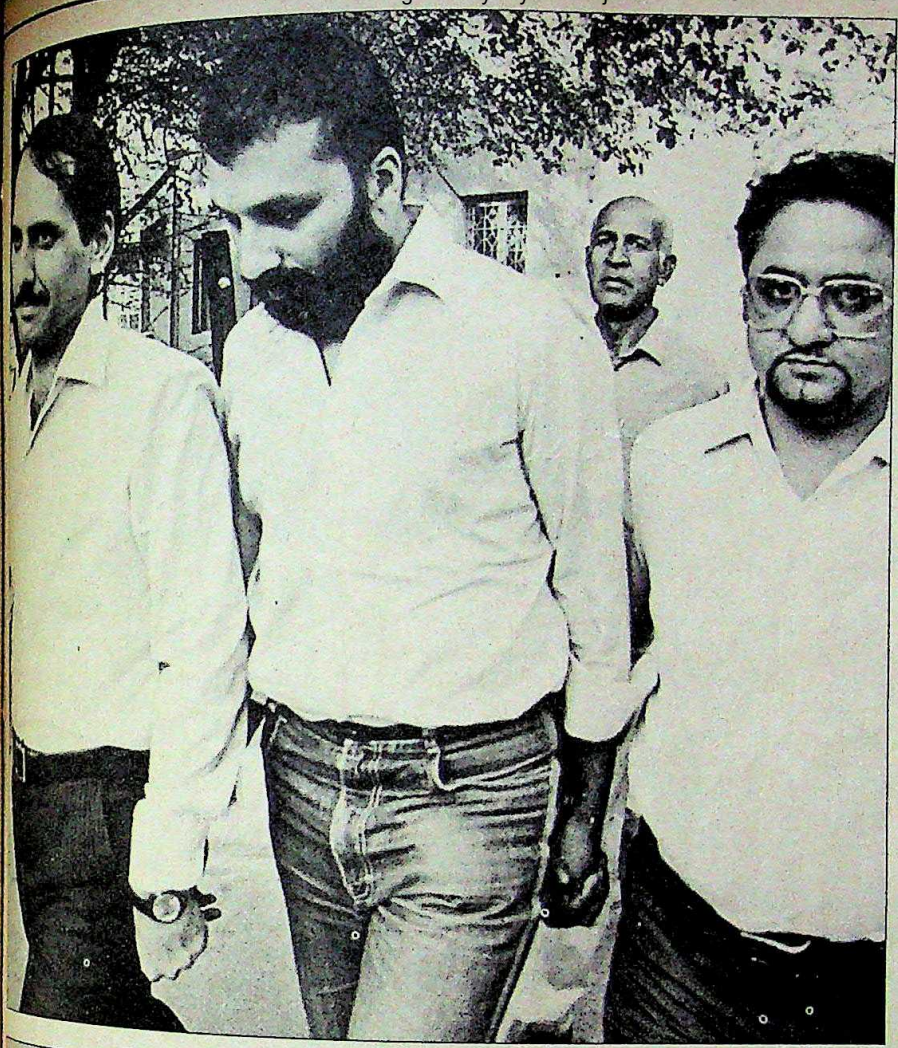

Sethia (centre) being led to court: tough battles ahead in India and abroad

> "In fact, I have come to India in pursuance of my efforts to collect funds from various sources for repayment to the banks."
> RAJENDRA SETHIIA

show. Sethia's tea company Jokai India, whose assets he had apparently offered to Punjab National Bank as security, may now be up for sale, and a bid is reported to have been made by Tata Tea.

Meanwhile, Scotland Yard's fraud squad is chasing Sethia, and a Yard spokesman said: "Sethia has been arrested in India on our request." CBI sources said that they had received a request from London for Sethia's extradition to Britain in connection with the cases that had been filed against him there.

While declaring Sethia a "fugitive from justice", a London court has already appointed an official receiver for the liquidation of his companies so that his creditors can be repaid. The receivers as well as Sethia's creditors are saddled with the crucial question of getting hold of Sethia's properties in Britain and elsewhere. Said Gerhard Weiff, one of the group of accountants appointed to assist the official receiver: "The case is criminal in terms of a fraud. My major responsibility is to find out assets of Esal's companies to pay back his creditors. Liquidation will take years probably. Indian and Nigerian debts will take still more time."

But Indian authorities are in no mood to let their catch be shipped abroad. During his police remand, Sethia was subjected to some tough interrogation by over half a dozen sleuths drawn from the CBI's special cell. Their main objective was to extract information about Sethia's Indian accomplices. CBI officials were sure that Sethia could not have got his loans without the connivance of influential people in Indian banks and elsewhere. Last month, the Government had summarily dismissed the chairmen of both the Punjab National Bank and the Central Bank of India for their failure to take appropriate preventive action. And the Union Bank of India's Chairman J. Bhatnagar was spared the axe only because he assured the Finance Ministry that his loans could be recovered with the help of pledged securities. Moreover, he retired before the Finance Ministry could check this claim.

So far, none of the banks' other employees have been prosecuted. B.R.Patankar, who was the Central Bank's deputy general manager in London, has retired from the bank and joined Sethia and Amarjeet Singh of PNB and S.C.Tara of Union Bank have been recalled to India. The CBI has prepared a list of over a dozen officials of the three banks who it believes may have been involved in the sanctioning and release of loans on the basis of fake documents. But before the noose is tightened, the CBI interrogators want to collect enough information about their relationship with Sethia. Preliminary investigations have shown that these officials had enjoyed Sethia's hospitality on his specially fitted Boeing 707.

For all that, however, the prosecutors will have to cross many legal hurdles before they can expect a breakthrough or before the banks can hope to get back their money. The Government will also have to shake off Scotland Yard pressure for Sethia's immediate extradition to London. And the legal route for prosecuting Sethia for offences committed abroad will have to be carefully worked out. Sethia could be kept temporarily in India for possessing what is alleged to be a forged passport and unauthorised foreign exchange, but this can be of little help in properly bringing to book the biggest bankrupt of recent times.

And even at this late stage, the Indian banks have not filed any suits against Sethia in British courts, while the insolvency declared by a London court makes no provision for Indian debtors. Perhaps it is the banks that will have to crawl on hands and knees through an assortment of tunnels for 15 years before they get their money back. —PRABHU CHAWLA

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DIAMONDS

Sparkling Success

QUESTION: Which industry's exports have multiplied 120 times in less than two decades?

Answer: Diamonds.

Which industry has the enviable distinction of producing goods worth Rs 34 on every rupee of capital investment? Diamonds.

Sparkling success is the story of the Indian diamond industry. A conversion enterprise par excellence, it imported almost all its raw material (Rs 900 crore worth of roughs in 1983-84) and exported Rs 1,190 crore of stones, earning almost Rs 300 crore in foreign exchange last year. With that kind of record, the sky should be the limit for Indian diamonds, but last fortnight the sparkle suddenly seemed to dim. Even as the country's first diamond exchange opened its doors, marking yet another step forward for the industry, raids on a diamond merchant provoked a shocked trade into an unprecedented and potentially crippling boycott of imported rough diamonds at a time when exports already showed clear signs of losing the tremendous momentum they have sustained over the past decade.

Last month, in an offshoot of the tax raids on builder firms throughout Bombay, taxmen raided a diamond merchant's office in south Bombay and seized a number of diamond packets belonging to the merchant and other exporters. The taxmen ignored explanations that at any given time any merchant is likely to have his as well as others' diamonds in stock on their way to and from the cutting and polishing centres.

In protest, diamond merchants refused the February 1985 'sight'—one of the 10 yearly import consignments of rough stones put together by the powerful Diamond Trading Company (DTC) of London—and threatened to boycott the next one in April as well. Shantilal Jhaveri, the combative president of the Diamond Exporters Association thundered: "Our protest is akin to Gandhiji's Bardoli satyagraha. The raids are just meant to harass us. The taxmen knew nothing about trade practices and we are paying for their ignorance."

The trade practice that Jhaveri refers to is the 'jhangar'—the identification slip which accompanies each packet of diamonds when it travels from one office to another. Within a fortnight, the seized packets were returned, but this did little to assuage hurt feelings, for the exporters had barely recovered from earlier raids in 1983 which resulted in Rs 1.41 crore worth of goods being seized. Those goods are still in the department's custody. Says Anoop Mehta of Mohanlal Raichand and Sons, which notched up Rs 18 crore in exports last year: "Fifty per cent of all roughs are imported on advance or imprest licences, so that we have to export the finished goods within six months. And if the tax people hold our diamonds for years then we lose a lot, especially the small firms which send their stuff to the larger offices to be shown to buyers."

One income tax officer explained privately that the jhangars were really not the bone of contention. The department was trying to penetrate the thicket of 'unseen' transactions in both rough and polished stones which take place any number of times between the time the rough arrives in the country and the time the finished product is shipped out. As a broker admits: "The diamonds that a company exports may not be cut from the same roughs it imported."

Still, there was some cheer for the diamantaires. After years of planning, and with a push last year from the then Union commerce minister V.P. Singh, India's first diamond exchange, the Bharat Diamond Bourse, finally opened its doors on one-and-a-half-floors of a building not very far from the complex of five buildings in south Bombay where the diamond traders are congregated. Essentially a meeting place for buyers and sellers, and a service centre for attendant headaches like customs clearance, the bourse, by the end of the first fortnight had notched up a daily turnover of Rs 6 crore.

While the merchants welcomed the establishment of the exchange, they were not too pleased about the involvement of

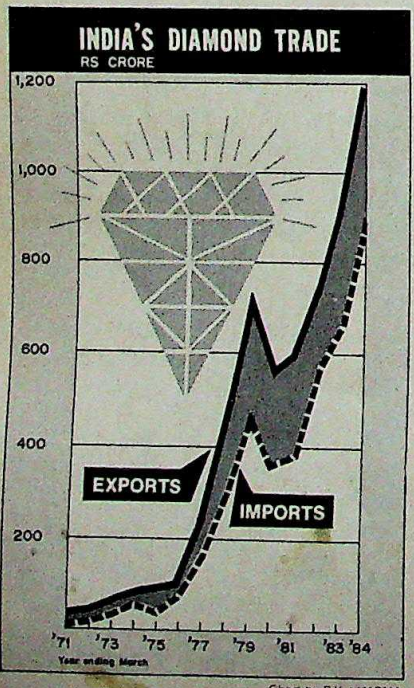
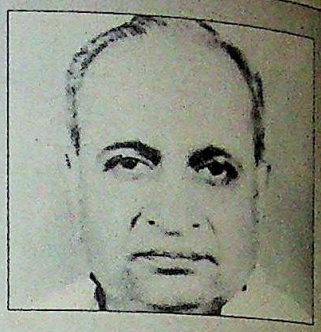


Chart by B.K. SHARMA



"The raids are just meant to harass us. The taxmen knew nothing about trade practices and we are paying for their ignorance."

SHANTILAL JHAVERI

Shining Trade

THE INDIAN diamond processing industry is a triumph of enterprise, the enterprise of a select community of Jains from Palanpur, a 1,200-year-old settlement 200 km north of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, which between them control an empire of 600-odd importing and exporting firms, over 30,000 cutting and polishing units which employ about 4 lakh people, and export Rs 1,200 crore on imports of Rs 900 crore. So close-knit is the community that attempts by the Birlas, Tatas and JK Singhania to set up their own diamond units have all ended in failure.

'Makeables' and 'cuttables'—rough diamonds which yield about 27 per cent of polished stone constitute 47 per cent of imports, with the rest composed of the

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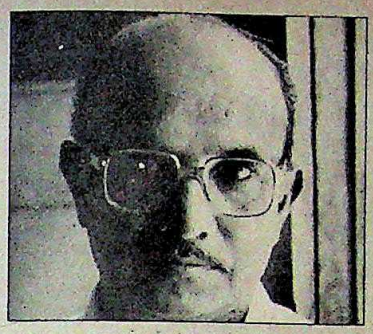
the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation (MMTC), which has been entrusted with the task of organising the bourse and which has loaned Rs 1 crore on soft terms for the purpose. For a trade which is notoriously clannish and secretive, this is just another instance of the camel taking over the entire tent. Says an exporter: "They didn't give us the land we wanted for our bourse in another part of the city, and the Rs 3.5 lakh we deposited for that plot is still locked up."

The raids, the strike and the bourse have all arrived at a time when the indications are that diamond exports have peaked at the 1983-84 figure of Rs 1,189 crore. From 1983 to 1984, the value of exports in actual dollar terms declined from $ 1,108 million to $ 1,084 million, a drop of 2.1 per cent. The drop in net exports is more significant, by $55 million. And the fall in terms of caratage is from 56.5 lakh carats in 1983 to 52.5 lakh carats in 1984, which works out to 7.24 per cent. No wonder that the chairman of the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council, Rasmikant Durlabhji, admitted last fortnight that the spectacular leaps in exports of the last few years were a thing of the past. In fact, India needs to export Rs 133 crore worth of diamonds in the last quarter of 1984-85 to bring this year's total level with last year's, which seems unlikely.

Ironically, India's own resounding success as the prime processing centre for small stones appears to have contributed to the current slump. Between 1972 and 1983, world sales of cut diamonds increased by 59 lakh carats to 84 lakh carats. In the same period, Indian exports went up by practically the same amount, by 51.5 lakh carats to 56.5 lakh carats. Thus nearly 90 per cent of the world boom was India's doing. And since India specialises almost exclusively in small and cheap diamonds, this was definitely a factor causing the depression in the large quality diamond market. De Beers, the monopoly company, declared 1984 a "quality" year and slashed the prices of quality roughs which were promptly grabbed by Israel and other centres. The finished products of others are attractively priced when compared to India's offerings.



"Our rules and our industry are geared to small stones. It's time for us to think of bigger things."

A.P. PALSHETKAR

Although the weight of a diamond has very little to do with its value, there is some criticism that India's diamond licensing system discourages work on large diamonds. Authorised imports of roughs range from 65 per cent to 87 per cent of value-added exports, and as the value added is labour, any company can maintain a self-sustaining cycle only if the labour content in the finished product is high. And it is obviously higher in the case of several small stones than a single big one. Says A.P. Palshetkar of Palshetkar and Co, a big import-export manufacturing combine: "Our rules and our industry are geared to small stones where we are the undisputed leaders. It's time for us to think of bigger things."

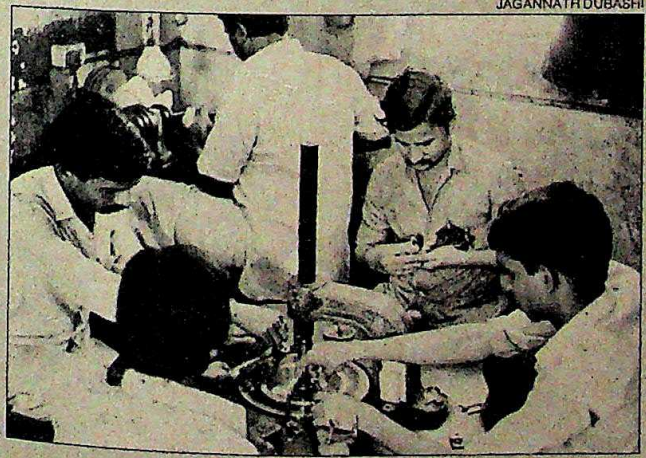
For the immediate present, however, the trade was steadily and vehemently lobbying in Delhi for more sympathetic treatment. Arguing that cracking down on the country's foremost export industry for the sake of a few crore rupees in tax would be tantamount to killing the goose for her golden eggs, Jhaveri says: "We don't say that we are all paragons of virtue. But most of us are honest entrepreneurs and we deliver the goods. That's more than you can say for several other industries." The million dollar question last fortnight was whether the powers that be would come around to this view.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

more expensive and more easily workable 'sawables' which yield nearly half their weight of stone. Forty per cent of the imports come directly from the DTC through the Indian 'sightholders' who are entitled to buy from DTC. This is a crucial privilege in a highly cartelised world in which about 35 per cent of all diamonds are of DTC origin. In fact, many Indian diamond companies have established a visible and growing presence in Antwerp, the world's diamond centre.

The roughs are parcelled out to cutting and polishing firms like Palshetkar and Co of Bombay and Ratnagiri, which employs 400 people in seven units. The salaries range from Rs 500 a month for the women who cleave the roughs to the Rs 5,000 a month (tax free, of course) made by the elite skilled workers who polish the stones. The skill of the Indian artisan is legendary. The roughs are handled best in Surat and Navsari, where the ghantis —the basic polishing wheels —are concentrated. The best part of the business is that it is not capital intensive: a ghanti costs about Rs 5,000.

JAGANNATH DUBASHI



Diamond polishing: fortune wheel

The polished diamonds are brought back to Bombay where they are offered to prospective buyers. The entire operation runs on trust. In the five buildings which are the heart of the trade, nondescript brokers run up and down stairs quietly offering sachets of stones. Nearly half of India's exports are to the United States, with Belgium in second place and Japan and Hong Kong tying for third. India's reputation as an exporter is justifiably high. The cottage industry has much to be proud about.

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SHAW WALLACE

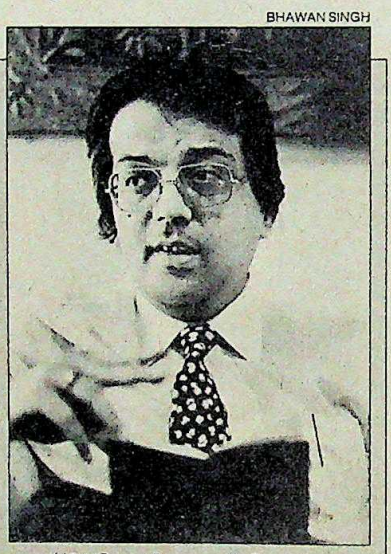
Share Desperation

MANOHAR Rajaram Chhabria is furious. Puffing away at an extra-long cigarette in a plush hotel suite in New Delhi, the 39-year-old Dubai-based businessman can barely restrain himself from rolling out the expletives. For after having coughed up more than $27 million for a 38.74 per cent stake in Shaw Wallace, he finds his voting power frozen by the Company Law Board, his intentions questioned, and his time taken up in a messy fight that he had never sought. "I have no time for a damaging situation," he says. But he is also not one to run away from a difficult situation, and Chhabria is now ready for battle to ensure that he gets control of the company he has paid for.

Chhabria's problem is that the Company Law Board has instituted an enquiry into the real ownership of the shares that he has bought, pending which his voting rights on the shares have been frozen. The shares themselves were bought indirectly, by buying up R.G. Shaw and Company, the overseas outfit that still owns the shares. So questions are also being asked as to whether Chhabria should have taken permission from the Reserve Bank for buying the holding company. Chhabria says he does not, since it was a completely offshore operation, but it is possible that permission is in fact required. This is because R.G.Shaw has no activity other than holding the Shaw Wallace shares. So, according to one interpretation of the law, the buying of R.G.Shaw's shares is tantamount to buying Shaw Wallace shares—an act which requires Reserve Bank's permission.

Such problems have arisen because Shaw Wallace's Indian management, in the person of Chairman S.P.Acharya, has strongly opposed Chhabria's entry into Shaw Wallace. Going well beyond the role of a professional manager employed by the shareholders, Acharya has lobbied with the Government, with the Malaysian company (Sime Darby) that sold the shares in the first place, and with the public sector financial institutions, which own 24.9 per cent of Shaw Wallace shares. He has held a succession of quick board meetings, proposed at one stage to increase the membership of the board (at which point Chhabria threatened to sue) and refused so far to speak to Chhabria. All this was probably because he believed that Chhabria was acting in collusion with Vijay Mallya, who operates as a rival to Shaw Wallace in the liquor business. But Chhabria stoutly insists that he is acting on his own, so Acharya might well have taken on a major fight without good reason. Acharya himself could not be reached for comment, and he has so far refused to speak to the press on the subject.

BHAWAN SINGH



"What have I done wrong? I have not ousted any promoter, I am not harming shareholders. The beauty of it is, I did not even want to change the Shaw Wallace management."

RAJARAM CHHABRIA

Last fortnight, Chhabria said he was prepared to face any enquiry by the Government. "I will give them documents even if they don't ask for them. What have I done wrong? I have not ousted any promoter, I am not causing any harm to minority shareholders. The beauty of it is, I did not even want to change the Shaw Wallace management. In fact, if Mr Acharya tells me tomorrow that he is resigning, I do not have anyone to replace him."

While Chhabria did the rounds in Delhi and Acharya planned the next step in a battle that has become the talking point in the corporate world, more fireworks seemed certain in the future.

The stage for the battle royal was set last October, when Chhabria got a call from the Grindlays Bank's corporate division, asking him whether he was interested in buying Shaw Wallace. "I thought the bank might be joking," Chhabria recalls, but he nevertheless consulted Vijay Mallya of United Breweries. "He knew the liquor business, and I was insisting he get involved, but he was not interested," says Chhabria, who also tried to strike a deal with his partner in the Dunlop India acquisition, R.P. Goenka. "Goenka is like a father to me, and he has adopted me as his son, but he said he did not want to be in the liquor business," says Chhabria, who finally decided to go it alone.

The bidding started soon afterwards, with a south Indian group providing the competition. Chhabria started at Rs 90 for each Rs 10 share, marginally higher than the going stock-market price, but this was steadily pushed up to Rs 124, at which level the competition dropped out ultimately.

On January 7, the Malaysian Central Bank gave its permission for the share sale, and Chhabria was called upon to pay up in seven days. On January 10, he flew to London armed with a banker's cheque for $23.4 million. The next day brought the first shock: Sime Darby said the deal was off and told Chhabria that they would invite fresh tender bids. Also, Shaw Wallace's Indian management would now be allowed to put in a bid through an overseas nominee. Recalls Chhabria: "Having flown to London at a few hours' notice, and since I had mentally set myself to acquire the company, this business of a tender was not acceptable." But his lawyers told him there was little he could do about it, so he finally decided to bid again.

This he did with native shrewdness. He offered Rs 2 per share more than the highest bidder, with a maximum price of Rs 145 per share, and payment in 24 hours. His rivals stopped at Rs 140, so he finally paid Rs 142. Interestingly enough, the rivals had included the Canadian Seagram whisky manufacturers (who have been trying to come into India for the last two years) and Nabisco Brand (which controls the Calcutta-based Britannia Industries).

Chhabria suspects that Nabisco may have been acting on behalf of the Indian

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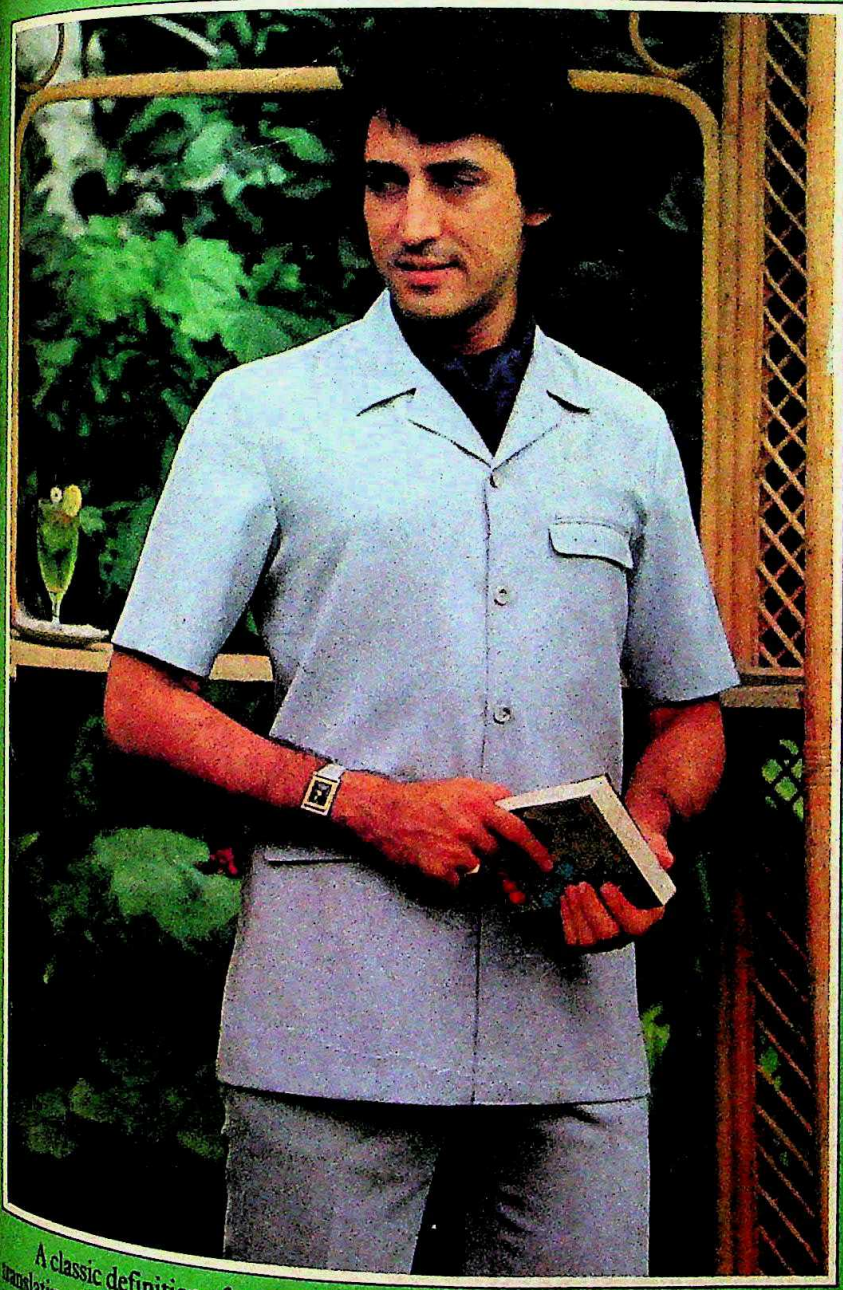

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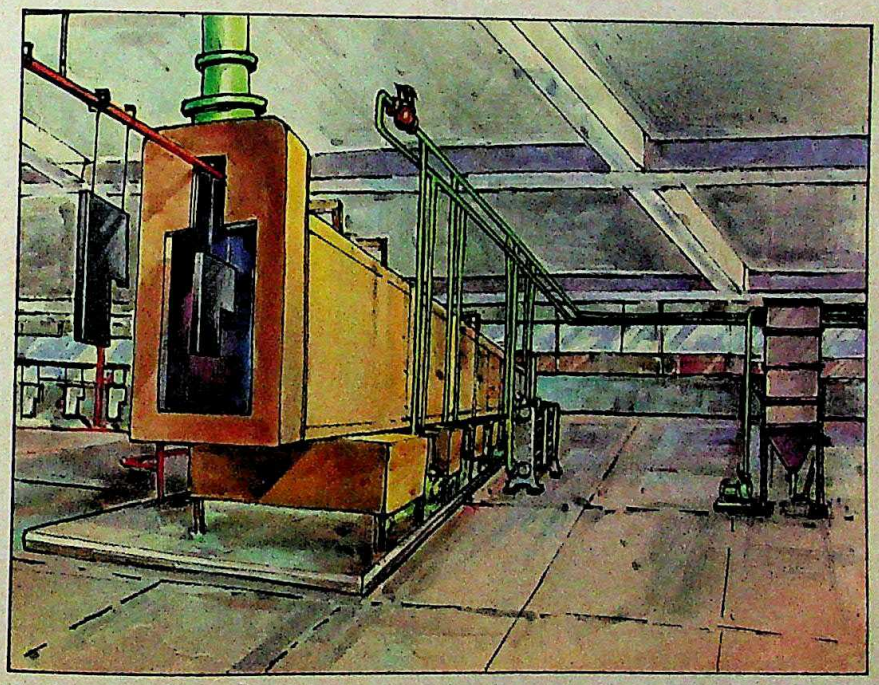

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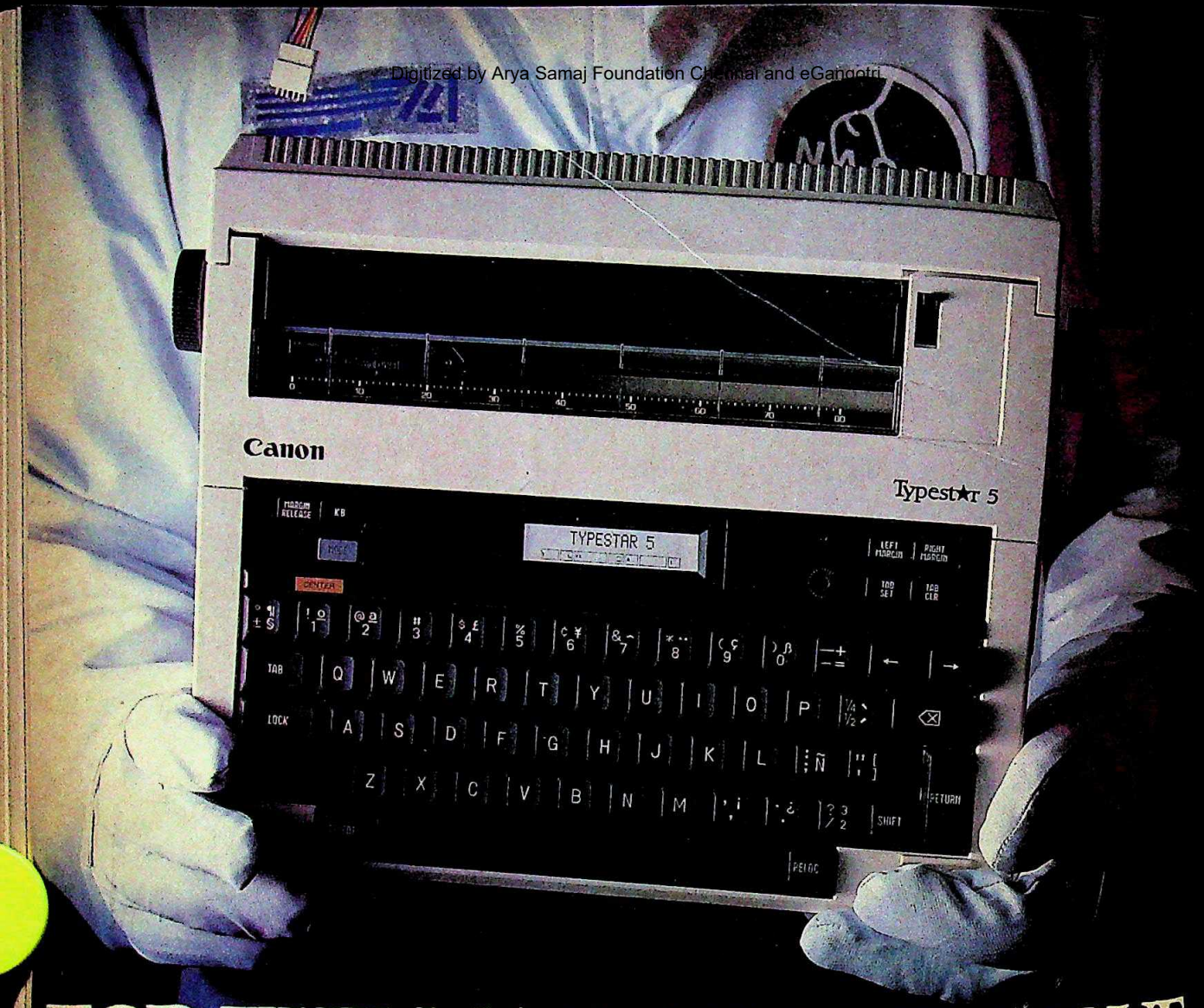

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management, and he is forthright in his comments: "I have paid $4 million extra because the management of Shaw Wallace decided to put up a rival bid and made Sime Darby go back on its earlier commitment to me." The frustrated buyer adds that he has made several efforts to meet Acharya, "but he has not even spoken to me on the telephone".

Once Chhabria was stymied by the action of the Company Law Board, there were other equally interesting developments. On March 5, Chhabria got a telex message from a firm of merchant bankers in Singapore, offering him a way out. The bankers, acting on behalf of Nabisco Brands, suggested that certain parts of Shaw Wallace's business could be transferred to the Nabisco group, leaving the rest to Chhabria. The interesting part of the message was that Nabisco would also take the present management of Shaw Wallace with it. Chhabria suspects that the offer of a partial buy-out was made in the hope that he would have got tired of the stalemate on the subject, and believes that this points to a partnership between Acharya and Nabisco.

His reply to the merchant banking firm was in the negative, and Chhabria has also rejected an offer to sell out his holdings at a profit of some $8 million. Says Chhabria: "I do not buy companies to sell them. I am not a greenmailer." (Greenmailers are corporate raiders who buy substantial shareholdings in a company and then threaten to take control unless their holdings are bought out at a higher price.)

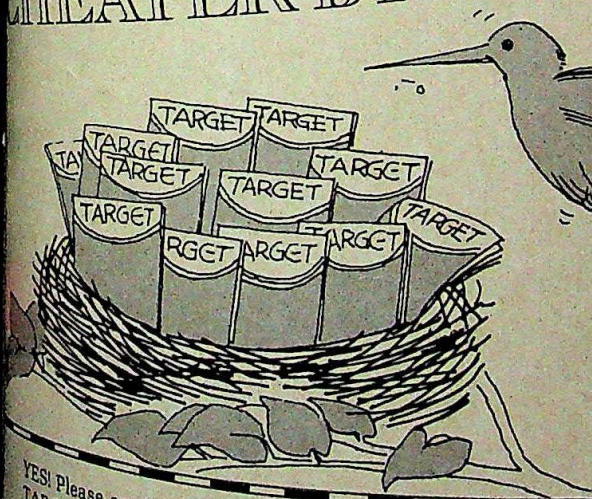
Talking of the Nabisco offer, Chhabria says: "This is like my ordering a cup of coffee for Rs 6. At that stage you put a fly in the coffee, then take out the fly and offer me Rs 60 if I drink the coffee. Will I drink the coffee?" Continuing further in this injured tone, he says: "I have been kicked around like a football from pole to pole, but I am not someone who can be threatened."

He says Shaw Wallace's attraction is its computer software business, which Chhabria thinks can be developed quickly. "I have Japanese friends who can help exploit Shaw Wallace's software business. At a meeting in Davos (Switzerland), I told the president of a giant Japanese company that if he gave us the hardware we could give him the software, and they were willing."

However, all such plans now have to be kept in abeyance till the Company Law Board completes its investigation, and until it becomes clear whether the Reserve Bank needs to clear his investment. The Dubai-based businessman could hardly have expected this cartload of trouble, given the smooth manner in which he has moved into three other Indian companies in the last six months: Dunlop India, Gordon Woodroffe and Bayer India. He has already taken over as chairman of Dunlop, is in the driver's seat at Gordon Woodroffe, and is being co-opted on to the board of Bayer India. Clearly, he had expected a similar sequence of events in the case of Shaw Wallace. And the management opposition must clearly have caught him completely by surprise.

He is now trying to regain the initiative, talking to journalists, to the Government and to anyone else who he thinks can be helpful, and he says: "I believe the new Government will give me justice." But at the moment, the great Shaw Wallace take-over remains stuck at a stalemate, with Acharya planning his next move and Chhabria fuming in frustration. —T.N.NINAN

CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN



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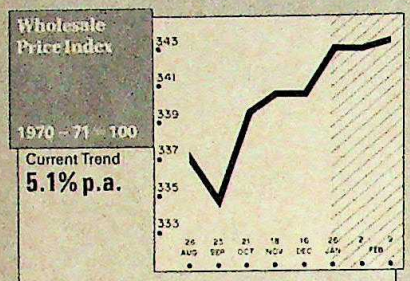
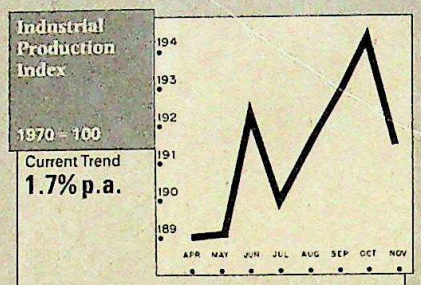
WHILE prices continued to remain relatively stable, industrial production especially manufacturing output, as well as power generation, registered unhealthy declines last month. Money supply continued to expand though considerably more slowly than earlier. The mood in the share market was optimistic and gold recorded a sudden upsurge, the first in several weeks.

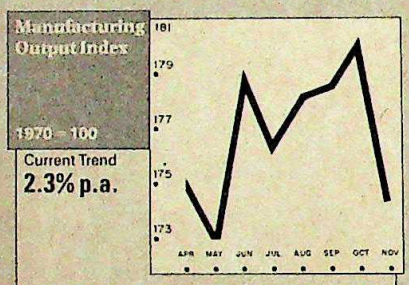
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.



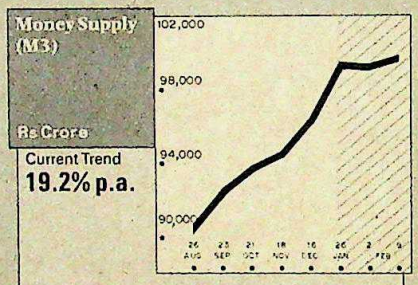
Wholesale prices were up marginally by 0.1 per cent last fortnight, above the long term trend but maintaining the stability of the previous month.



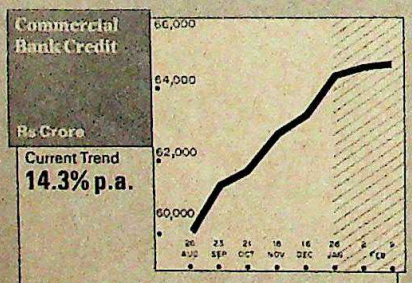
Industrial production dropped by 1.6 per cent last month owing to a fall in manufacturing output; increase in mining output failed to prop it up.



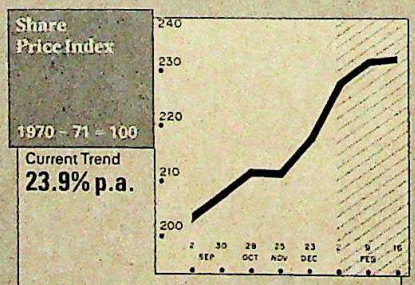
A steep decline in the output of machinery led to a disturbing 3.2 per cent drop in manufacturing output last month.



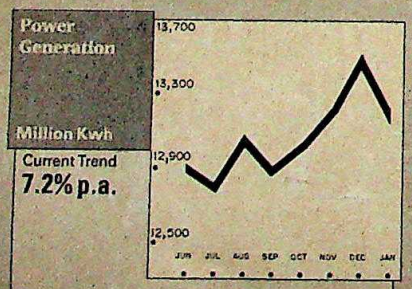
Money supply jumped 0.4 per cent last fortnight due chiefly to a sharp upsurge in commercial bank credit to the government.



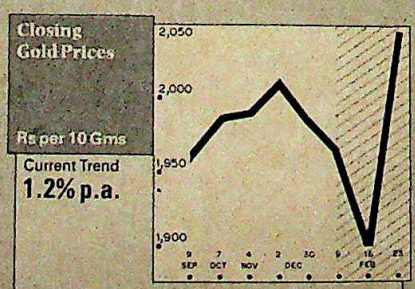
In keeping with the long term trend which is decelerating, bank credit to firms was up about 0.6 per cent last fortnight.



Bullish tendencies in chemical fertilizers, tea plantation and electrical machinery securities caused a 1.8 per cent jump in the share market.



Power generation dropped 2 per cent last month chiefly due to a shortfall in non-thermal output.



Gold prices rocketed 4 per cent last fortnight notwithstanding a sharp dip in the middle, accelerating significantly over the previous fortnight.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with maximum growth in October 1984

	% Growth
Sugar Machinery	62.69
Textile Machinery	54.87
Paper Machinery	49.12
Railway Rolling Stock	29.47
Cosmetics	28.44
Electrical Machinery	23.34
Vegetable & Animal Oil	22.50
Scientific Instruments	17.44
Insecticides	16.99
Earth Moving Machinery	16.73
Enemellg, Japanng, Polishg Met Prdts	14.94
Boilers	14.76
Matches	14.70
Telecommunications	13.55
Tanneries	12.47
Air Gas Pumps	12.44
Construction Machinery	12.32
Cotton Fabrics	12.04
Sewing & Knitting Machines	10.33
Razor Blades	10.30
Fine Chemicals	9.97
Iron and Steel Casting & Forging	9.63
Coffee Curing Works	9.44
Weighing Machines	8.99
Ferro-Alloys	7.89
Mathematical Instruments	7.86
Metal Products	7.44
Bolts, Nuts, Screws	7.20
Explosives	6.96
Dry Cells	6.56
Industrial Instruments	6.50
Handtools	6.16
Electrical Motors	6.08
Iron and Steel Structurals	5.79
Asbestos Cement	5.67
Typewriters & Duplicators	5.60
Pens and Pencils	5.30
Airconditioners & Refrigerators	5.00
Cotton and Blended Yarn	4.83
Fertilizers	4.54
Machine Tools	4.29
Non-Ferrous Metal Industries	4.23
Grain Mill Products	3.42
Metallurgical Machinery	2.67
Organic Chemicals	2.13
Synthetic Rubber	1.99
Tiles	1.86

Of 119 important series considered, 59 with a weight of 48.7 accelerated, while 60 with a weight of 45.9 decelerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1985	1984
Crude Petroleum Thousand Tonnes February	2458	2187
Call Money Rate-Bombay Per cent February	10.00	9.95
Revenue Earning Goods Traffic Million Tonnes January	21.90	21.72
Letters of Intent Number January	54	77
Industrial Licences Number January	81	67

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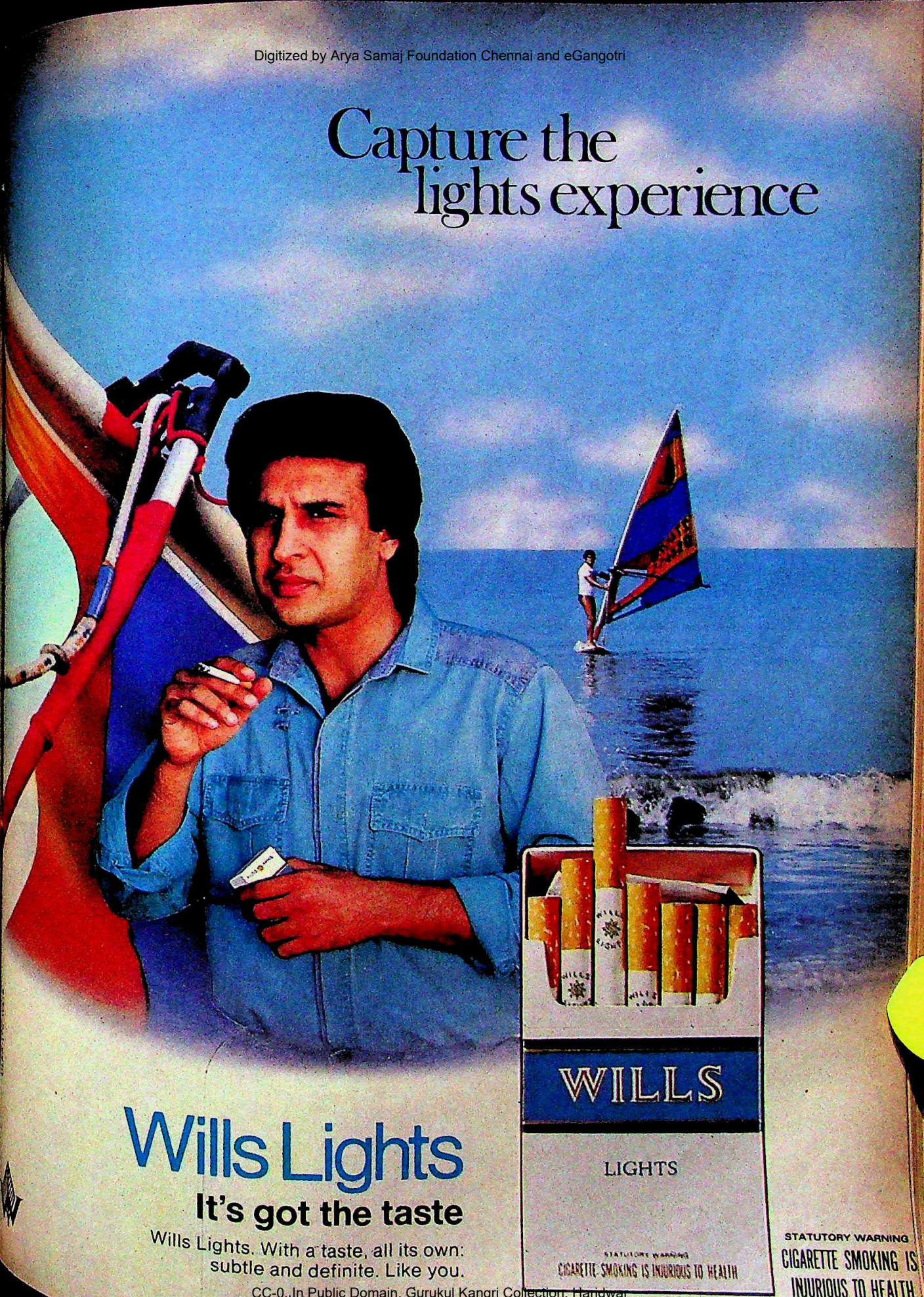

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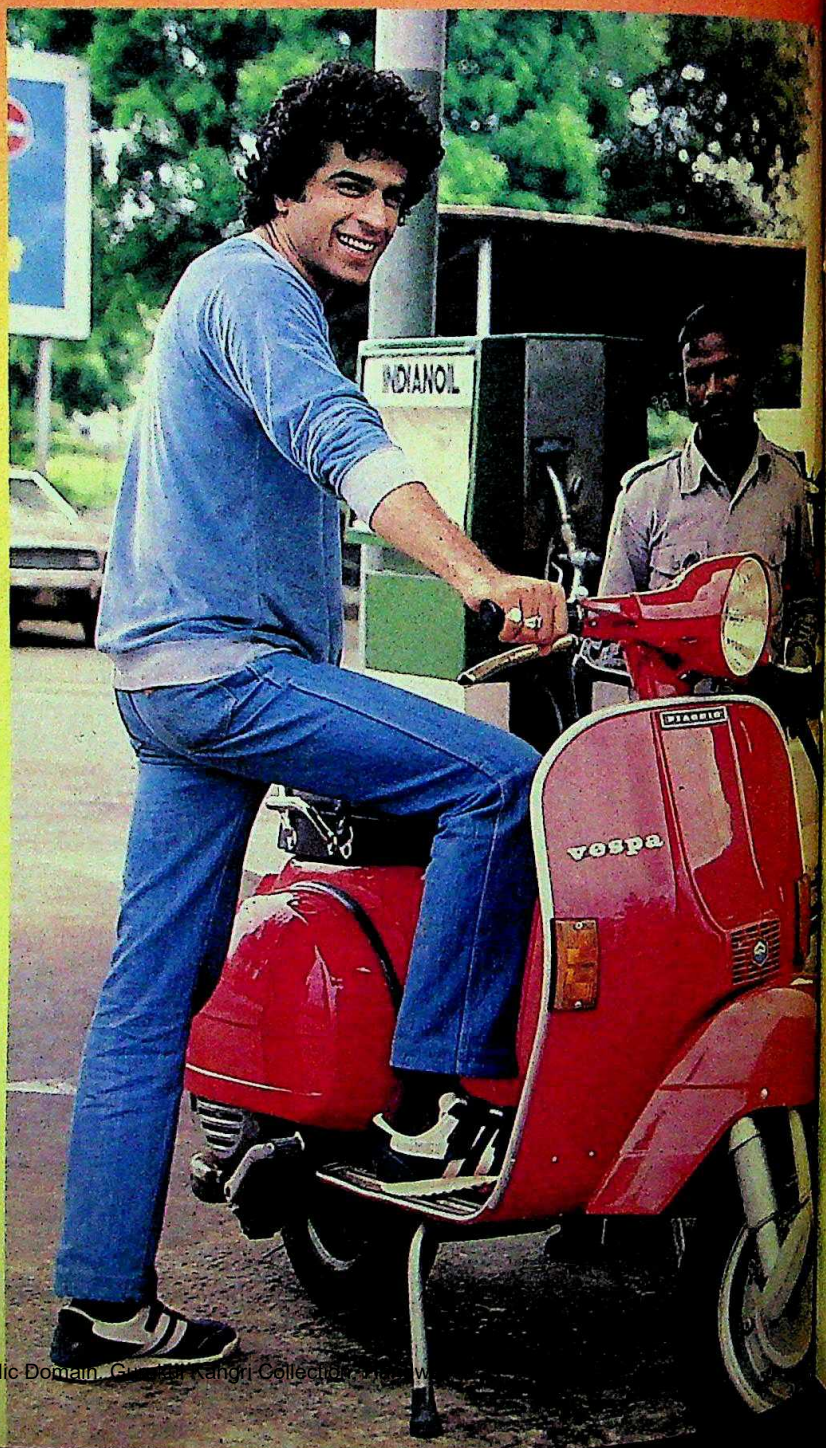
ON THE ROAD WITH A VESPA XE RIDER

"It's got power and a sense of style. But what really turns me on is it's all round economy."

When my Dad gave it to me, he summed it up, "It's all yours son. The power, the safety, the style. But knowing what your allowance is, most important, the low maintenance and running costs."

Trust Dad to have phrased it right. You see I do a lot of travelling. College every day. Out of town on weekends. And my evenings are reasonably exciting. It's reassuring to know that I have a tough, reliable and economical scooter.



LOHIA MACHINES LTD., AND PIAGGIO OF ITALY.

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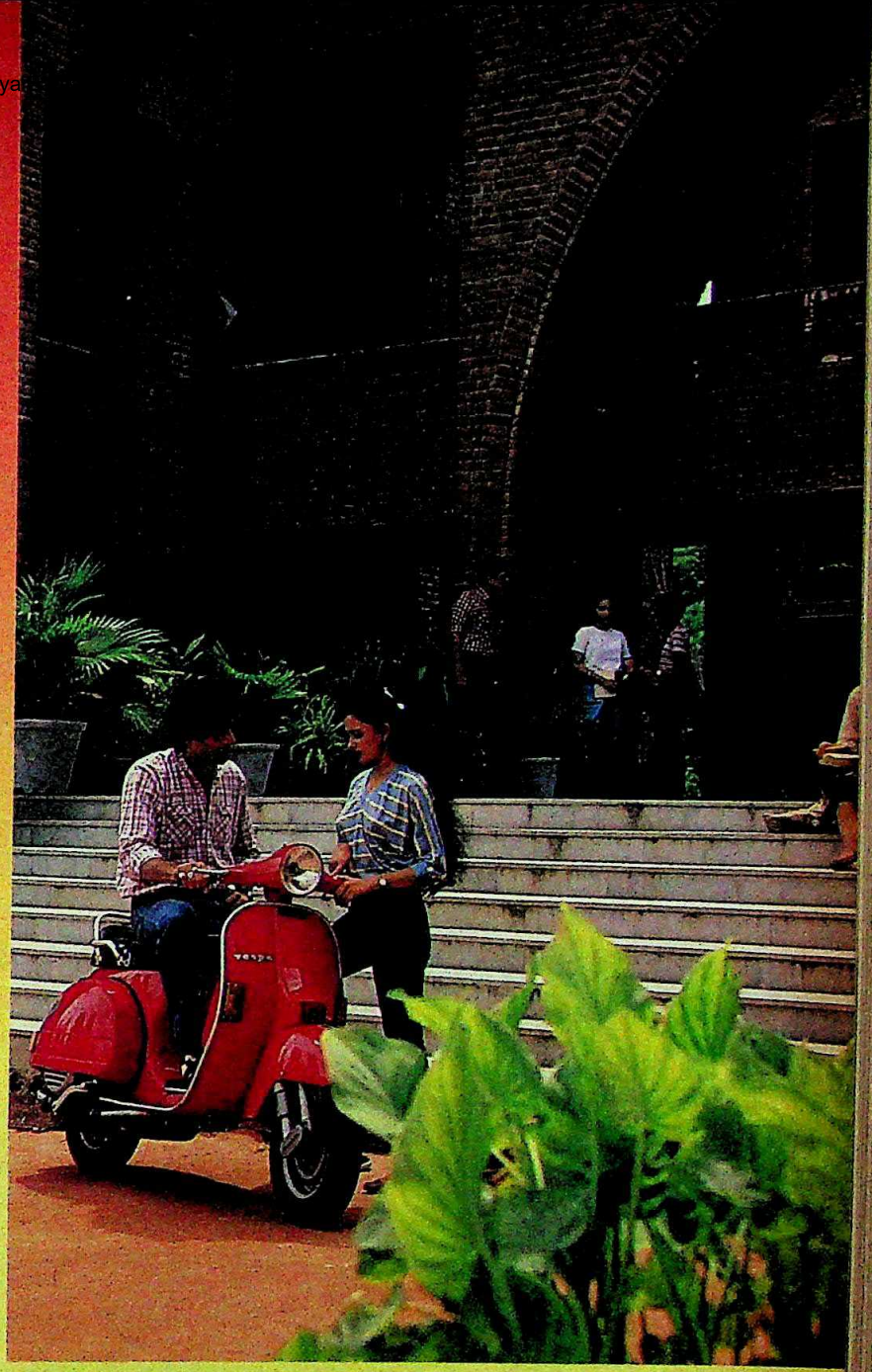
I keep telling my friends that they should get one. For the first time, they would be riding a two wheeler that gives economy without sacrificing on power, safety, comfort and durability.

That makes everybody want to try it out. But I'm really possessive about it. It is just not something you'd like to loan.... even to your best friend."



the vespa XE from Lohia Machines Ltd and Piaggio of Italy

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Our dream sequence framed in Duroply....

Only Duroply. I had left the interior of the bedroom to my wife. And she came up with a design really out of this world.

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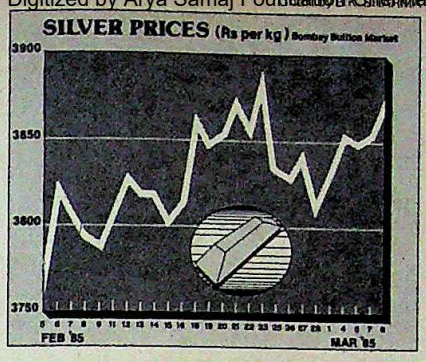
THE MARKETS

Holding Steady

LIKE the man who has eaten well but not too wisely, the stock-markets are busy digesting their recent gains. The markets have been remarkably steady with the index only a couple of points below the maximum reached since the start of the year. Most investors apparently take a fairly optimistic view of the forthcoming budget and the fact that the finance minister has not gone into hiding is taken as an indication that he will not spring an unpleasant surprise on the great day.

Operators are normally expected to be cautious on the eve of the budget but the bulls continue their tight grip on the market, encouraged perhaps by sustained buying by institutions. In any case, good scrips are in short supply while investible funds are apparently plentiful. Corporate reports are by and large upbeat. Wimco has fared well and stepped up its dividend from 18 to 20 per cent. Its gross profit has gone up by more than a third from Rs 9 crore to Rs 12.5 crore on a turnover of about Rs 105 crore. Vulcan-Laval, a Pune-based company, has done even better with sales up by 35 per cent and net profit by more than 50 per cent. Punjab Tractors, a joint sector company that made its fortune in tractors and is now diversifying into commercial vehicles, had a mixed year, with sales more than doubled but without much improvement in profits.



Those who think that share prices are unusually high and it is ridiculous to pay Rs 60 or Rs 70 for scrips that pay no more than 20 per cent may be in for a surprise. The shares are likely to go even higher and at least a dozen scrips should touch the magic figure of 100 in the next couple of years. The business community is backing the Government to the hilt and expects goodies in return. With a huge five-year plan to be fed with resources, tax reliefs may not be on the cards, but there may be other incentives. The general feeling is that industry is raring to go if only the Government will stop breathing down its neck. Unless the finance minister has been sending false signals, the share markets should have a record year ahead.

On a longer haul, companies involved in the power and oil industries deserve more than a passing look. The Government plans to spend more than Rs 40,000 crore on these two basic industries in the next five years or so, which must be a godsend to the manufacturers of switchgears, transformers, material handling plants, as also such special equipment as valves, rigs etc. Companies like Larsen & Toubro, Greaves Crompton, Kirloskar Electric, Siemens etc almost suggest themselves. Their shares are already pretty high—though Siemens is passing through a rough patch—but there is more in it than meets the eye. It is not for nothing that oil is called black gold.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1985 HIGH	1985 LOW	1985 CLOSE 5.3.85	Change on Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	37.50	29.00	33.50	1.50 +
Asian Paints	124.00	87.00	97.00	3.00 +
Associated Cement	484.00	382.00	408.00	8.00 +
Avery India	63.50	56.00	63.50	2.00 +
Bajaj Auto	970.00	855.00	910.00	30.00 +
Balharpur	46.25	44.00	44.00	0.75 –
Baroda Rayon	309.00	281.00	301.00	nil
Bata India	53.25	48.00	53.00	3.45 +
Bayer	395.00	317.50	375.00	nil
Bharat Forge	42.00	35.50	42.00	1.00 +
Birla Jute	55.70	51.70	55.40	0.10 +
Blow Plast	55.00	39.00	48.00	2.00 –
Blue Star	40.50	32.50	37.00	0.50 –
Bombay Dyeing	78.50	63.00	78.50	10.00 +
Britannia Industries	54.00	46.50	53.80	0.20 –
Brooke Bond	54.70	47.50	52.00	0.50 –
Ceat Tyres	200.00	180.00	200.00	5.00 +
Century Spinning	920.00	815.00	830.00	5.00 +
Chloride India	63.00	56.90	61.50	nil
Colgate	179.00	143.50	173.00	4.00 –
DCM	51.50	45.00	48.56	2.44 –
East India Hotels	28.25	25.50	28.25	1.75 +
Escorts	64.00	56.00	57.00	1.00 –
Food Specialities	53.50	49.87	52.25	1.25 –
Glaxo	111.00	86.00	110.00	1.00 –
Glaxo Keen Williams	30.50	24.00	29.00	1.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	20.80	18.70	19.40	1.10 –
Hico Products	58.00	53.75	57.00	0.25 +
Hindustan Aluminium	30.50	24.50	24.50	3.00 –
Hindustan Cocoa	55.00	51.00	53.80	0.25 +
Hindustan Lever	80.00	54.00	56.00	0.50 –
Hindustan Motors	69.25	50.75	69.25	2.25 +
	68.00	52.50	62.00	1.00 –
Indian Aluminium	28.60	25.50	28.60	2.00 +
Indian Cable	22.80	21.75	21.75	nil
Indian Explosives	44.10	33.00	39.50	4.60 –
Indian Hotels	88.00	77.00	78.00	2.00 –
Indian Oxygen	45.15	43.50	43.60	0.20 –
Ion Exchange	68.00	57.50	66.50	1.50 –
ITC	31.25	29.10	29.40	0.25 –
Kinetic Engineering	148.00	127.00	135.00	2.00 –
Kirloskar Oil	33.00	25.00	26.25	0.75 –
Kothari Industrial	24.00	20.50	20.50	0.75 –
Lakme	92.00	76.00	82.00	2.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	96.50	72.00	91.50	nil
Lipton	30.50	26.50	28.90	1.60 –
Lohia Machines	52.87	42.00	56.00	6.87 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	63.00	47.50	56.50	2.50 +
Modi Rubber	25.00	19.50	24.87	1.12 +
Nirlon	48.50	37.00	44.50	2.00 –
Otis Elevator	99.00	86.00	90.50	4.50 –
Peico Electronics	47.60	38.40	47.60	1.00 +
Premier Automobiles	358.00	310.00	357.00	16.00 +
Punjab Tractors	43.00	33.50	38.00	2.00 +
Ranbaxy	75.00	49.00	66.00	1.00 –
Reliance Textiles	144.50	120.00	144.50	2.00 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	34.50	34.50	1.25 –
Siemens	46.50	42.50	42.75	0.25 +
SPIC	56.75	43.50	55.75	1.00 –
Tata Steel	436.00	373.50	431.50	34.00 +
Tata Tea	78.00	63.75	71.60	1.00 +
Telco	515.00	406.00	498.00	17.00 –
Union Carbide	18.80	17.10	17.65	0.10 +
Voltas	390.00	365.00	368.00	3.00 +
W I Erectors	45.00	38.00	40.00	1.50 +
Zuari Agro	55.50	46.00	53.50	1.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.0900	9.0430
Austria	Schilling	100	55.0464	54.7239
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.9617	34.9007
Bangladesh	Taka	100	0.5081	0.4974
Canada	Dollar	1	9.3951	9.3605
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.0813	1.0767
Egypt	Pound	1	16.0759	15.5873
France	Franc	1	1.2804	1.2586
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6893	1.6866
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0122	0.0119
Iran	Rial	100	0.1359	0.1355
Italy	Lira	100	0.6185	0.6159
Japan	Yen	100	5.1413	5.0125
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8012	0.1933
Kuwait	Dinar	1	42.9276	42.8356
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0655	5.0527
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.7994	0.7894
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.76	0.75
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.4064	3.3956
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8407	0.8258
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.7857	5.7726
Spain	Peseta	1	0.6990	0.6645
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.5008	0.4955
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3625	1.3571
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.5428	4.5266
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7111	0.7012
Thailand	Baht	100	0.4769	0.4761
UK	Pound	1	14.1043	13.9987
USA	Dollar	1	13.2100	13.0800
UAE	Dirham	1	3.6471	3.5376
USSR	Rouble	1	14.3742	14.3000
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.9541	3.8525

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd. New Delhi and quoted on 11.3.85.

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TABLE TENNIS

An Attacking Champion

SIXTEEN years ago, a frail, bespectacled teenager made a quiet entry onto the table tennis scene in Calcutta. Connoisseurs, smitten by the reigning queen Rupa Mukherjee, failed to take notice—this was just another bubbly youngster who had looked good at school-level encounters but was as yet too aggressive, too rash, for top-drawer competition. Two years later, however these same connoisseurs in Calcutta sat up as Indu Puri swept aside Rupa to annexe the national title. That 1972 win signalled the beginning of a remarkable career that peaked last month with yet another national title, Indu Puri's eighth, and the sixth running. "Take it from me, she is a born champion. It is all there, in her strokes, approach to the game, and her tremendous strength of mind. When the other girls go out to play her, all they are looking forward to is a decent score," says G.Jagannath, former national champion himself and coach of the nine-member squad that left for Yugoslavia last fortnight for pre-world championship training.

Indu Puri's supremacy is all too obvious even now, at age 31. Last fortnight, the Union Bank officer from Delhi proved through many rounds of practice at the Nehru Stadium that the left-handed smash Indian spectators are so familiar with is still far too lethal for the younger girls in the team to tackle. "She is so attacking, and she takes so many points from that side-spin push of hers," acknowledges Vyoma Parekh who offered stubborn resistance to Puri at the last national finals. And the verve has not diminished. "I am an absolutely attacking player. I can't defend for nuts," she says, and adds, scotching rumours that she may call it a day this year, "Who does not like to win? I intend to continue for as long as I am good enough."

Given the poor standards of table tennis in the country, Puri never had the benefit of great coaching. "There haven't been any coaches. I learnt the game from my father, manager of a jute mill in Calcutta, who was a sports enthusiast and encouraged me to play. The rest was dedication and determination," she says and rues the fact that during the last 15 years not many youngsters have lived up to their initial promise. "To begin with," she says, "many of them look good. But later they fail to keep improving as they choose different priorities in life. Some get jobs and leave, and marriage, in Indian conditions, is a problem for a sportswoman." But the lack of both formal coaching and competition at home have not deterred Puri from making her mark on the international scene as well. She hit the high spot at the 1978 Asian Championship, defeating North Korea's Pak Yung Sun, the then world champion. "That," Puri recalls, is a moment I will cherish forever. It was much too big a victory for me." But that was also the period when the Indian women's table tennis team posted a few notables on the international scene. Puri was ranked second among the Commonwealth countries, won, with Nandini Kulkarni and Shailaja Salokhe the World Railways title in 1978 and put India in the first category of the Corbellion Cup, the world women's table tennis championship. She reminisces nostalgically, "Shaila was a worthy rival. Those were indeed great days." For many years, till Salokhe faded away, the two invariably fought it out for the national title. Says Puri: "Right from 1972 onwards I won every national that I was fit to play. The toughest challenge was always from Shaila."

Indu Puri in action at the last nationals: smash hit

And if fitness has been a perpetual bugbear her success speaks amply of her determination. She has lived with chronic asthma—she wheezes perceptibly even as she talks. A look at her glasses and any expert would dismiss her as a non-starter. But Puri does not even like to mention the fact that all through these 16 years she has looked down on her opponents through lenses of the strength of minus 10. "Please," she says, pleadingly, "I would be happy if you did not even mention that. I have never thought that my eyesight was a handicap of any kind."

But, if determination took care of the physical problems Puri inherited, her remarkable fitness now, at an age when most table tennis stars find themselves too slow for top-level competition, is due to the strenuous 45-minute workout she has every morning. "It's strenuous to train but when you are fit you realise what the others are missing. With exercise now my lungs have become so strong asthma does not even bother me," she says and regrets the fact that most of the young players today are not adequately fitness-conscious. Says she: "That is our problem at the international level where everyone is so fit. And the importance of fitness is never drilled into our youngsters."

That is one problem she now wants to apply herself to. She has her mind set on full-time coaching once she decides to leave medals and trophies to younger women. Yet she does not look at the future of table tennis in India with a great degree of optimism. Says she: "There is no incentive. Even the press bothers only about cricket. Think of Ami Ghia, seven times national badminton champion. Has she ever made it to the cover of a sports magazine? Ravi Shastri and Kapil Dev are always there." And that, indeed, is another left-handed clincher that will go unanswered like her famed side-spin push.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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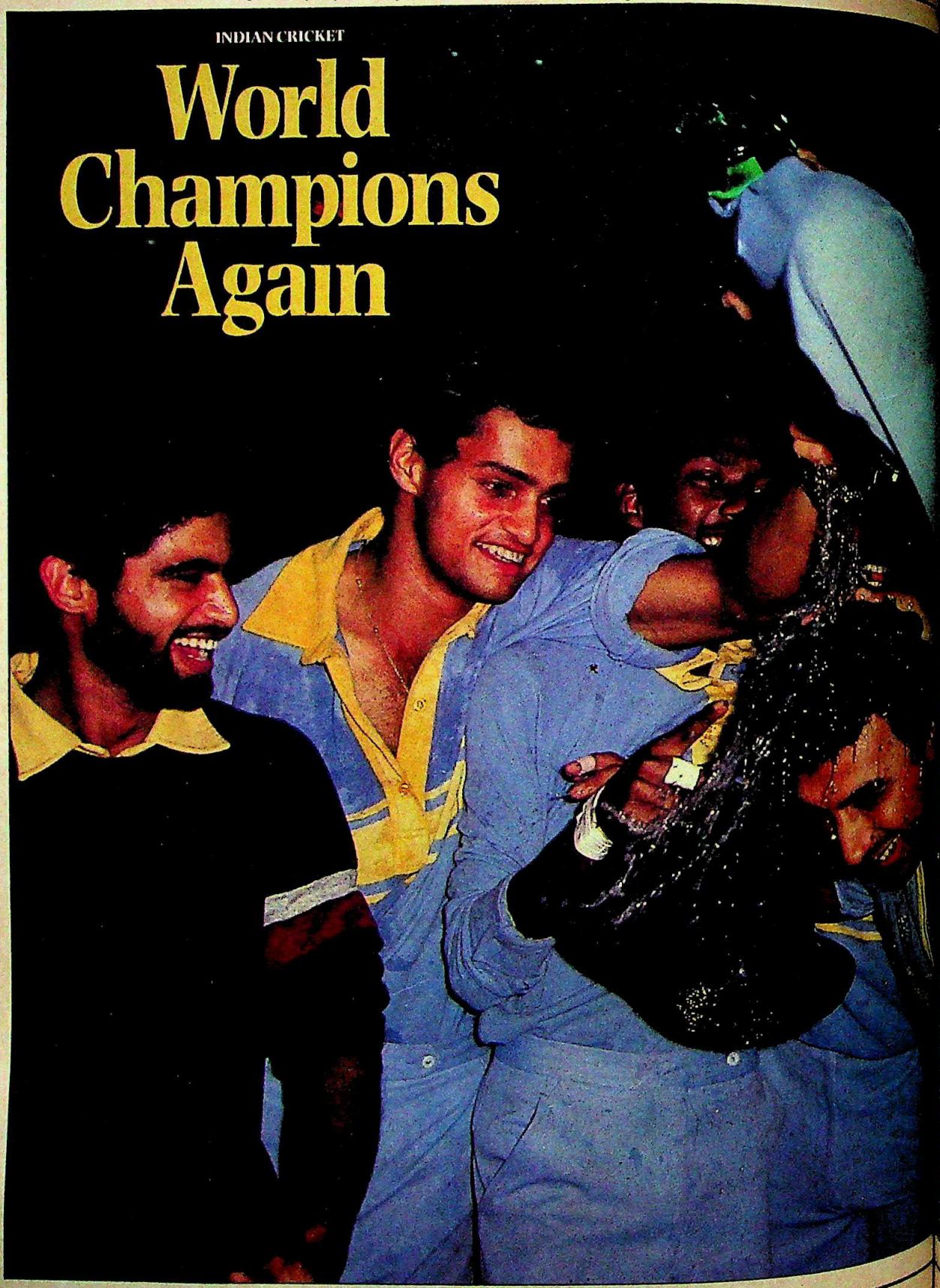
INDIAN CRICKET

World Champions Again



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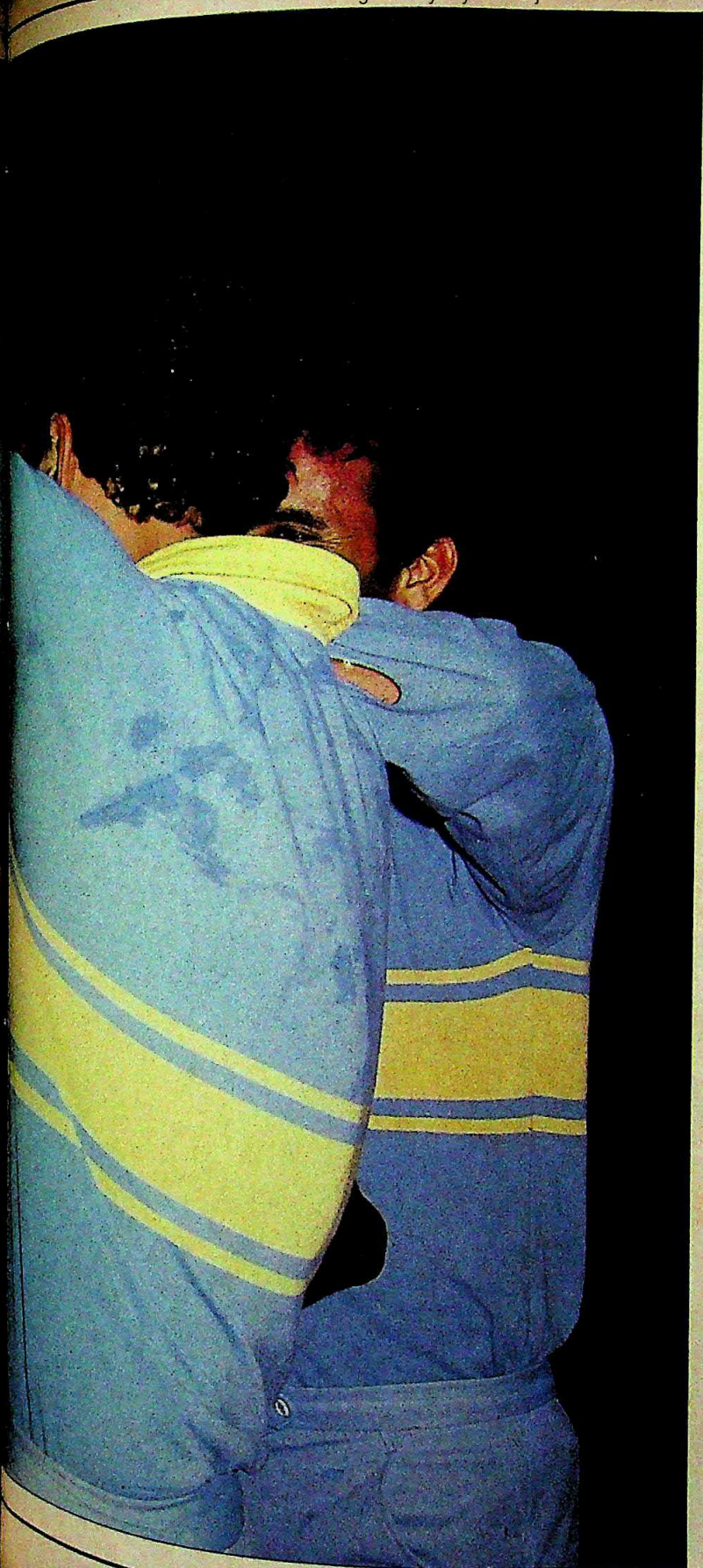

Colour photographs by GARRY SPARKE

HALFWAY through the floodlit finale of the world championship of cricket at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) last fortnight, a pair of teenaged female Indian supporters hastily scribbled a message on a cloth banner and joyfully held it aloft. It read proudly: "Down Under, India is Thunder".

That one statement said it all. To the delighted disbelief of Indian sports fans, a totally transformed Indian cricket team powered its way to an authoritative victory in the seven-nation world championship of cricket tournament, steamrolling over the more fancied Australian, New Zealand and English teams before disdainfully brushing aside Pakistan in an emotion-charged final to win convincingly, for the second time in the span of 20 months, the title of World Champions of one-day cricket.

In June 1983, against all odds, India had humbled the all-conquering West

Gavaskar being showered with champagne by his teammates (left) and proudly holding aloft the trophy: proving a point

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The victory lap in Shastri's new Audi: emotion-charged finale

Indies at Lords to win the Prudential World Cup, a victory largely diluted by the then-expressed view that it was a freak, flash-in-the-pan performance. But last fortnight's superlative display by Sunil Gavaskar's tightly-knit team was undoubtedly because they were without question quite simply the best team in the tournament.

Shrewdly shepherded by Gavaskar playing his last series as captain, the Indian eleven, unchanged throughout except for the final when opening bowler and till then leading wicket-taker in the tournament, Roger Binny, caught the flu, chalked up a 5-0 unbeaten record in such convincing fashion that at no stage in the tournament did they look capable of being beaten, even had they encountered the favourites, the West Indies.

It seemed incredible that barely two weeks before the tournament—held to celebrate the Australian state of Victoria's 150th birthday—Indian cricket had reached yet another nadir, having been roundly beaten 4-1 by a mediocre English eleven in the one-day internationals during the Test series at home. In Australia, fielding virtually the same 1983 World Cup combination, they started off as un-

The jubilant eleven after the final: outstanding teamwork

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overdoses with local bookies offering 20-1 odds against India, way behind the West Indies (1-3), Australia (5-1), England (8-1) and New Zealand (16-1).

In fact, so demoralised and divided had the Indian eleven looked against England that they were widely expected to move in to Pakistan in their opening match of the tourney, specially when their *bete noire*, the fiery Imran Khan, sent back three Indian batsmen with 27 runs on the giant Melbourne scoreboard. Then, in what was to become a regular feature of the Indian teams' performance, Mohammed Azharuddin, fresh from a record-breaking three consecutive centuries, and skipper Gavaskar put on a glorious 132-run partnership that allowed India to cruise past Pakistan's total of 183. Azhar, making his first appearance earned, rattled up an unbeaten 93 to wrest the man of the match title from bowler Binny (4 for 35 in 8.2 overs).

Overnight, the bookmaker's odds changed and India were now favoured at 3-1 to win the tournament. Australia's many cricketing scribes were also quick to comment on the new sense of purpose and self-confidence in the team, something that had been markedly absent just a fortnight earlier. "The boys tend to come closer together on tour," remarked Gavaskar after the match against Pakistan, raising visions of India repeating their stunning World Cup victory.

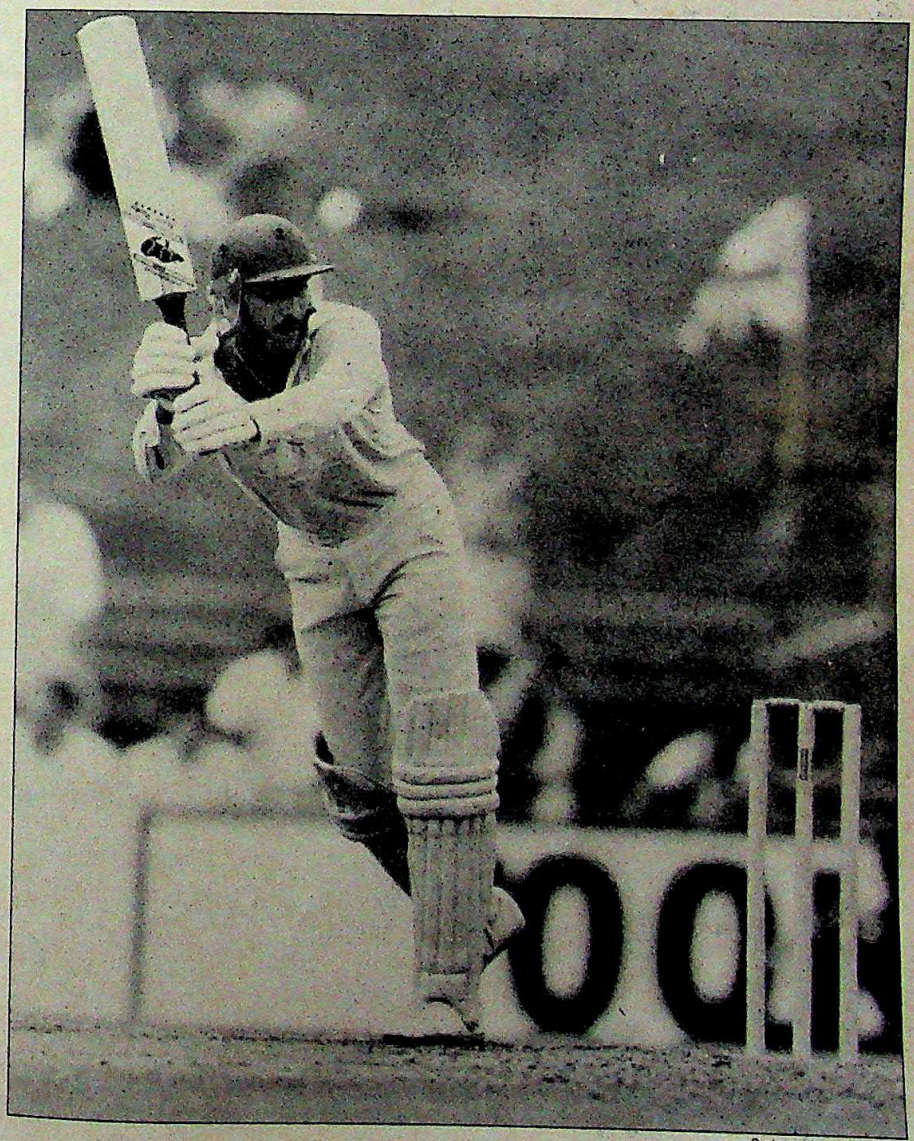
The truth of that statement was all too evident in the very next encounter against England in which India gained sweet revenge by grinding David Gower's men into the dust of the Sydney cricket ground, thrashing them by a convincing margin of 86 runs. Again, it was an inspiring team effort, opener Srikkanth laying the foundations with a typically swashbuckling 57 to earn the Indians their second $500 (Rs4,400) man of the match award, while the spinners, Ravi Shastri and the young and prodigiously talented Sivaramakrishnan, backed up by superb, razor-sharp fielding, eagerly gobbled up three wickets apiece.

But the toughest hurdle lay ahead, the decisive match against Australia, playing on home soil and heavily favoured to beat the West Indies in the finals. Skipper Gavaskar, however, had planned well and wisely. Realising that the key to eventual victory lay in fielding, he had arranged for the Indians to practice in secluded grounds far away from the prying eyes of the rival camps. There, under the watchful eye of tour manager and former Indian spin king Erapalli Prasanna, the team went through extremely strenuous workouts in the muggy Australian weather, fine-tuning their fielding and perfecting their strategy.

So unobtrusively and single-mindedly had they gone about their task that 23,000 Australians—the highest turnout for any of the matches to date—trooped into the MCG to savour what everybody thought would be a slaughter. It was, but not the way that had been expected. The Indian bowling line-up of Kapil Dev, Binny, Mohinder Amarnath, Madan Lal, Shastri and Sivaramakrishnan kept the Australians on a tight leash, giving nothing away while the fielders snapped up every chance that came their way. Australia were bundled out for 163 largely thanks to Kapil Dev (2 for 25), Binny (3 for 27), Amarnath (1 for 16), Siva (2 for 32) and Shastri (1 for 34). It was the third consecutive time that India had bundled out the opposition for a total below 200 and within the stipulated 50 overs.

An Indian victory would ensure that the team topped the group with maximum points from their matches, giving them a well-deserved berth in the semi-finals. They went about that task with consummate ease and confidence, opening pair Srikkanth (93 not out) and man of the match Ravi Shastri (51) hammering 124 runs to give India an 8-wicket victory in just 37 overs and also set up a semi-final clash against New Zealand. Australian captain Allan Border had no hesitation in giving the Indians credit for an outstanding performance. "They plain and simply were the better side by far," he admitted after the match, a statement that was gradually gaining wider currency as the days went by among the captains of the other six teams as well as the cricket-crazy Australian public.

The day before the all important semi-



Ravi Shastri in action: anchorman

Sydney Morning Herald

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final clash, New Zealand captain Geoffrey Howarth flatly stated: "We are very impressed with India and are not going to take them lightly. They seem to be back in the same kind of form that won them the World Cup two years ago. But I think we have their measure." Former Australian cricket captain Richie Benaud was not so sure. "India must go into this game strong favourites to win," he commented on Kerry Packer's Channel Nine, "they have the motivation to prove that their 1983 win was no fluke. I would put my shirt on the Indians."

So apparently, did the large number of bare-chested Sydney spectators, increasingly impressed by the thorough professionalism and dedication of the Indian eleven. New Zealand had no record to go by in the tournament having been given a tough fight by cricketing tyros Sri Lanka and losing a rain-affected 19-over match to the West Indies.But team manager Prasanna and captain Gavaskar were both cautious about the outcome, knowing that New Zealand are a tough side to beat in any one-day encounter.

In the end, it took just 51 electrifying minutes for the outcome to be settled.In the space of 74 balls, a belligerent Kapil Dev and an elegant Dilip Vengsarkar tore apart the New Zealand pace attack that had successfully tied up Srikkanth (9), Shastri (53) and Azharuddin (29) to send India storming into the finals of the world championship of cricket. But once again, it was team effort that really did the trick with the Indians really outstanding in the fielding department. New Zealand, in fact, were the first team to cross the 200 mark against India, managing to scrape together 206 in the face of exceptionally tight bowling, Shastri (3 for 31) being particularly dangerous. He picked up his second man of the match award in four matches but it was really Kapil Dev's explosive innings that turned the tide in India's favour. His electrifying 50 came off just 30 balls—17 in one over off feared paceman Richard Hadlee—and together with Vengsarkar (63 not out) posted India's third century partnership of the tournament.

Then it was back to Melbourne for the elated Indian team to await the outcome of the other semi-final battle between Pakistan and the West Indies, a match that saw the latter humbled in what was captain Clive 'Supercat' Lloyd's farewell appearance before his retirement from Test cricket. Nobody was more surprised than Gavaskar who had psyched up his teammates for a meeting with Clive Lloyd and his pace battery at the MCG on March

SUNIL GAVASKAR

"Everything went right"

"TERRIFIC" was Indian captain Sunil Gavaskar's laconic reply to the question of how he felt after shepherding India to a historic victory in the World Series of Cricket final in Australia last week. But even over a transcontinental telephone line, the normally unflappable Gavaskar's excitement was evident, and justifiably so.

A sizeable portion of the credit for India's dominant showing in the tourney belongs to Gavaskar for the outstanding captaincy and inspiration he displayed in what he insists is his last series as captain. Associate Editor DILIP BOBB *spoke to Gavaskar over the telephone an hour after India's triumph at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Excerpts:*

Q. *How confident were you of winning the final considering you were playing Pakistan and not the West Indies?*

A. Pretty confident.We had beaten Pakistan quite convincingly in our first encounter in the tournament and we knew we could do it again.But I must confess I expected them to make a little more than the 176 they did specially with Roger Binny, our highest wicket-taker, not able to play.

Q. *This has been a low scoring series and considering the extra pressures of a final it could well have been a tough total to match?*

A. Well, we knew that anything less than four runs an over was well within our grasp and Shastri and Srikkanth gave us a dream opening stand.

Q. *Did you go into the tournament with a predetermined strategy or treat each match as an individual challenge?*

A. We took each match as it came depending on the opposition.The entire team had a serious discussion before every match where we analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the other side and decided on our own game plan. But in the end, everything just went so right for us that there really was no need. We merely played better than anybody else as a team.

Q. *The remarkable feature of the Indian team's performance was the total transformation they seemed to have undergone, the team spirit has never been more evident and every member gave of his best. What brou[illegible] this about?*

A. Somehow, there are various un[illegible]voidable pressures on the team when we are playing in India that take away from the overall performance. The players are not as confident and any mistake is magnified out of proportion. Outside the country, the whole atmosphere is different, there's less tension and friction and much more confidence and teamwork.

Q. *Talking of playing abroad, as the underdogs, did the lack of crowd support bother you at all?*

A. On the contrary, we were quite surprised at the level of support we got from the crowds.There were a large number of Indians settled in Australia who turned up to cheer for us and we even got a lot of support from the Australian spectators, mainly the youngsters.

Q. *Every single Australian commentator has been full of praise for your captaincy during the tournament and has also criticised your decision to step down as captain. Ian Chapell says you should continue as a kind of Clive Lloyd father figure. How serious are you about giving up the captaincy?*

A. Very serious. It's something I've given considerable thought to and my mind is made up.The boys have given me a wonderful gift for my farewell appearance as captain and I couldn't ask for a better way to end my captaincy. Now I just want to relax and enjoy whatever cricket I have left in me.

Q. *If you are absolutely convinced, you must have given some thought to your likely successor as well. Who is your nomination for the next captain of the Indian side?*

A. Well, I have absolutely no preferences at the moment. It is something for the Indian cricket board to decide and I really wouldn't like to comment.

Q. *From a captain's point of view, does the performance of players like Binny and Srikkanth mean that they will finally find a permanent place in the Indian Test team?*

A. It's obvious to anybody that they have done more than enough to justify their inclusion. I personally think they are an asset to any side.

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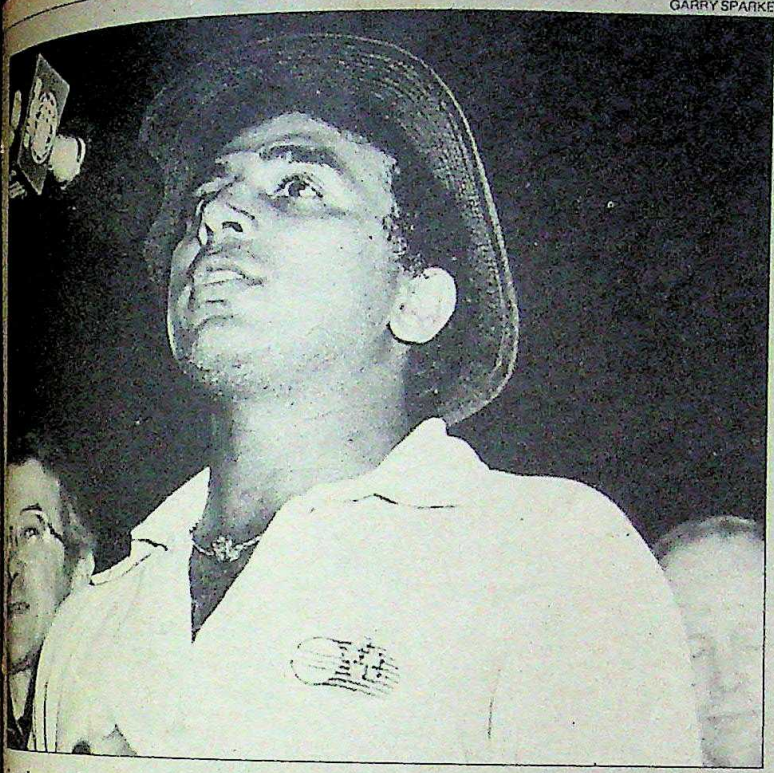
GARRY SPARKE



Gavaskar on the victory stand: bowing out in style

Q. The present team seems to have got the right blend of youth and experience. Do you think they can continue to display the same world-beating form in subsequent series?

A. There is a tremendous depth of talent not just in this team but in Indian cricket in general. There are a lot of youngsters waiting in the wings who have an abundance of talent. Provided that talent can be backed up with the right temperament, Indian cricket has a bright future ahead. Take the present team, for example. One only had to see the enormous amount of effort everybody put in at practice to tone up our batting and physical fitness. We did it quietly and away from the glare of publicity so nobody was really aware of the effort being made. But we really worked hard for our victory. Even the reserves like Manoj Prabhakar, Ashok Malhotra and Chetan Sharma threw everything into the practice sessions. That is one reason why our fielding was much above the rest of the teams.

Q. How crucial were the spinners in your scheme of things?

A. Absolutely vital because it indeed two spells of 20 overs out of 10. Both Siva and Shastri contained the runs and picked up crucial wickets after Kapil and Binny had given us the vital breakthroughs.

Q. Manager Erapalli Prasanna seems to have done a good job. What was his contribution to the success?

A. He was very involved in every stage. He bowled to us at the nets and I was quite tempted to include him in the team except that his fielding was not up to the mark. But seriously, he was an invaluable asset.

Q. You have been quite consistently airing your theory of having neutral umpires for Test series. Has the current competition reaffirmed your belief?

A. Definitely. If a neutral umpire makes a wrong decision there are no hard feelings whereas with a non-neutral umpire, there is always a suspicion of bias. Umpires are an important factor in a Test match and if you have very good neutral umpires officiating it can eliminate a lot of the current controversies and bitterness that arise out of umpiring decisions. I think this competition has only proved my point.

Q. What about your cricketing future? Now that you have decided to step down as captain will you bat lower down in the order as you did here?

A. (Laughs) That all depends on whether I'm selected for the team at all.

10. "I was confident we would qualify for the finals," he said, "but to be facing Pakistan and not the West Indies has come as something of a surprise. Their morale must be sky-high after beating Clive Lloyd's men."

But so was the Indian team's. When they jogged out to field on the sun-drenched expanse of the MCG after Pakistan skipper Javed Miandad elected to bat, they exuded extraordinary confidence and a quiet capability.

Having beaten Pakistan once already in the tournament, India clearly had the edge but even so, the tension in the packed stands was almost physical. On paper, India and Pakistan had played 14 one-day internationals against each other with India having won seven and Pakistan six (one was abandoned). But Pakistan were obviously over-dependent on Imran and Mudassar Nazar while the Indians had a team in which every member had come good.

Kapil, recapturing the bowling form that catapulted him to original fame, grabbed three early wickets and the perfect yorker that shattered Qasim Omar's stumps was described by commentators as the best ball of the tournament. Both Miandad and Imran, who featured in a face-saving partnership, were lucky to get the benefit of the doubt from the umpires before little Siva, the darling of the Australian cricketing pundits, bowled one that turned prodigiously to beat Miandad's bat and the hyped-up Vishwanath behind the stumps had the bails off in a flash to claim his 12th victim in the tournament. Siva, brought in when 18 overs were left, wound up with three wickets in the match to take his tournament tally to 10, making him the highest wicket-taker in the series, an incredible feat for a spinner in a one-day tournament.

Once again, India had skittled out the opposition for less than 200, Pakistan finally inching up to 176 for 9, the only team to last out the full 50 overs against the Indians. But even that was not to be taken lightly considering that the entire tournament had been a low-scoring one. Gavaskar, however, had enough faith in his colleagues to know that anything less than four runs an over was attainable.

When the Indian innings opened, Imran was at his most hostile. But Shastri, showing a maturity far beyond his 22 years, stood like a rock and once again revealed his ability to shine under pressure. Playing his traditional sheet anchor role, Shastri blunted the pace attack to allow the exuberant Srikkanth at the other end to indulge in his pyrotechnics. Between

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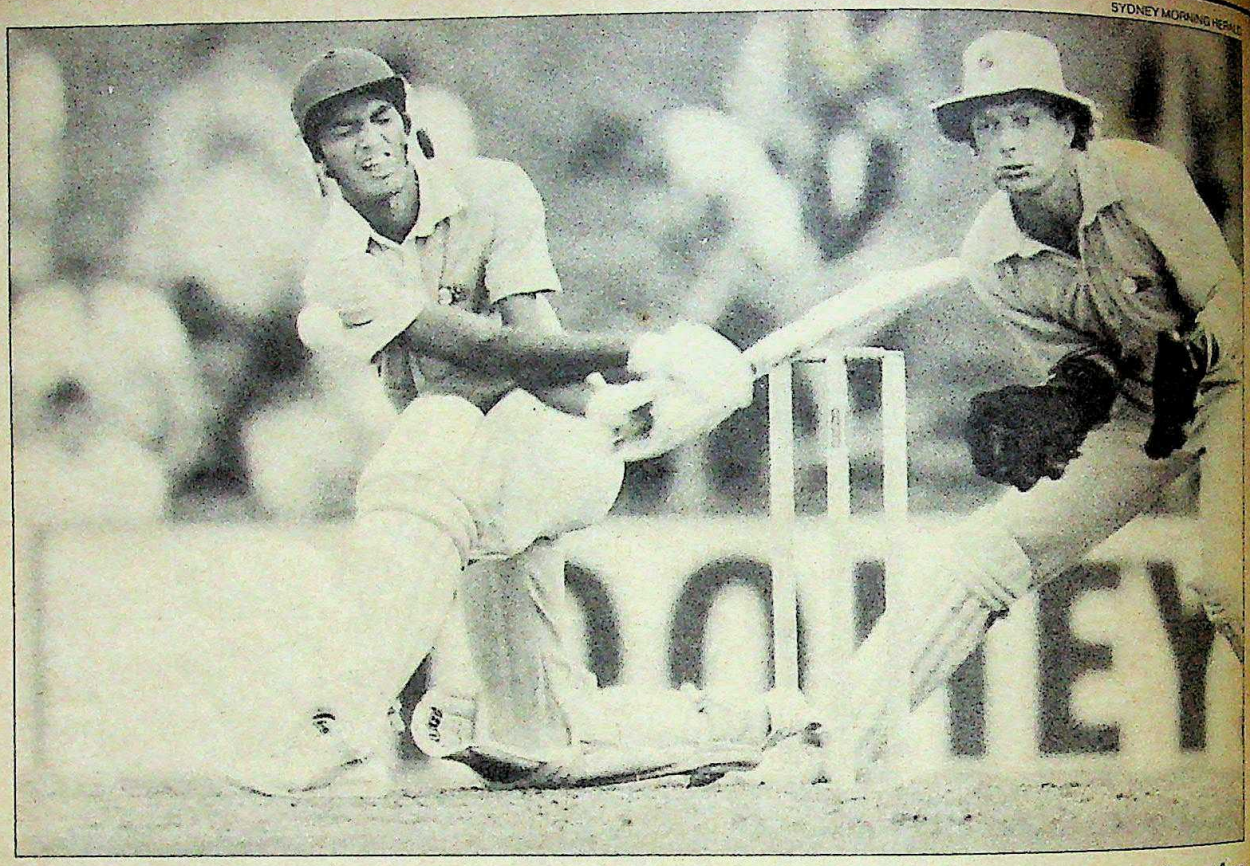
SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



Azharuddin: grit and determination

them, the two openers registered the fourth century stand for the Indians (the sixth in the entire tournament) and by the time Srikkanth was finally out for 67, the champagne corks had already started popping in the Indian dressing room.

It was, in many ways, reminiscent of the World Cup victory at Lords but with some major differences. Unlike the famous balcony scene at Lords, the elation in the Indian camp was more subdued. Even with four runs for victory and all the time and batting in the world, only Test newcomer Sadanand Vishwanath couldn't wait to uncork the champagne. Gavaskar, apart from the occasional smile and nod, looked as tense as if the innings had just started. Kapil, the next man in, paced up and down with the pads on, his irresistible urge to get at the bowling quite undiminished. Veteran Amarnath sat quietly in a corner autographing miniature cricket bats and did not even look up when Vengsarkar and Shastri took the winning run.

It was, more than anything else, a measure of the Indian team's new-found confidence in themselves and their ability and a reflection of their cricketing maturity. Once again, India were champions of one-day cricket and once again it was a spirit-lifting team effort that had triumphed. Srikkanth picked up his second man of the match award and Shastri picked up his third consecutive 50 in the tournament, a feat that, along with his bowling figures of 8 for 166 (he was the only bowler in the entire tournament to bowl his allotted 10 overs in every match) earned him the coveted title of Champion of Champions and a $40,000 bronze Audi 100 car, overshadowing contenders like Imran Khan, Allan Border, Vivian Richards, Richard Hadlee, Malcolm Marshall, Joel Garner and Alan Lamb.

In terms of sheer emotion, Melbourne clearly lorded it over Lords. The Indians, by their grit, team spirit, professionalism and obvious enjoyment of the game, had won the hearts of the Australian crowds and when Gavaskar lifted the $8,000 (Rs 72,400) gleaming gold goblet high in the air, the unrestrained ovation from the 35,000 spectators—the highest ever for a match not involving Australia—reflected precisely that. Then came the moment that will linger long in cricketing history: Shastri accepting the keys to his Audi and turning around to find an impish Gavaskar already in the front seat fiddling with the dashboard gadgets while the rest of the team piled into the back, on the roof and on the bonnet for a victory lap. "What a day it has been," said Shastri when he alighted from the car, "this beats hitting six sixes in one over".

The moment was highly symbolic. Nobody epitomised the professionalism more than Shastri. The tall talented all-rounder had set out to win the man of the series award well before the finals and had made no bones about it in an interview after the match against Australia, just as he had waxed confident about an Indian victory in the final. He had been instructed by Gavaskar to play an anchorman's role and keep one end up and he played that to perfection as his total tally of 182 runs testifies. Shastri also personified the new aggressive, killer instinct that has finally crept into Indian cricket. Said Dennis Lillee, one of the best fast bowlers the game has produced: "The Indians used to be almost apologetic earlier, almost idolising the opposition. It's good to see them getting more aggressive and confident."

But if Shastri symbolised the new awakening, he was not alone. There was Sadanand Vishwanath, the man with a pugnacious jaw and mercurial fingers, hyped up behind the stumps, shouting encouragement to the bowlers and castigating fielders for fumbles. Here was

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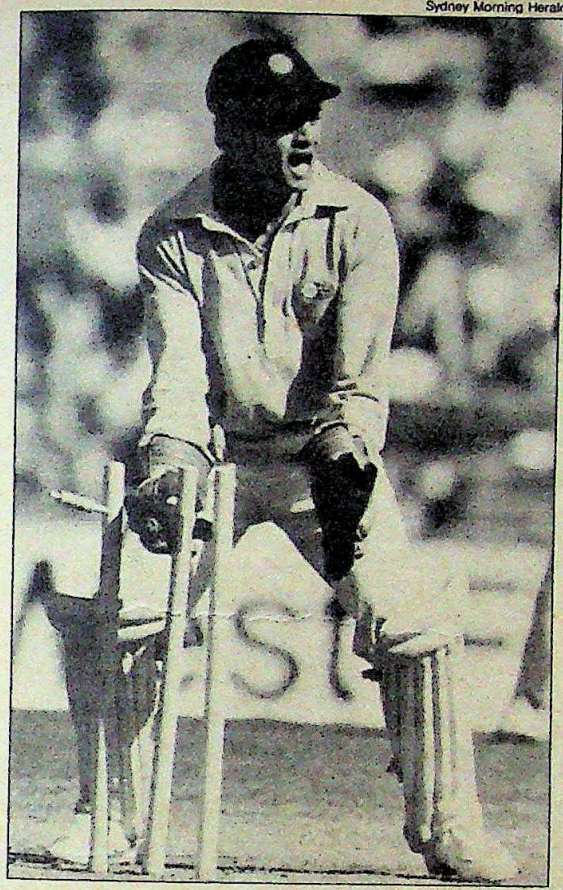
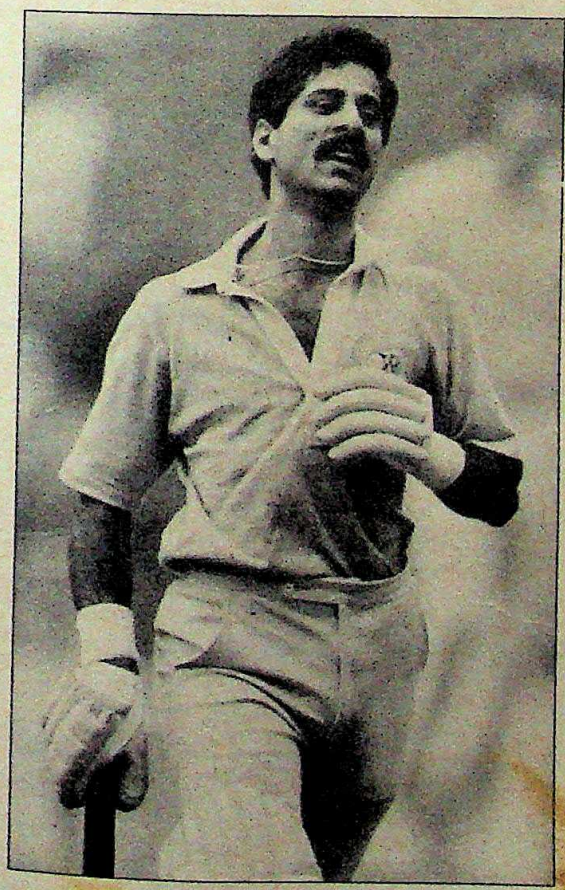
another Indian player with aggressive intent, giving nothing away. In the final match, when Imran Khan charged down the wicket to loft medium pacer Madan Lal over the midfield, Vishwanath immediately moved right up to the stumps. Imran never tried that shot again. India could not have found a more ideal replacement for the ageing Syed Kirmani.

Even young, reed-like leg spinner Sivaramakrishnan, 19, revealed himself to be as competitive as anybody else in the tournament, taunting the batsmen with his mystical variations of flight and turn and frustrating them with his agility and speed while fielding. In fact, so tight was the teamwork that it was virtually impossible to single out individual performances. Indian players topped both the bowling and batting averages with Srikkanth chalking up the highest run aggregate of 238 followed by Azharuddin (187) and Shastri (182) while Siva (10 wickets), Binny (9) and Kapil Dev (9) collected the highest number of wickets. Madan Lal performed his usual workhorse role, picking up seven wickets in a highly economical spell. Mohinder though hardly required to bat, bowled with his usual accuracy and intelligence, giving nothing away and garnered crucial wickets when they were needed the most, while Binny and Srikkanth showed by their all-round performance that their exclusion from the Test side was an insult to their talent.

The most heartening feature was the return to form of Kapil Dev and to some extent Dilip Vengsarkar. Kapil also recaptured the captaincy a day after the Melbourne victory for the four-nation $ 100,000 Rothmans tournament in Sharjah next fortnight. India won the Asia Cup at Sharjah last year and if they win the Rothmans it will be their fourth victory in one-day international tournaments in a row. Apart from the healthy additions to the team's individual bank balances. They picked up $ 51,500 (Rs 456,000) in total prize money at Melbourne besides the Rs 15,000 each player received from the Indian Cricket Board. Undoubtedly they will be showered with more financial blessings when they make their victorious return to India this week.

Sydney Morning Herald





A belligerent Vishwanath (above) and Srikkanth: competitive edge

But the Indian victory was worth much more than the purse. The world series of cricket marked, more than anything else, the revival of Indian cricket. Says Gavaskar: "Our efforts in this tournament will make a lot of people revalue our credentials. I believe that we have an excellent blend of experience and youth. Indian cricket is alive and well and this win in such a competition is a very special victory."

Nobody, least of all arch-rivals and finalists Pakistan, could have grudged Gavaskar and his men that palpable pride. "They fully deserved their victory," said Pakistan Captain Javed Miandad, "they were a better side." Ian Chapell made much the same point when he said that the Indians "showed no weaknesses at all. They were outstanding in bowling, batting and fielding. They have just the right blend of talent and in a year or two this could be the top cricket team in the world". Chapell's only criticism was regarding Gavaskar's decision to step down as captain. Chapell, one of the most successful captains Australia has had, strongly feels that Gavaskar should stay as skipper, bat lower down in the order and play the kind of father figure role that Clive Lloyd has played all these years for the West Indies. Gavaskar, however, seems quite determined to stick to his decision, made before the series got under way, but even he could not have conjured up a better way to bow out. "The boys could not have given me a better send-off as captain and for that I am proud and grateful," he says. But the ultimate comment on India's performance was reserved for Richie Benaud. "India's victory was more rewarding than in the financial sense," he said. "Gavaskar's team will remember the event with pleasure because it lifted them from the depths to which they had slipped just a few short weeks ago. It didn't just give them a purseful of dollars, it gave them pride, and that, whichever way you look at it, is a very valuable commodity in cricket."

—DILIP BOBB with ROD NICHOLSON in Sydney and Melbourne

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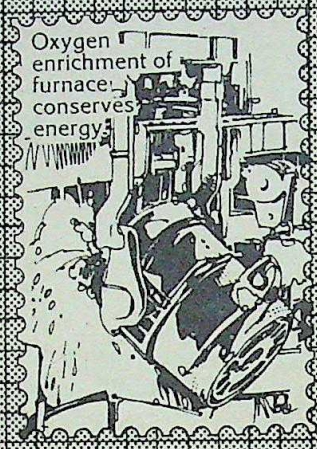
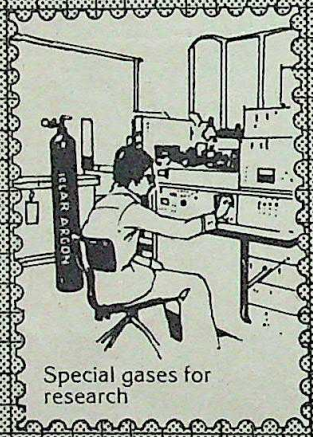
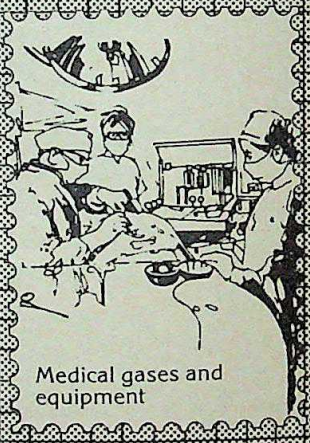
"In commemoration







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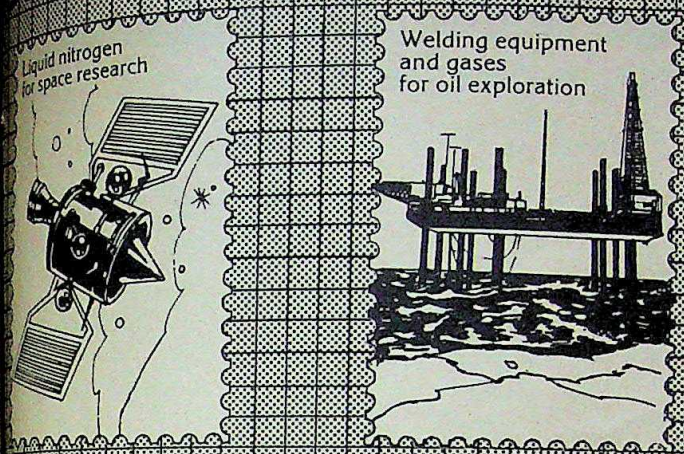
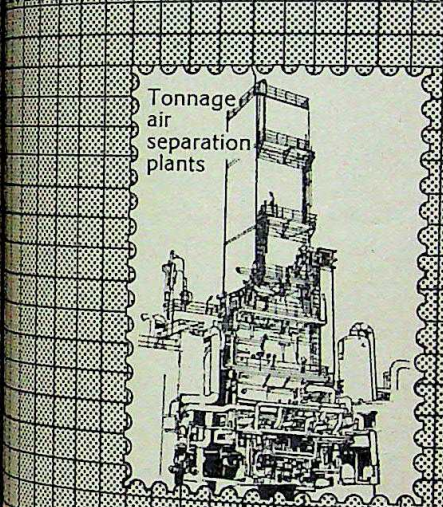
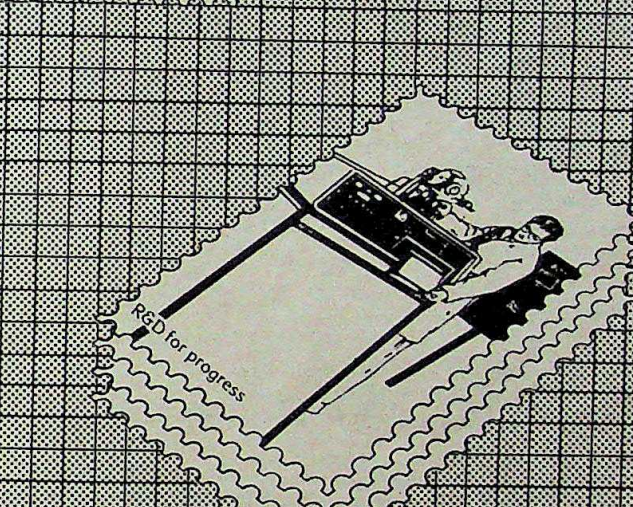
# of 50 golden years"







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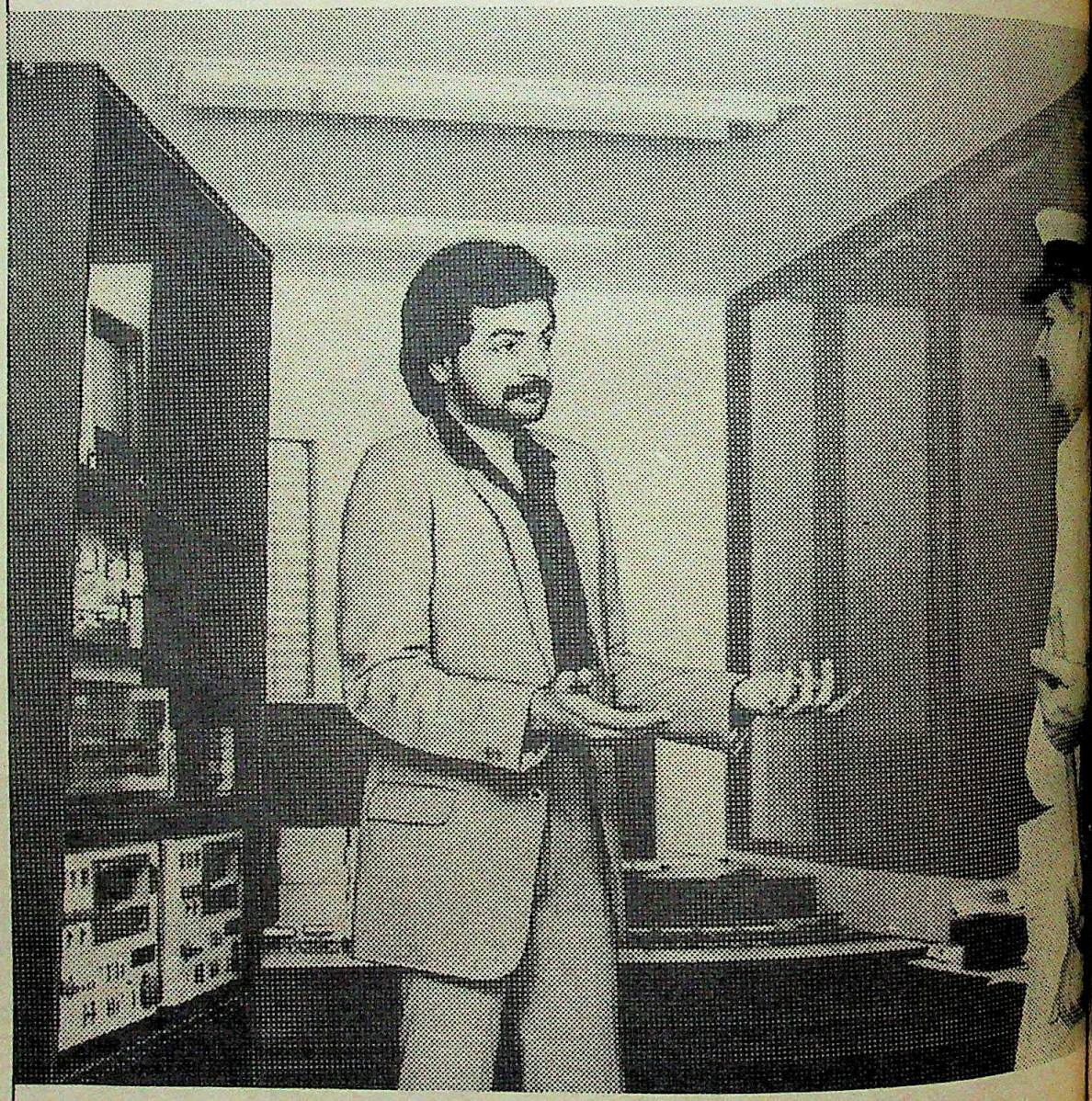

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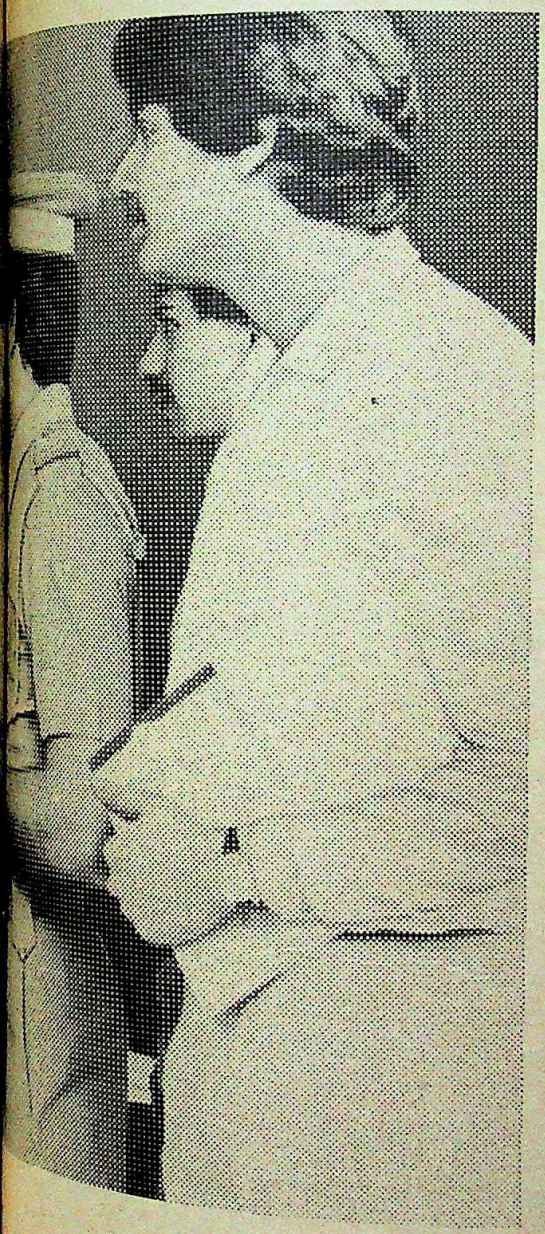

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JUDICIARY

Leaving a Mark

P SUBRAMANIAM Poti has never lacked the courage of his convictions. Whether questioning central intervention in state affairs or speaking of the need for a uniform personal law, Poti has not hesitated to voice his opinions. As a result, he has been no stranger to controversy. When he was chief justice of Kerala, his home state, his relationship with Chief Minister Karunakaran and Home Minister Vayalar Ravi was far from harmonious, with some state Congress(I) men even calling him a CPI(I) stooge.

But last month, when he retired after a year's tenure at the helm of the Gujarat High Court, Poti had every reason to be proud of his record. In a series of judgements the bespectacled judge restored faith and hope in the judicial process and showed that the most effective law comes from the activist judge with a human concern. Leading lawyers and judges in the state could not help remarking that Poti had set a trend his predecessors could ill afford to ignore. And despite the fact that he could speak no Gujarati, Poti was a man on the move, travelling to every nook and corner of the state and pepping up the Lok Adalat system in remote areas by personally attending sessions.

But it was in public interest litigation that Poti's record was brightest. Gujarat has had a long tradition of socially committed judges, like P.N. Bhagwati and D.A. Desai but under Poti it received a new impetus. And a unique feature of his functioning was that quite a few of the cases he took an interest in were sparked off by media reports, many of them in INDIA TODAY. Only a few days after he took over, he freed 300 bonded labourers from the clutches of a labour contractor, and in his judgement lashed out at the contract labour system which exploited lakhs of workers in the state.

Other cases followed in quick succession. One involved hundreds of coal workers who were forced to live in subhuman conditions by a labour contractor under the very eye of their principal employer the Western Railways. Despite the battery of legal luminaries who fought the case for the contractor, within weeks Poti passed orders that saw to it that their condition underwent a sea change. Now 10 workers who work on loading coal on one wagon receive combined wages of Rs 130 a day, compared to Rs 80 previously. They now have identity cards and proper wage slips to prevent fraud, are entitled to free medical treatment and leave, provided with a canteen and a creche, and are given a Rs 150 bonus during Diwali.

RAMESH MENON

"In a growing democracy, the judiciary has a tremendous responsibility. Judges and lawyers have to rise to the situation to keep ensuring that people do not lose faith in the judiciary."

—P. SUBRAMANIAM POTI

As a consequence, the workers who lived in terror of the contractor's henchmen now believe that there are forces that will protect them. And their optimism is not just because of the court case. The momentum created by Poti's decisions has fired many young activists to regularly visit them and create an awareness among them of their rights. This case also forced the state labour commissioner to proceed against numerous other state corporations guilty of exploiting workers, especially after Poti lashed out against the working of the labour department.

For Poti himself, the pitiable condition of many in society has been an eye-opener. "It has been a great education for me. I was shocked to hear tribals in Dang ask me what the law was, whether there is actually a law. They did not know their rights and benefits and how they can live with dignity. There are so many areas like this which need attention," he says. And Poti's interim orders on a petition regarding the exploitation of tribals in Valia taluk in Broach district just before he retired was a land-mark. He directed the Government to ensure the tribals were paid the minimum wage and report to the court on how it enforced its decision, and ordered the police not to discriminate in dealings with the tribals.

"In a growing democracy," says Poti, "the judiciary has a tremendous responsibility. Judges and lawyers will have to rise to the situation to keep ensuring that people do not lose faith in the judiciary." In case after case, and the judge has not hesitated to reprimand whoever is responsible for any abuse of human rights. He has issued interim orders asking the Government to specially appoint factory inspectors to ensure that labour laws are enforced in the case of 18,000 textile workers in Surat and has asked the labour commissioner to report back to him.

Only last month, Poti minced no words when he and Justice I.C. Batt said the state of the Ahmedabad children's home made a mockery of the Children's Act. The home had become a den of illness and crime, and was run with no thought for the children. Poti and Bhatt passed an interim order that the state Government immediately organise health checkups of the inmates and that the juvenile courts take a more humane approach to their job, especially as many of the children had no business being there.

Addressing a packed gathering of lawyers and judges at a reception in his honour just before he retired, Poti spoke of one of his first cases as a young lawyer in Kerala when he had asked a villager to pay Rs 200 to fight his case. When he found out that the villager who lived by selling milk had to sell his cattle to get the money, says Poti, that was the turning point. Never again, he decided, would he tell a poor man to pay in order to get justice. The lawyers and judges listened to him in reverential silence. But whether they deem it necessary to learn from his experience remains to be seen.

—RAMESH MENON

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. . . of hope in her eyes

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AIRCRAFT PURCHASES

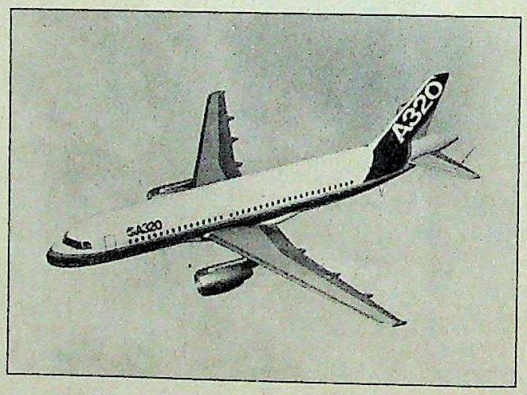
Delayed Flights

IS THERE a jinx attached to aircraft selection in India,or is it just the timidity of decision-shy bureaucrats which holds up re-equipment decisions for years? This question is being asked once again in aviation circles because the painfully slow selection process which produced a deep penetration strike aircraft for the Indian Air Force in the late 1970s and a feederliner for Vayudoot some years later, now looks like being repeated.The sufferers this time are Indian Airlines and Air-India.

The plane selection for Vayudoot by half a dozen committees, dragged on for ten long years till one front running aircraft became obsolete. The same danger now threatens the Boeing 757 selected for Indian Airlines (IA).The Government issued a letter of intent to the 757 manufacturers last summer,but the final decision to order the planes has now been held up because a new exercise has been ordered to evaluate *ab initio*, a completely new type of plane,the Airbus A 320, which will be available around 1988.

In Air-India's case a proposal to buy six Airbus A 310 aircraft has crossed the hurdle of the Public Investment Board(PIB) and now awaits Cabinet approval. Inexplicably, the file has been awaiting Cabinet approval for several months. Both cases are typical of the tortured process of decision-making in aircraft purchases. IA's proposal to buy twelve 757s was approved by the board of directors in June 1984 and it went through an informal scrutiny by the PIB in early December. The 206 seat 757s were due to start arriving in September this year—well in time to meet the heavy traffic rush IA faces in winter.

But the letter of intent remains just that,and Indian Airlines will have to find other ways of meeting the winter traffic rush. Meanwhile Airbus Industrie has told IA that the A 320 offers a substantial saving in operating costs over the 757. IA planners knew that the A 320 was in the works when they evaluated and selected the 757. But suddenly,in the last weeks of 1984 a new committee was set up headed by IA's Deputy Managing Director B.K. Bhasin to evaluate the A 320.That team has been at work for over two months and it is to be seen what its labours will produce.The earlier team which selected the 757 had looked for an aircraft midway in capacity between the 287 seater Airbus A 300 that it flies on the trunk routes and the 126 seat Boeing 737 used on the secondary routes.The 757 fitted the bill, particularly because of its ability to operate satisfactorily to all the airfields presently used by the 737.



The Boeing 757 (top) and A320: the technology trap

Airbus Industrie now argues that its A 320 can perform that very function much more efficiently.It offers just the right capacity increase over the 737, and since the 320 comes a couple of years after the 757 it has improved technology and better fuel economy.But the problem is that the A 320 is still very much a paper plane and will at best be delivered in 1988. What should IA do till then to meet traffic demands that are growing by 12 per cent a year. Airbus Industrie has suggested a way out: to lease some A 300 Airbuses and some 737s to tide over IA's problem till 1988. "Should IA keep waiting indefinitely for state of the art technology, or should it make up its mind and order some equipment to tide over the present crunch," an official asked.

Boeing is now trying to hit back and stall the A 320 bid.It has announced that it is designing a 150 seater for delivery in 1991 using the new General Electric unducted fan engine which promises a fuel efficiency of over 25 per cent over existing jet engines. This announcement by Boeing only underlines the argument that if IA waits for every advancement in technology then it will probably keep on waiting, and the development really worth waiting for would be the gearless G.E. engine with two counter–rotating propellors which would generate the same speed as jet engines.

But one factor which could work against the A 320 proposal is the Government's reluctance to give all its business to one manufacturer and one country.In case it decides that IA should wait till 1988 for the 320, then the Air-India proposal to buy A 310 aircraft may have to be altered in favour of the Boeing 767. If that happens it will confirm Air-India's hunch that its efforts to replace the old fuel guzzling 707s, are star crossed.In the early 1980s it had chosen the Lockheed Tristar only to be informed that its manufacture was being discontinued.Later it evaluated the A 310, the Boeing 767 and the three engined MD 100, and chose the MD 100, just before the McDonnell Douglas Corporation scrapped plans to produce the plane. The Tata Committee finally selected the Boeing 767 only to be told by the Government to take the A 310. Even that could be in danger now.

In any case Airbus probably realises that the IA business will in the long run be worth much more to it than Air-India's. In any case the Air-India order will only be for six planes whereas the IA order, if it comes through, will be worth fifteen A 320s in the first instance, with the likelihood of many more if it is to eventually replace the 737,the workhorse of the IA fleet. But whichever aircraft is eventually chosen,it will reflect poorly on the decision–making process.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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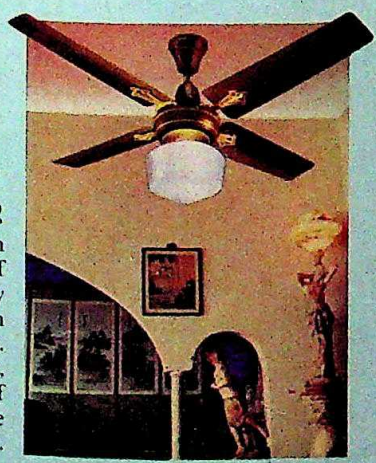

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—Praful A. Shah, Managing Director, Garden Silk Mills Pvt. Ltd. : Chairman, Vareli Group.

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WEST BENGAL

The Language Lament

THIRTY-EIGHT years after the demise of the British Raj, English retains a curious fascination for a majority of the middle class in West Bengal. The compulsory teaching of English has long been abolished in almost every state in the country, but nowhere has such a decision provoked as much controversy and opposition as it has here: a fact that the ruling Left Front is discovering to its great dismay.

Just how important the language still is in West Bengal was brought home rather dramatically recently when the second largest constituent of the Left Front, the Forward Bloc, publicly declared that the Front's educational reforms, particularly the decisions to scrap English and the system of examinations in the primary school stage, were among the foremost reasons for its poor showing in the Lok Sabha elections last December.

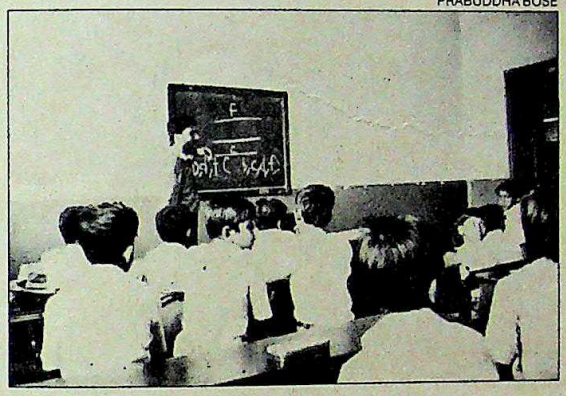
And it is not just the Forward Bloc that has gauged the pro-English trend of popular opinion. The Marxist opponent of the Left Front, the Socialist Units Centre of India (SUCI), has used the language issue to rally large sections of the urban and rural middle class against the Front ever since 1980 when the changes were first introduced. Of late, some Congress(I) leaders have also started voicing their opposition to the abolition of English.

The literate classes in the state, despite their almost jingoistic devotion to the cultural heritage of the Bengali language, fear that by abolishing English at the primary stages the Government is in effect ensuring a lifetime of mediocrity and restricted opportunities for their children. Most palpably worried are the urbanites for whom the institutes of technology, medicine and management outside the state are a paradise that can be reached only by treading the straight and narrow path of an education in English.

To the SUCI, however, the CPI(M)'s intentions are more diabolical. "Just like the British who did not want English to be taught to the broad masses since it would spread liberal ideas, the CPI(M) wants to keep the masses uneducated so that they can be manipulated and prevented from questioning the system," says SUCI women's leader Sumitra Mukherjee. But even the CPI(M) professes the importance of the language. Chief Minister Jyoti Basu declared at the 150th anniversary of St Xavier's Calcutta, his old school: "English is indispensable."

"The issue is not whether English should be taught or not," protests Primary Education Minister Mohammed Abdul Bari. He says the real question seems to be whether the absence of English teaching at the primary level will prevent a child from gaining proficiency in the language at a later stage.

PRABUDDHA BOSE



An English class: great demand

"The Left Front merely endorsed the view put forward by every central committee on education that only the mother tongue should be taught at the primary school stage," Bari adds.

But the result was the production of many graduates who were incapable of constructing even a single English sentence correctly. The malaise, CPI(M) leaders like Bhabesh Maitra argued, could only be cured if the traditional methods of teaching by rote and the monotony of the "C A T spells cat" system were replaced by the scientific method of teaching by association. But reorienting English teachers in all the 10,191 Madhyamik (class six to 10) schools has proved impossible even with the help of the All Bengal Teachers Association (ABTA). Beni Madhab Bhattacharjee, an English teacher in Calcutta's Ballygunje government high school feels that "the new method can help a student pick up the language fast but in the absence of supplementary reading and conversation practice and other forms of exposure to the language children fall back to learning mechanically."

Not surprisingly, the Marxist educationists who assumed that a child could gain sufficient proficiency in English within a span of just five years (between class six and 10) without having any previous encounter with the language have come in for considerable criticism. John Mason, principal of Calcutta's St. James' school, for one, is of the opinion that "four or even six years of learning English do not provide sufficient grounding for switching over from Bengali medium to English medium instruction at the college level".

And judging from the sharp decline in student admissions to government-run schools in urban areas in recent years, most middle class urbanites seem to share Mason's views. "Private primary schools where English is taught have proliferated in recent years in Calcutta," says Sukumar Chakraborty, secretary to the state committee of the Forward Bloc's Prathomik Shikshak Samiti. Chakraborty explains that in comparison to the increase in the number of primary schools from 40,941 to 51,800 in the last seven years, the number of high schools has only increased from 8,544 to 10,191, leading to a terrific competition for admission and increasing the premiums paid for admission to private schools.

The worst hit by the educational reforms, ironically, are the rural masses whom the changes are supposed to have benefitted. "Due to the absence of examinations or any other form of evaluation, there is no compulsion on the teacher to ensure that he does his job properly," says the Forward Bloc's Ashok Ghosh. In the villages of the interior, teachers at times do not bother to attend school for long stretches, or do not come in time, leave alone teaching by a method imperfectly understood by them. The Left Front might be doing the right thing in initiating a programme to bring about literacy to the greatest numbers but in the process it has lowered the level of the education system to that of the lowest common denominator. To the sizeable middle class in the state, the Left Front has only succeeded in creating a shortage of essential English education, just like other shortages of power, milk and civic amenities.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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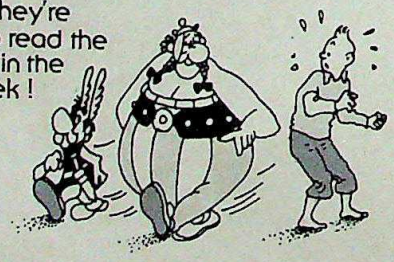

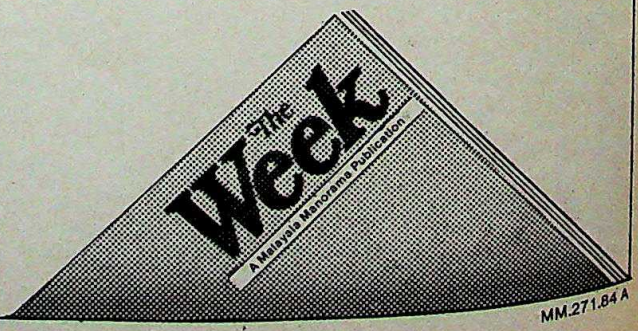

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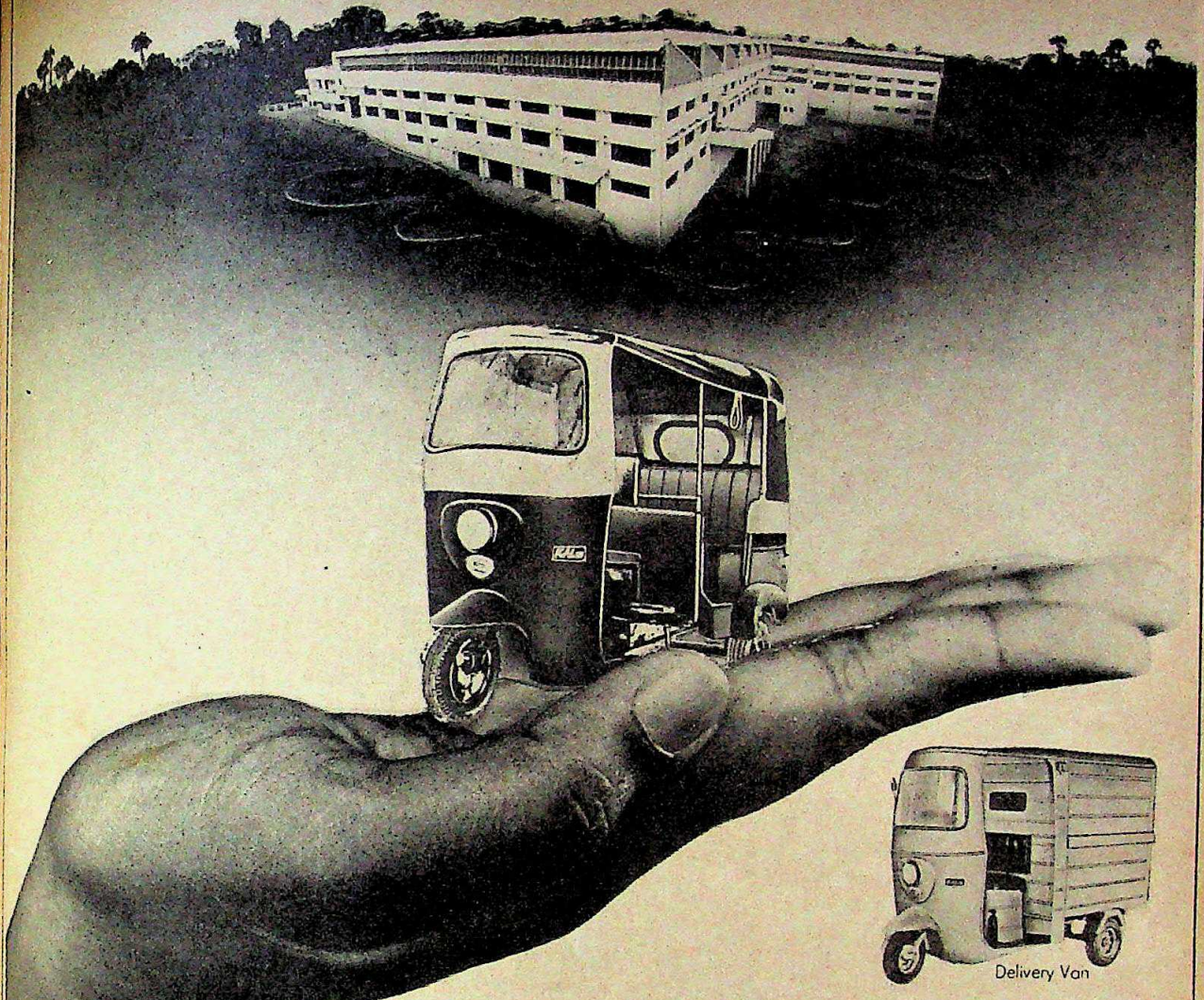

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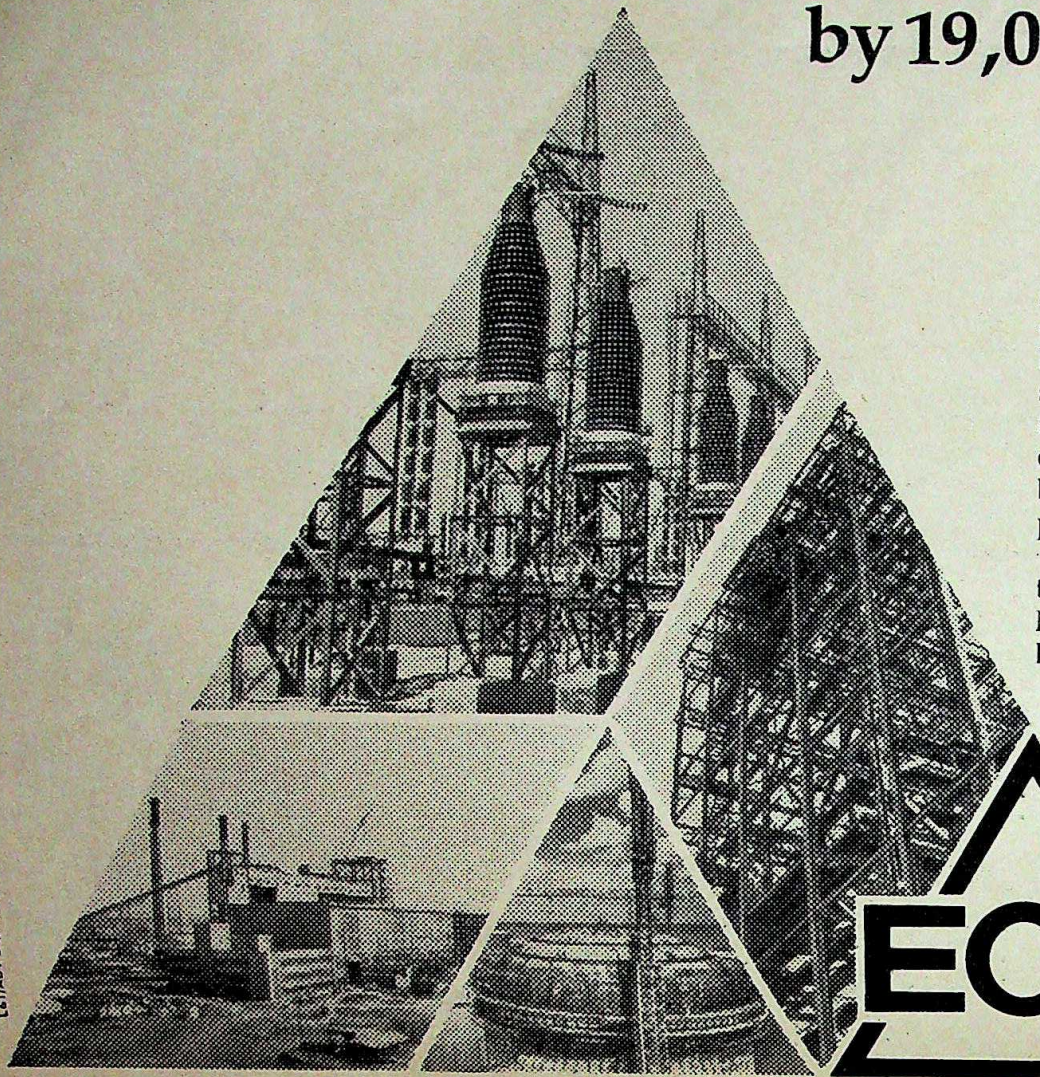
India steps up thermal power generation capacity by 19,000 MW in two decades



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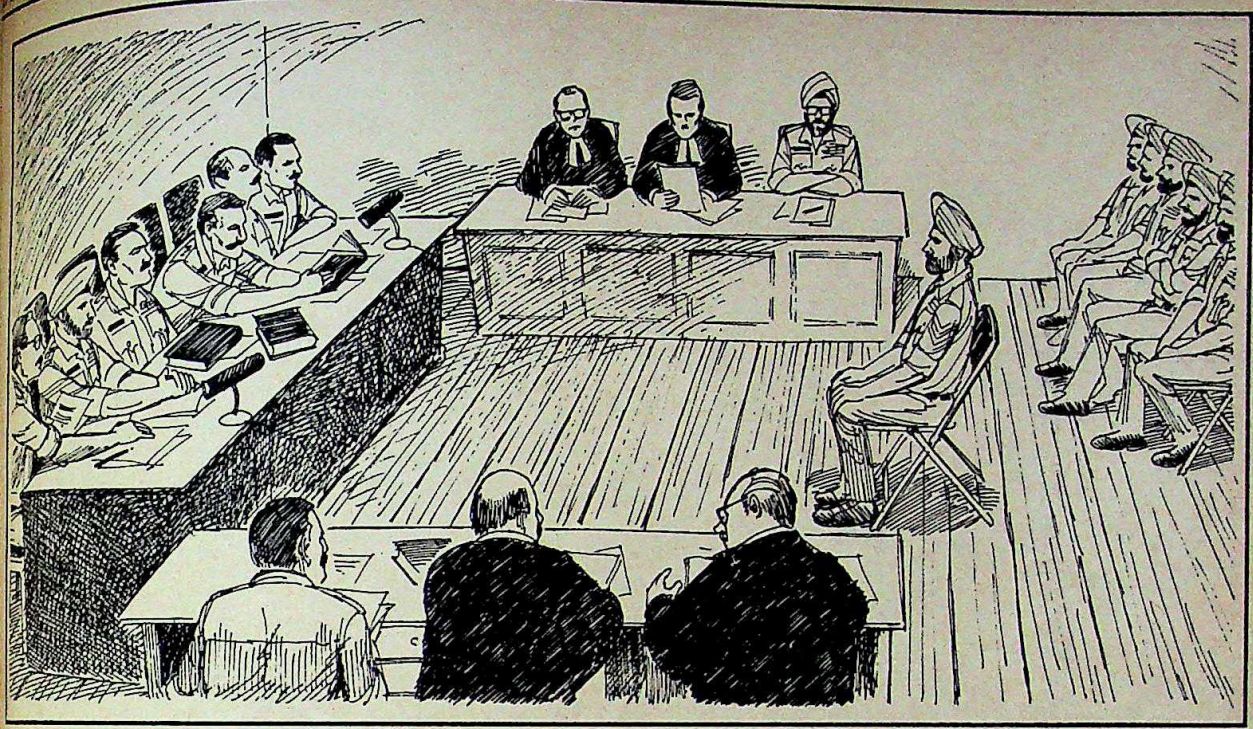

An artist's impression of the court-martial scene

COURT-MARTIALS

Deserters in the Dock

THE WIRY, young soldier adjusts his peak-cap, gives an inexplicable last look at the gleaming bayonet on his self-loading rifle and barks a command. Tensely, he eyes the seven men march past him in single file, the first and the last carrying bayoneted rifles, and the rest, young Sikhs, looking just a wee bit bedraggled, in unkempt uniforms and ammunition boots. Some more loud commands, the armed soldiers salute, do a smart about-turn and retreat, leaving the five Sikhs in steel chairs, facing six middle level army officers, led by a brigadier in the middle. "Silence, GCM in progress", a signboard outside the Grinder Club at the Grenadier's Regimental Centre at Jabalpur solemnly announces. Inside the club hall, Brigadier Ved Prakash Airy, Maha Vir Chakra, calls the court to order and the sentries are back on duty again, ushering in Naik Kuldip Singh, the defence witness.

Thus, last fortnight, the court-martial of a large number of Sikh soldiers, accused of inciting mass desertions, violence and the murder of Brigadier S.C.Puri commandant of the Sikh Regimental Centre at Ramgarh in Bihar got into high gear at Jabalpur. At least six more general court-martials (GCM's) were in the process of being constituted and at least two more began to function close on the heels of conviction at the first GCM resulting in the conviction of Havildar Sadhu Singh and Naik Hari Singh on charges of inciting fellow soldiers and recruits into desertion, looting of armoury and violence.

The GCM's are being held at the numerous regimental centres spread around Jabalpur. On trial in this, the second round, are 10 more NCO's and jawans from Ramgarh—Naiks Baldev Singh, Harbhan Singh, Kulwant Singh, Lance-Naiks Pritam Singh, Bir Singh and Sepoys Surain Singh, Gurmeet Singh, Hakam Singh and Balraj. The GCM's, each one of which contains at least one Sikh officer, are being headed by officers of brigadier's rank. The third one to begin functioning last fortnight was headed by Brigadier R.S. Warriar, commandant of the Mahar Regimental Centre.

Besides judging the guilty, the officers at the trials are also trying to fill in the gaps in the sequence of events on June 10, last year, when the desertions began. Though the trials have been ordered on the basis of an inquiry report submitted by Major-General Inder Raj Kumar, general officer commanding of the Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa area, the officers are still looking for answers to certain questions. And interesting facts have surfaced during the trial. There is, for example, the revelation that while the desertions were triggered off by the vile rumours of oppression on the village-folk in Punjab in the wake of Operation Bluestar there were also deeper reasons behind it. It is obvious that the jawans and recruits were being indoctrinated for quite some time by certain men who were purveying Bhindranwale propaganda.

Lieutenant-Colonel K.K. Varma, commandant of the training battalion at Ramgarh told the GCM headed by Brigadier H.S. Lamba that he had foreseen trouble much earlier when a large number of recruits began to report for the routine physical training exercises, carrying kirpans. He questioned this and a Sikh soldier promptly produced a moth-eaten sheet of paper containing a rule made in the British times allowing Sikh soldiers the right to wear kirpans. Significantly, that is just the argument Bhindranwale was known to use frequently. Many of Bhindranwale's taped speeches mention this.

Again, the recruits and soldiers reacted with an obvious show of anger to the central authorities' reluctance to let the gurudwara prepare the *karha-prasad* in desi ghee. The defence counsel took umbrage at these statements and accused

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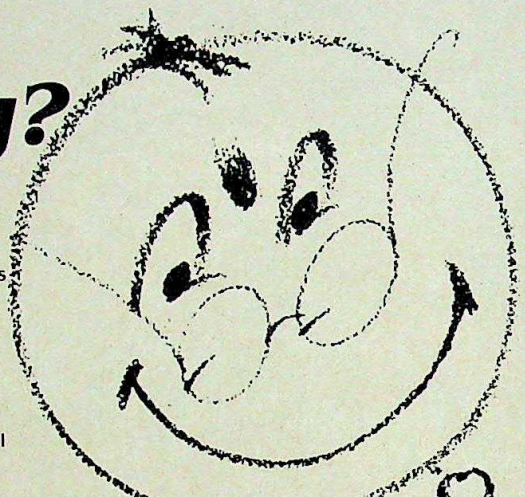
What made UNIDO pay a tribute to our national drug industry?



The national drug industry comprises hundreds of well-managed large, medium and small scale units. They have contributed their talents, technology and resources to create, within a relatively short period, an outstanding record of performance in many directions of clear public benefit. But for these contributions, our national health goals, our drug production targets, our goal of reducing imports and increasing self-reliance, our object of free drug availability at reasonable prices and our aim to carry the name of India to other countries through exports would have remained an unfulfilled dream.

Today, the national drug industry, representing wholly-owned Indian units, is producing about 95% of the important bulk drugs considered as essential by the World Health Organisation and needed by our people. These important drugs include anti-T.B. products, antibiotics, vitamins, anti-diarrhoeal products, hormones, drugs for diabetes, hypertension, anaemias, cancer, asthma, skin diseases, leprosy, malaria, etc. About 80% of the country's total bulk drug production and 60% of formulations are made by the national sector using minimum import components and the country has now become almost self-sufficient in most essential drugs. It is no surprise, therefore, that UNIDO has credited India as a country with a well-developed drug industry.

Uninterrupted supplies of drugs are made available by the national drug industry at reasonable prices throughout the country with the help of an extensive distribution system which involves close co-operation between drug manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers. The national drug industry has always adopted a responsible attitude and co-operated fully in making essential drugs despite temporary losses resulting from certain Government procedures and policies.

Thanks to the positive changes made in the Indian Patents Act in 1970 the Indian scientists and chemical technologists have perfected commercial processes for many new drugs, which are being increasingly, more expeditiously and more economically made available to the Indian public by the national sector. This also saves our country considerable valuable foreign exchange, which would have been otherwise spent on imports and payments of royalties and dividends.

The national drug industry has now established technological capabilities which are not only proving extremely valuable for the country but also are enabling India to help several other developing nations in setting up viable pharmaceutical industries.

Another noteworthy achievement of the national drug industry is in the field of exports which are rising rapidly despite very keen competition from the gaint multinationals. Today, we are exporting our high quality drugs to USA, UK, W. Germany, USSR, Australia and several countries in Africa, the Middle East, the Far East and Latin America.

The national drug industry has performed creditably in line with the national objectives and priorities. It has the will and the capability to excel and do even better. It needs greater recognition and encouragement to fulfil the promise of tomorrow.

IDMA

The voice of the national sector

The Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association

keeping India healthy.

JAISONS 684

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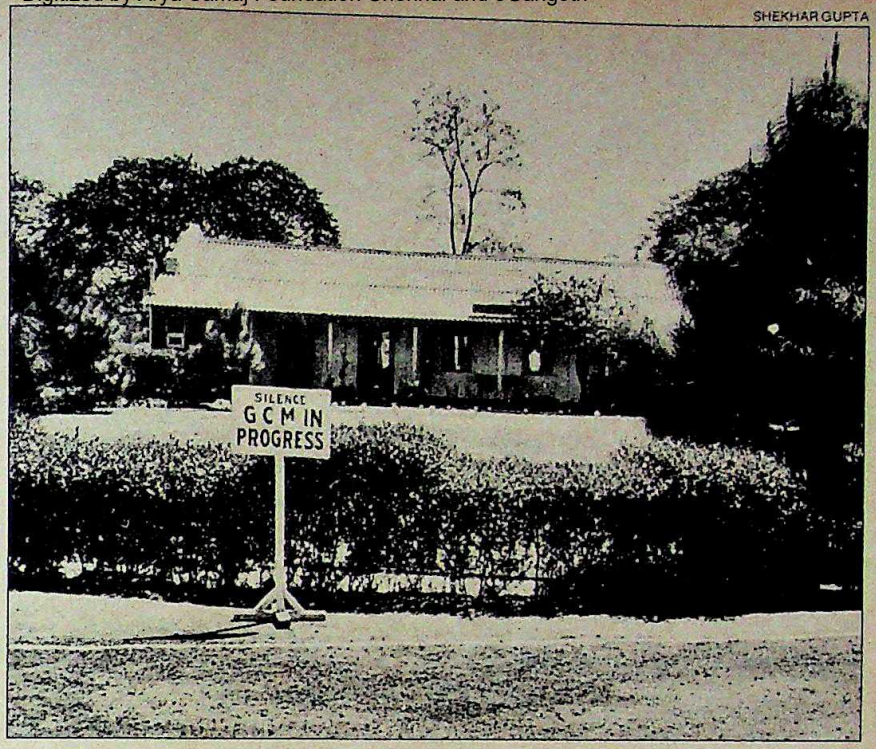
the officer of meddling in the religious affairs of the soldiers. Khanna argued that he was only mentioning some of the early symptoms of trouble and resentfully dismissed the charge of communal bias stating that he knew the Guru Granth Sahib by heart, much better than the Gita.

But such testimonies also underscore the point that the traumatic desertions from the Sikh units spread all over the country could have been anticipated and preventive measures taken. It was also reported in April last year that a large number of Sikh soldiers had met Bhindranwale in the Golden Temple and taken amrit (the holy nectar) from him. It is quite likely that these very men may have spread to the various units and possibly encouraged the desertions.

The second fact on which there seems very little doubt now is that Brigadier Puri's murder was not premeditated. Both from the inquiry report and the testimonies of jawans and officers at the centre—including those who got injured in the June 10 shootout—it is clear that Puri caught a bullet as a large mob of deserters suddenly fired in the direction of the car in which he was sitting next to the window. Two other officers next to him in the car were also injured.

THE INQUIRY has mentioned the names of three soldiers—Giani Gurnam Singh who died in the encounter with jawans of the fifth battalion of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles sent in to intercept the deserting troops, Sepoy Balwinder Singh, who is presently in custody and Sepoy Satnam Singh who died in the Command hospital at Lucknow in the army's captivity. The army authorities say he died of a kidney ailment while the defence lawyers make veiled suggestions of physical torture.

Incidentally, the zeal of the defence lawyers at the court-martials, where the defendants happen to be no more than poorly-paid jawans, incapable of hiring expensive lawyers, is a bit of a surprise. Initially, the army had provided the accused service officers as defence lawyers and also hired a local Jabalpur lawyer Jaya Singh Chauhan on a payment of Rs 250 a day. But as the trials progressed last fortnight Rajinder Singh Sodhi, a prominent Supreme Court advocate from Delhi appeared at Jabalpur and engaged some of the best known and most expensive lawyers in the city to defend the rest of the jawans. The defence lawyers' team is now headed by Satish Chandra Dutt, a well-known figure in the high court at Jabalpur. Officers say this helps the army as it goes a long way to building up the feeling of fair trial.



SHEKHAR GUPTA

The Grinder Club in Grenadier's Regimental Centre: crucial trials

Major-General Inder Raj Kumar said: "We want to maintain the sanctity of the court-martial which is the fairest trial. Can there be anything better than a trial by your own colleagues who have no interest in the issue?" In the same quest for credibility the army authorities have not kept the trials under wraps and readily granted a request by INDIA TODAY to witness the trial.

But the civilian lawyers defending the accused continue to nurse misgivings. "The system here is so outdated", said Dutt, adding, "all over the country now we have trial by a judge but in the army they continue to have the jury system. The defence has its say, but sometimes one feels that the jury's minds are already made up." Similarly civilian lawyers have doubts about the army's system of justice where an appeal to a civil court can only seek examination of the procedure followed during the trial and, if found wrong, can at best lead to a fresh trial, again by a court-martial. Says Dutt: "I don't see why we should persist with this system when even the British have changed?"

Besides, questioning the system there is a body of opinion, both inside and outside the army that are of the opinion that a lenient view should have been taken considering the fact that the desertions were no more than an emotional outburst. This was also conveyed by five retired Sikh generals, in a letter to the President which has been forwarded to the Defence Ministry. But the army says it has been reasonably lenient. Normally desertions, they say, should have attracted much more than 10 years' imprisonment. The GCM's are keeping in mind the mitigating circumstances.

Also, charges are being pressed against less than a hundred people out of the 1,128 who deserted from Ramgarh alone. Since 1,068 of the deserters were recruits, they have been treated separately. Nine hundred of them have already been tried summarily and given rigorous imprisonment for a mere 28 days. A decision on retaining them in the army is yet to be finalised. It is perhaps deliberate that the army has not yet scheduled the trial of the most prominent accused, Balwinder Singh, who is being blamed for the death of Puri. The trial will attract much wider attention and the authorities are taking no chances and are treading extremely warily.

Yet with a large number of the Sikh organisations, including the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) determined to defend the deserters to the last, the cases are unlikely to end at the GCM stage. Most will result in appeals and, possibly, also in a few landmark judgements on the system of jurisprudence in the army.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Jabalpur

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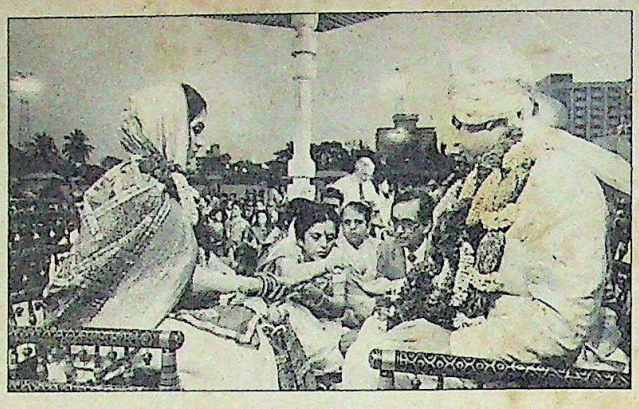
◆ As a couple, they are tailor-made for each other: **Mukesh**, son of the Reliance Textiles wizard **Dhirubhai Ambani** and **Nita**, daughter of an executive in Birla's Century Rayon Mill. Last fortnight, the two decided to weave their lives together in what papa Dhirubhai insisted was a "simple and tasteful" wedding in Bombay. Mukesh, the 27-year-old heir to the loom, came not on one of the garishly dressed nags hired out by wedding caterers in Bombay, but simply in a buggy drawn by six stallions. The guests at the dandiya ras function were allowed to take their beautifully painted ras sticks home, and the wedding card—embellished with Mughal prints—was quite a collector's item. As for the wedding reception, designed as a beautiful rural fair, a mere 5,000 people turned up. Obviously when Dhirubhai hosts even a simple wedding ceremony—it's an affair to remember.

◆ It is **Upendra Nath Ashk's** most novel idea, but he's not going to put it in a

Ashk: counter-moves

book. The 74-year-old Hindi playwright, satirist, author—producer of a 100 novels—opened shop in his home town Allahabad recently. No, not a book shop but a grocery store—as his own unique way of saying that after years of putting his blood, sweat and *ashk* into literary work he is still unable to support his family and that it is warped government policies that are responsible for putting a creative spirit behind a humdrum ration counter. Ashk has in the past sold newspapers, handkerchieves and lemons. "I see no harm in it," he said, "I can sit on the road and sell things." If that manages to raise some literary hi-brows to action, very well. Otherwise, the store—if not the story—can go on.



The Ambanis: perfectly suited

◆ *A Passage to India* might very well work for **Victor Banerjee** as a passage from India—judging by the amount of kudos he's getting the world over. Last month, Banerjee was named Best Actor of 1984 at the D.W. Griffith awards ceremony in New York. "I was fortunate that David Lean went to India to search for an actor," he said modestly. Now that the world has discovered Banerjee, there's not a thing he can do wrong. He has been called the best thing about Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire* and *USA Today* wrote that "Banerjee's acting is something to remember at Oscar time." The 38-year-old star has certainly sailed a long way since he first played female parts in school productions.

◆ She's the loveable girl-next-door, everybody's two-

Chutki: testing time

pigtailed little sister. But even little ones fly the coop and **Loveleen Mishra**—Chutki to all—recently abandoned the homey security of *Hum Log* to become a Marxist-oriented young woman in Govind Nihalani's latest film *Aaghat*. That done, she's back where she belongs—in homes all over the country thrice a week continuing with the continuing domestic crises of *Hum Log*. She's not joining films yet, insists the first year history honours Lady Shri Ram student. In fact she plans to do nothing in the near future except study. "The film was very exciting," she chirps, "but now I have to pass my exams or my parents are going to say, sit at home."

Banerjee: going west

◆ A Tamilian woman living in South Africa comes to India in search of her roots but all she gets is cheated and humiliated by her countrymen. Depressing stuff, but the novel *Oru Kaveriyai Pola* has earned for its authoress Tripurasundari—better known as **Lakshmi**—the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for 1984. Like in all her works there is a bit of Lakshmi in this story too. She lived in South Africa till her husband died and returned to India only in 1977. She didn't like what she saw: "The progress in Tamil literature," she laments, "is only in obscenity and not in ideology." Her own writing

S. ALEXANDER

Lakshmi: root cause

—praised for its realistic detail and strong narrative power—champions the cause of women. Said she with righteous conviction: "When a man like Sarat Chandra Chatterjee could do so why not a woman like me?"

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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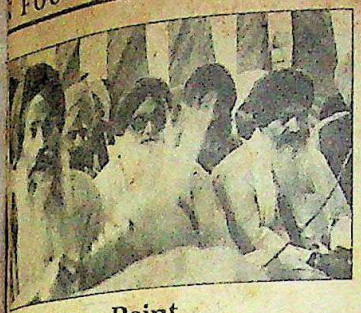


A Turning Point

The Punjab pendulum swung once again last week when the Centre conceded the demand for an independent inquiry into the riots after Mrs Gandhi's assassination. Other concessions announced made it clear that the ball was back in the Akali court.

COVER STORY 18

Clearing the Air

There has been a marked change in the once-charged atmosphere in the south Asian region. The change is the direct result of the hectic tour of neighbouring capitals by Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari at the initiative of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

NEIGHBOURS 70

The Poisonous Plants

The rapid industrialisation of Bombay city seems to have been at the expense of environmental safety standards. A report compiled recently has come out with some shocking facts about the lack of safety and pollution measures in the city's industrial units.

ENVIRONMENT 74

Out of Currency

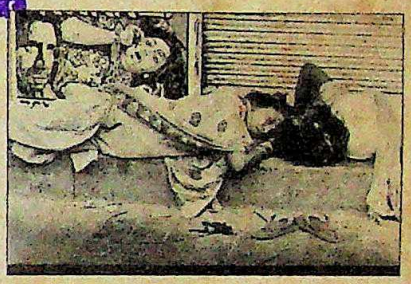
The arrest last month of Mrugesh Jaikrishna, one of the country's top industrialists, under COFEPOSA, has led to the unearthing of details about his past political connections and the dubious manner in which he rose to industrial prominence.

INVESTIGATION 86

The Kidnap Trap

Bihar's west Champaran district has become unique for a lucrative kidnapping racket being run by a handful of gangs. Recently, the Bihar police launched Operation Black Panther, an all-out bid to smash the gangs and end their reign.

CRIME 122



Is Calcutta Dying?

Rajiv Gandhi's statement in Parliament that Calcutta was a "dying city" stirred up a hornet's nest. But there was enough truth in his statement. Calcutta has been going steadily downhill and its economic life is grinding to a halt.

PHOTO FEATURE 129

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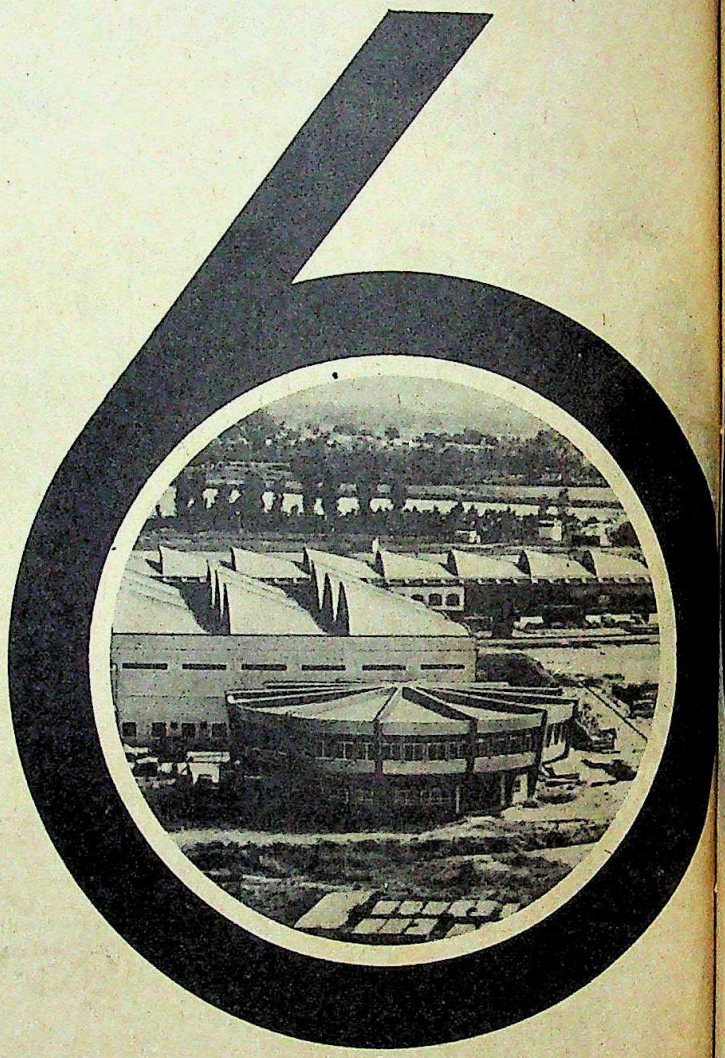
As well as our 'thirds' and 'fourths'.



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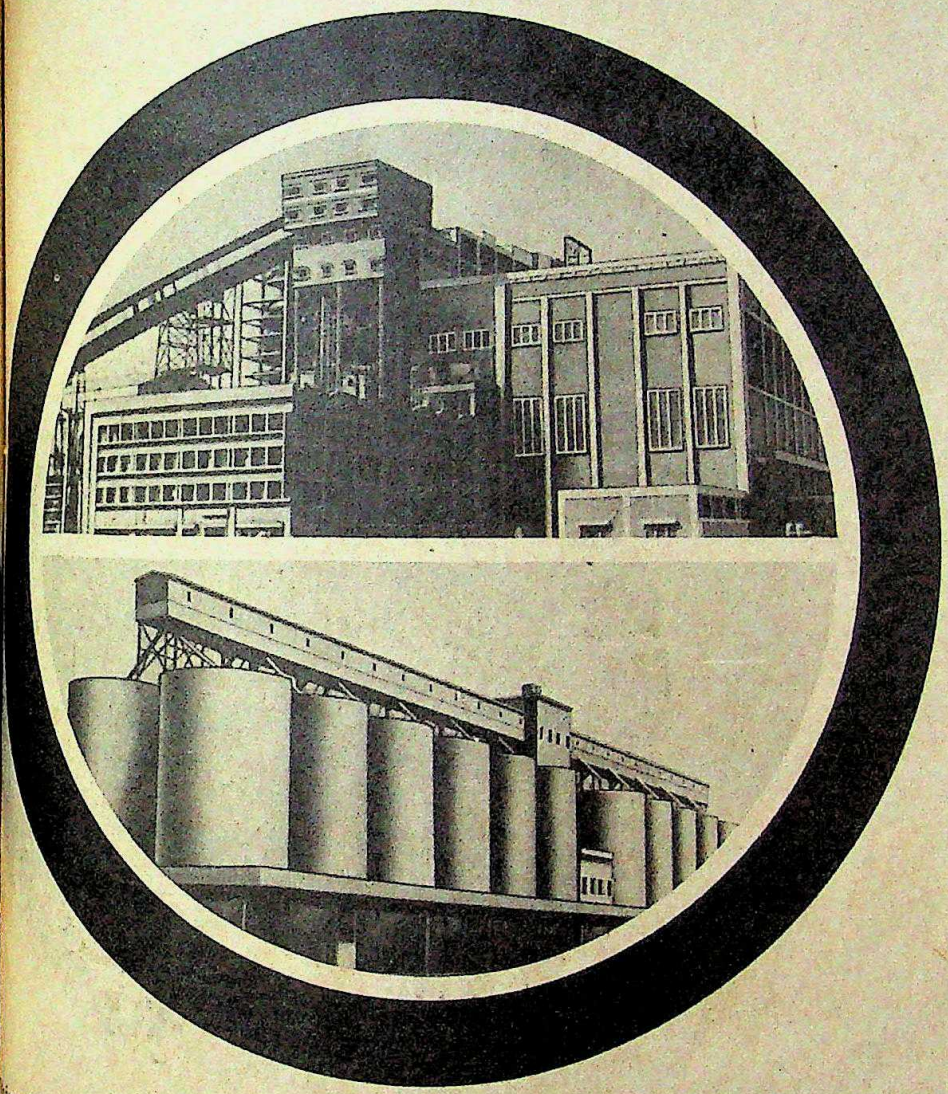

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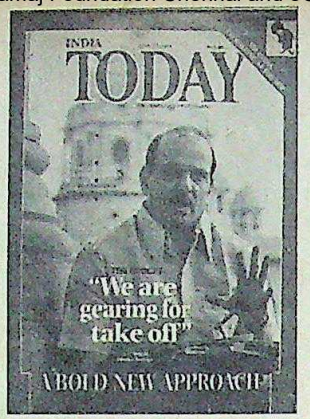

CLEVER CAMOUFLAGE

The cover story "The Budget: A Bold New Approach" (April 15) made interesting reading. It has been a blessing in disguise for the elite section of the society who spend many a sleepless night pondering about how to evade taxes. However, the hike in prices of petroleum products coupled with the increase in rail freight and tickets has caused a lot of concern and worry to the common man. Naturally the prices of essential commodities will also subsequently rise. The finance minister's budget has punched the middle class below the belt.

Calcutta ARVINDER SINGH WALIA

■ The cartoons "pre-budget and post-budget" said it all and much better than any write-up on the subject could.

Calcutta SUBIR K. LAHIRI

■ The finance minister's new-look budget is not merely a balance sheet, an annual profit and loss account of the Government but it gives a clear perspective of the long-term fiscal policies of the Government. The budget is the major instrument through which the Government tries to direct the economic activity of the nation. The logical sequel to the many tax reliefs and liberal concessions to the industries should be a fillip to the country's economy which is now at take-off stage. But the Government can't be complacent or over-confident but should take all measures to keep a tight leash on prices. We can't and should'nt expect miracles to happen over night.

Bangalore PREMLATHA KRISHNAMOORTHY

■ Vishwanath Pratap Singh has conceived the so-called growth-oriented budget in such a way that it is neither open to criticism nor praise. It is a well-known fact that the budget is a camouflaged benediction to the industrialists and the likes who are well above the average middle class income level. On the other hand, is a definite burden on the middle class and the poor, who constitute a majority of the population, whose incomes are far below the tax limits.

Bangalore K. CHIDANAND KUMAR

RABBLE-ROUSING

Your Comment "Games Politicians Play" (April 15) was very apt. As soon as a communal riot starts in the country, a war of words between the politicians of the ruling party and the Opposition starts. It is these allegations and counter-allegations that make the situation worse. There is absolutely no need for the politicians of any party to visit the affected area, as his statement after the visit incites more trouble. All such statements should be made after the lapse of a certain period of time.

Lucknow DHIRESH BAHADUR

■ Our major problem is that the politicians practice the "divide and rule" policy creating hatred, bitterness, fear and distrust among the various religious groups thus inciting riots. Blaming the Opposition or appointing a judicial inquiry will not solve the problem in any way. Nor will a high-powered all party body or a national commission on "communal harmony" as suggested by the National Police Commission help. The immediate need is a change of heart on the part of our politicians.

Madras A. SESHA GIRI RAO

GRAVE RESERVATIONS

Your special report "Reservation Policy: The Caste Crunch" (April 15) explicitly reflects the flimsiness of the reservation policy followed by various state governments. The outright reservation of seats for a particular community is reason enough in itself for social discontentment that prevails, as it deprives more deserving candidates of their legitimate right on an undemocratic pretext. Such policies sound like absurd anachronisms in the 20th century. If the Government is so concerned about the welfare of particular sections of the downtrodden communities, then their economic uplift should be their primary aim.

Dehra Dun AJAY SINGH

■ The aim of the reservation policy should be to lessen the economic disparities existing in our society and not to foster ill will among various fragments of

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the society, which is exactly what the present policy seems to be doing. Reservations should be made purely on the basis of economic backwardness and the caste factor should be abolished totally.

SOURABH MISHRA
Ranchi

■ It is shocking to read Jagjivan Ram's statement that he "does not want reservation because it is a means of economic upliftment but because it is an instrument of social change". I think that only abolishing reservation could bring about an upliftment of the Harijans. Because it would be only after this that nobody would be forward or backward.

KAMLESH K. SHRIVASTAVA
Bombay

■ The homely example of the Mandal Commission drives home the point that reservations have to be made at the initial stage of education—by having public schools and other similar institutions to reserve seats at lower levels for the "Lallus"—who should be given free education to nullify the "obvious... vast differences in social, cultural and environmental factors". Thereafter he/she should be on his/her own.

The policy, however, chooses to miss this aspect by a mile and picks up Lallu when he is almost an adult and thereafter pushes him upward where he is a total misfit causing not only heartburn in others but a loss to the nation through jobs not well done.

Bombay R.S. NIRBHAY

CALLOUS CRITICISM

In his letter Surendra Kanstiya (April 15) writes "Yesterday they (the cricketers) were flops, today they are a big hit and tomorrow they may go down... Rama Rao, Hegde and Bhandari's victory in the assembly elections is a more significant achievement." Doesn't he realise that politics is equally prone to ups and downs as is cricket. Politics may have its own historical facts but so has cricket.

Bhatinda DEEPINDER SINGH

■ Would Surendra Kanstiya have labelled Hegde and Rama Rao as flops had they lost the assembly elections? And does he label their victory as sheer luck as he does the cricketers in Melbourne?

Lucknow RAJESH MEHROTRA

TOTAL TRANSFORMATION

The cover story "World Champions Again" (March 31) was superb. Our cricketers have magnificently proved that they are undoubtedly the masters of the limited overs game, by winning in a line the Prudential Cup, the Asia Cup and the World Championships in Melbourne. India was treated as underdogs in this game but they have proved it otherwise much to the delight of the cricket fans in India and abroad. We now have the right blend of enthusiastic youngsters with a lot of potential and the more experienced and seasoned players. This has made a total transformation in the Indian team giving it a professional touch. Given the same degree of dedication, determination and self-confidence coupled with excellent team spirit we can hope that India will come back in full striking form in the five-day Tests too.

Faridabad GEETHA BALASUBRAMANIAM

■ India's recent victory was the result of astute leadership and commendable team spirit. This win has proved that India's Prudential Cup victory in 1983 was not a fluke.

Jorhat (Assam) RUPJYOTI BORTHAKUR

■ Your article on the recent success in Australia filled me with pride and joy. I had spent the last year in Australia where I had to fight tooth and nail every time an Aussie made a derisive comment about the state of Indian cricket. I would give anything to be there now.

Madras ANURADHA BALARAM

■ Simply taking some runs and wickets does not make a person worthy of a Champion of Champions title. While choosing the Champion of Champions more importance should be given to the player who is responsible for the turning point of the game through his individual performance at a critical juncture. It was Kapil who once again proved his mettle by taking 30 runs and three wickets which ultimately helped India win the match against Pakistan at Sharjah.

Palghat RAVI

■ Was very disappointed with the cover story. One expects you to do stories with themes which would induce one to think about the bleak condition of Indian sports. I think one of the most inappropriate and unnecessary little "colonial heredity" which the English people left for us, is cricket. This game which is being played by a handful of countries (mostly with a colonial past) and mostly by a section of a privileged group, is being given unwarranted attention. There are other people who share my view. To quote Indu Puri in the same issue "... Even the press bothers only about cricket." Think of Ami Ghia, seven times national badminton champion. Has she ever made it to the cover of a sports magazine? Ravi Shastri and Kapil Dev are always there.

West Berlin SABYASHACHI GUPTA

AN ACUTE AWARENESS

Referring to the Comment "Messages in the Mandate" (March 31) the Government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi should understand the messages the voters conveyed in the recent assembly elections. The voters of Karnataka, for example, by overwhelmingly voting the Janata Party to power, as against the Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha elections, have warned the prime minister that they are not ready to be taken for a ride. Rajiv Gandhi's success will largely depend on how clearly he understands the message.

Kathmandu SANJAY UPADHYA

The triumph of Ramakrishna Hegde in the Karnataka assembly elections ("A Historic Comeback", March 31) has highlighted the political awareness of the electorate. They overwhelmingly supported the Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha elections giving it 24 of the 28 seats but in the assembly elections they not only favoured the Janata Party but also improved on its showing of 1982 when it formed a minority government with the support of the BJP.

Chandigarh ASHOK GROVER

■ Ramakrishna Hegde's historic comeback suggests that there is scope for value-based politics at least in Karnataka. The landslide victory of the Janata Party is in response to Hegde's integrity and sincerity. The entire credit should go to him.

S. Paravur, Kerala O.JAYAPRAKASH

JUSTICE FOR ALL

Your profile about P. Subramaniam Poti ("Leaving a Mark", March 31) was excellent. If ever a man is to be honoured for bringing justice to the common man, the choice can be none other than Poti. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Poti has laid the foundation for a more socially relevant judiciary. The mark left by him is indeed indelible.

Madurai S.PRAKASH

■ It is only because of judges like P. Subramaniam Poti that the image and dignity of our judiciary has gone up. All those concerned with the judicial adminstration should emulate his example.

Ayakudi, Tamil Nadu N. PUGALENDHI

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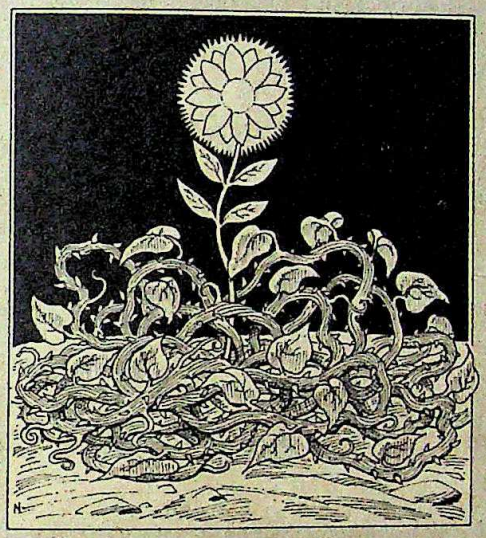
Peace Offering

FOR THE first time in months and months of turmoil, bloodshed and acrimony, peace has a chance in Punjab. There will be some who will argue that the Government's initiatives of the last four weeks ought to have come earlier. Others will say that the Government is guilty of appeasement. And there will be some who will say the Government's announcements don't go far enough. Whatever the merit in all these arguments—and some can't be dismissed out of hand—they do not negate the basic fact that the steps taken one by one over the last fortnight—and other steps that must logically flow from these initiatives—should begin to restore a sense of confidence among the Sikhs at large, and create a climate for a long overdue reconciliation.



Nothing can, of course, be taken for granted. The wounds in Punjab and elsewhere run deep. There are terrorists who remain dedicated to stirring up trouble. The Sikh community lacks a credible and widely accepted leadership. The Akalis are fragmented and, after so many months in jail, are still searching for a constituency. And, of course, there are the Hindus who were the victims of the terrorist violence in Punjab prior to Operation Bluestar whose views and reactions are germane to any long-lasting peace.

It follows that peace in Punjab will depend on how each of these protagonists reacts in the coming weeks as events unfold. There are some obvious pitfalls to avoid. If the Akalis, who have hardened their stand in the last few weeks, fail to rise to the opportunity offered by the Government's concessions, they will merely show themselves to be political opportunists rather than what they claim to be: representatives of the interest of the Sikhs. Political differences are one matter; an agitation in support of demands that have been more or less agreed upon is unacceptable. Indeed, by vacillating for so many months before ordering an inquiry into the riots and yielding to the demand on the eve of a threatened agitation, the Government has given the Akalis a measure of credibility which they earlier lacked and which they can easily fritter away through ill-advised response.

The Akalis should realise that the actions of some of their leaders in lionising the alleged assassins of Mrs Gandhi cast doubt on their good sense. They may expediently win laurels from some sections of the Sikhs, but they do themselves considerable long-term harm and dilute their claim to be taken for serious politicians. Fortunately, there are still some Akali leaders untarred by this extremist brush, but those who mouth slogans of convenience can blame nobody if they come to be treated as crutches of convenience, and discarded when they are no longer relevant. Their only honourable course is to resume talks with the Government.

The Government, on its part, has matching responsibilities. It did the right thing in punishing army deserters and it was right to deal with them with a certain amount of understanding. Nor can it be faulted for respecting tradition and decorating those soldiers and officers who distinguished themselves in Operation Bluestar though it could have done so with a more propitious sense of timing. And it will be perfectly justified in continuing its crack-down on extremist violence wherever it occurs. But it must unhesitatingly follow up its announced initiatives such as releasing Akali leaders still in jail, speeding up the trial of extremists detained in Punjab and pushing the economic development of the state. And, while it must vigorously pursue negotiations with Akalis, it must be prepared to announce unilaterally, if need be, its decisions on such old, outstanding issues as the river waters dispute, the status of Chandigarh, the enclaves of Abohar and Fazilka and the Anandpur Sahib resolution of 1973.

But more than any of this, it is the handling of the inquiry into the riots in Delhi in early November that will be crucial to relations between Hindus and Sikhs. There is justification in the fear that old wounds will be reopened as evidence is presented in violence which resulted in the killing of some 2,000 people in the capital alone. There is reason to fear that those who perpetrated violence on such a large scale will not find it hard to fabricate evidence that saves their necks. It is not implausible that all this could drive Sikhs and Hindus further apart rather than heal the rift.

In this, the judge concerned and the Government have special responsibility to conduct the inquiry in such a way that perjurers are punished, that any heat and anger generated in the courtroom is contained within it, that even while justice is seen to be done, it doesn't generate new emotion outside the courtroom. In this, the Government should not hesitate to seek the cooperation of the media in reporting the inquiry with restraint, omitting to give wide currency to reports that might once again inflame passions. There is no reason why representative media bodies such as the Editors' Guild shouldn't take the initiative to set the guidelines.

The ultimate objective of all these moves is to restore a popular government to Punjab. But it would be self-defeating to rush into elections without first convincing the people of Punjab that the long process of ameliorating the anger and pain of the past has begun, that their interests do not lie with the hotheads, that the time has come to look to the future rather than the past. Last fortnight's initiatives are a sensible move in that direction.

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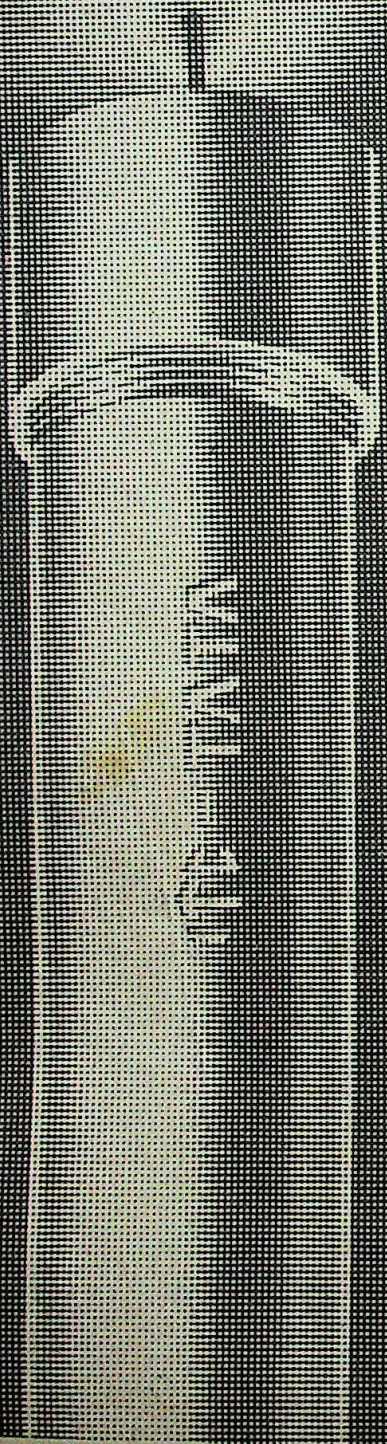

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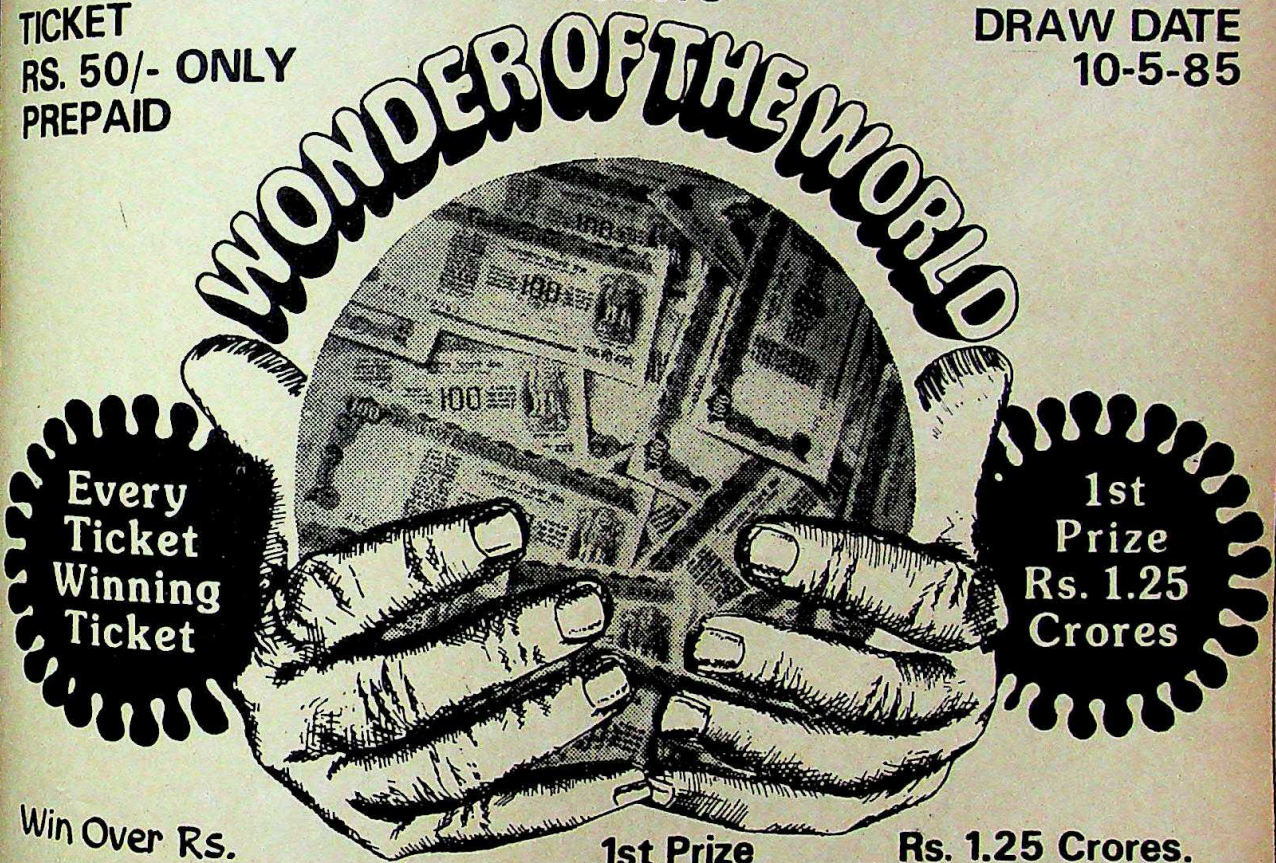

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The Times of India

● *A Spartan, puritanical sort, he (V.P. Singh) is even more obsessed with seeming to be Mr Clean than his prime minister.* ■ *Imprint*

● *Budgets are a bore, people who get excited over them are crashing bores... Every other Indian I have recently met has become a crashing bore.*
■ KHUSHWANT SINGH in *Mid-day*

● *I don't understand his (Rajiv Gandhi's) English, possibly he knows better since he has studied in Cambridge. Exploitation by the British in India could mean something but how could the* CPI(M) *exploit the city (Calcutta)?*
■ JYOTI BASU

● *Rajiv was being called (to Punjab and Ahmedabad) to assume the role of a one-man fire brigade on a jet plane instead of wheels.*
■ R.K. KARANJIA in *Blitz*

● *Deep-rooted silent fatalism... dumb acceptance of misery... a sea of raging poverty and a few islands of stupid, vulgar luxury inhabited by a few who behave as if nothing has happened... These disturb me the most in your country.*
■ GUNTER GRASS in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *I love women from the age of eight to 80. What can I do about this reputation. Perhaps my face is such. The fault is with God; he gave me a Casanova face.*
■ M.F. HUSAIN in *Sunday*

● *I must thank Kapil for introducing me as just Sunil Gavaskar... They all refer to me as the little master, or the maestro, or the short fellow, or the chap who did not wish Azharuddin on his third Test century.*
■ SUNIL GAVASKAR at a reception in Sharjah

● *It is shocking that the film maker and the writer (of the film Kamla) have tried to lampoon the entire journalist community by portraying them as bottle-happy chauvinists... They (the journalists) are a far superior lot than those who make cheap films out of serious themes.*
■ DR UMA SARIN wife of the *Indian Express* reporter Ashwini Sarin in *Onlooker*

● *I don't know about emotion but there is a lot of motion involved. To my mind casual sex is a social service. I believe in spreading happiness. I intend winning the next elections because of this.* ■ RANDHIR KAPOOR in *Stardust*

● *Tiger Pataudi is the kind of man I always find so attractive. I hate these good looking men. They are such a bore.* ■ JAYA BHADURI in *Filmfare*

● *If Naseer hits out at commercial cinema, his is a case of sour grapes. Their films get metal awards. Mine get paper (money) awards.*
■ RAJ BABBAR in *Cine Blitz*

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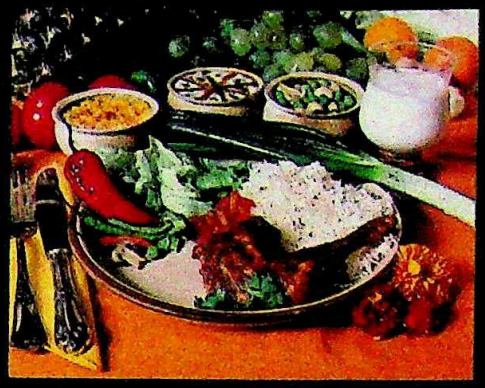

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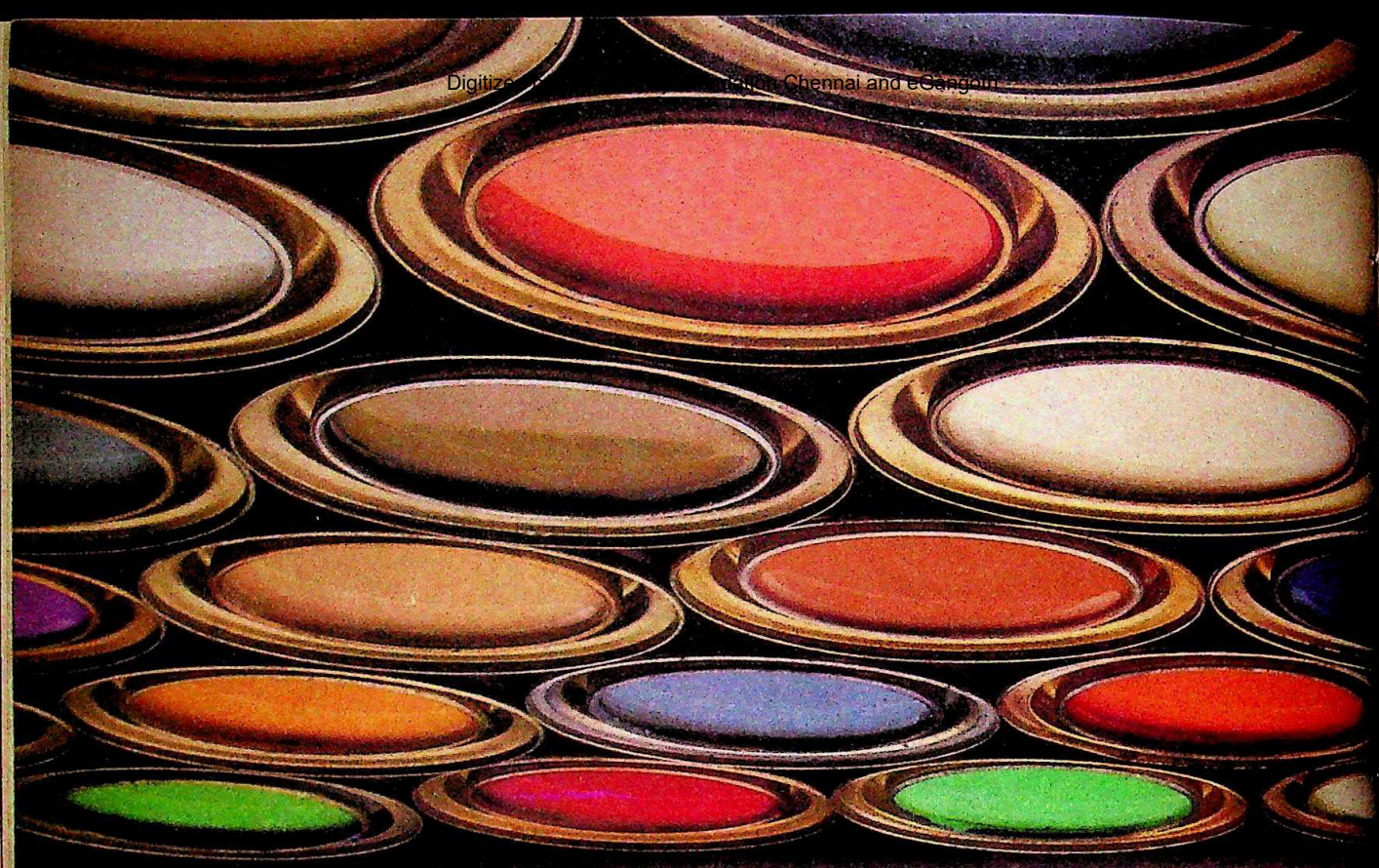

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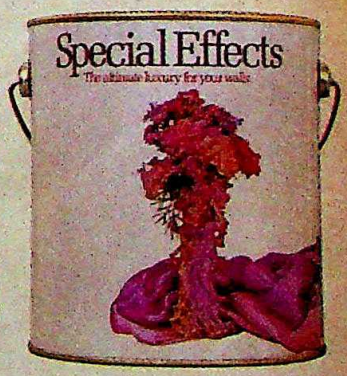

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RUDE AWAKENING

■ The unfunny thing about thieves is that you never know where they'll strike next, as happened in north Bombay last fortnight. Assistant Commissioner of Police K.A. Karanje was asleep in his flat in an apartment house in Matunga inhabited mostly by police officers. Perhaps that lulled him and his family into a sense of security, but whatever it was, the sense of security they were lulled into was a false one, because even as they were dreaming about whatever families of police officers dream of when a hard day's work is over, light feet were tripping over the linoleum. This was not, as Karanje might imagine, little Baba wanting his midnightly snack of WHO condemned baby food, but a hardened burglar who had shinnied up to the first floor flat on quicksilver feet and was now making off with all the goodies he could find with even more quicksilver feet. And when Karanje rubbed the sleep from his eyes and reached for his service revolver, the robber was gone with clothes, shoes and cash totalling Rs 2,000. No one likes to be caught napping, and the cops least of all.

CRASH LANDING

■ Guilt is a terrible thing. For the sensitive person, living through its torment can be hell. Even for the not so sensitive person it is not an experience he would like to re-live. No one knows to which category Suleman, Ramesh and Jamuna of Delhi belong, but anybody who knows of their experience that terrible night will, like the walrus, deeply sympathise.

The guilt stemmed from G.B. Road, a thoroughfare in old Delhi which Victorian writers would have described as inhabited by ladies of ill repute. The three had just visited a few such ladies and were making their weary way home on a motorcycle when the police at a roadblock signalled them to a stop. They didn't of course, and whizzed out of sight. A flying squad in Connaught Place, failed to intercept

them but the motorcyclists unfortunately ran into a police van a few kilometres ahead. Shots fired from the van scared either Suleman, Ramesh or Jamuna—there's confusion over who was driving—and the bike ended up meeting a wall, upon which all three and the bike did a spectacular acrobatics act. Suleman and Jamuna were taken to hospital where they no doubt pondered the uses of a clean conscience.

STRIPPED WOLVES

■ In the days when man was not so clever, highway robbers operated in the time-honoured fashion of raising a pistol and saying the two words "..or else". These days they are more subtle.

Consider the Waiganga Hardoli Ghat Kamgar Cooperative Society Ltd. This impossingly-named organisation operates out of a hut on the

bank of the river in Maharashtra from which it draws its name and the hut is manned by about a dozen men whose job is simplicity itself. Whenever a vehicle draws up to the bridge, one of them backed by two or three others, moves up to the window, extends a grimy receipt book and says "pay". He doesn't even add "..or else" because the driver believes he is shelling out towards the cost of construction of a new bridge and as every Indian's instinct is to yap like a domestic dog when confronted with authority the Society Ltd had it fairly easy.

Until a group of journalists came calling and asked for their authorisation from the Government. This, of course, they could not produce and when reports last came in the Waiganga whatever was being wound up.

APPAREL FOOLS

■ "Miller's Apparels Pvt Ltd invite you to a grand exhibition of the latest fashion from Paris by the internationally known designer Christian Dior at 9.00 p.m. on Monday the 1st of April, 1985 at the NCPA (Tata Auditorium), Nariman Point. The top fashion models of Europe will be displaying a dazzling display of apparels for men and women. Cocktails will be served. Please bring this card for admission. Seating is limited. Maker Chamber VI, 15th Floor, Nariman Point, Bombay-400 021."

By all accounts this should have been the event of the season for Bombay. After all Dior of *Gay Paree* is not to be sniffed at even by tired old socialites with withered shoulders and 20-year-old brocades who have or pretend to have seen it all. So it was no wonder that most of

the 300-odd darlings of Bombay's *beau monde* who received the card called up at the NCPA to confirm their treat.

NCPA officials told each of the dozens of callers that there is no Maker Chamber VI and cocktails are *nevah* served in the Tata theatre. If that didn't convince them they were curtly told "April 1, sir (or madam)." And so ended one of the more tasteful April Fool jokes of recent years.

—compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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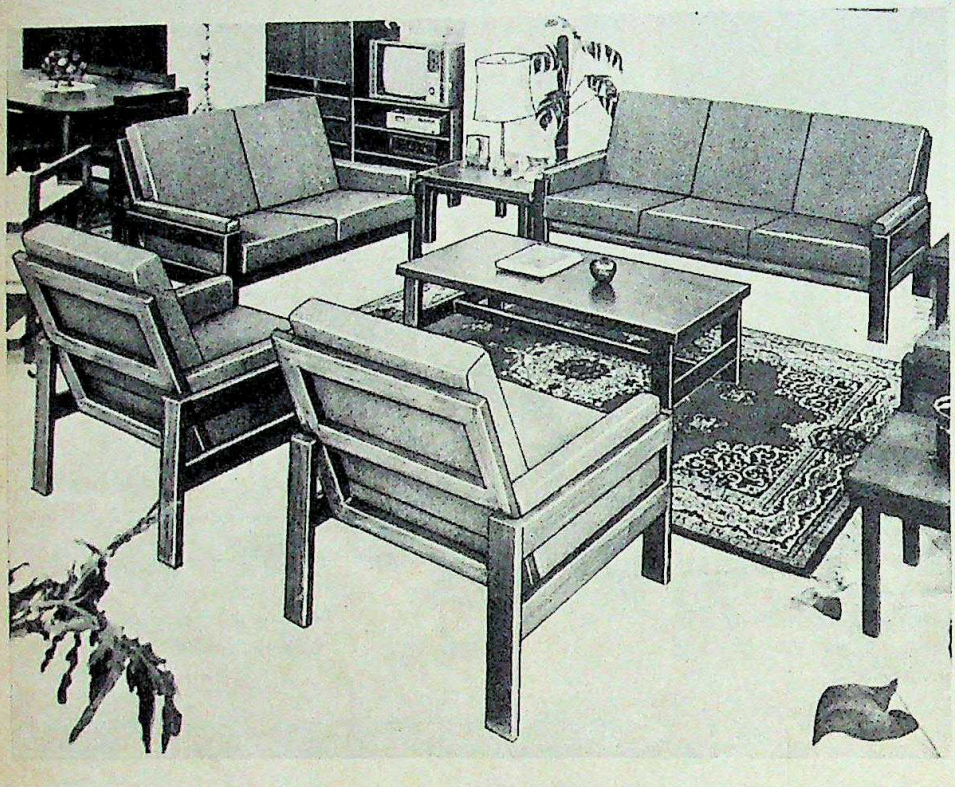

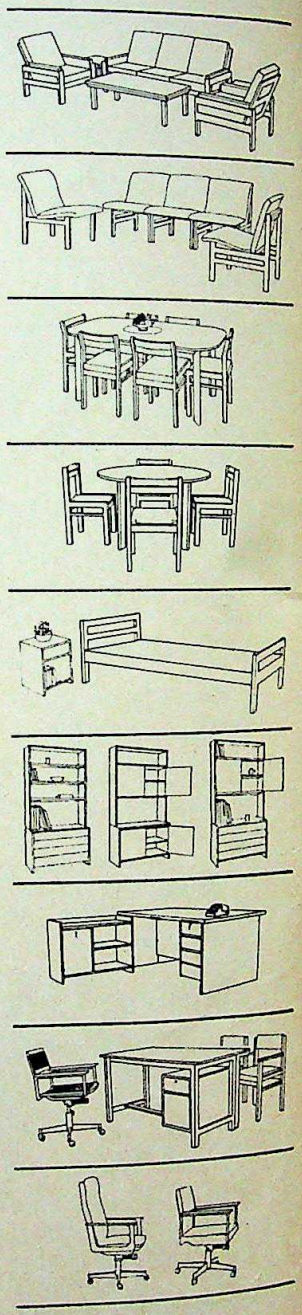

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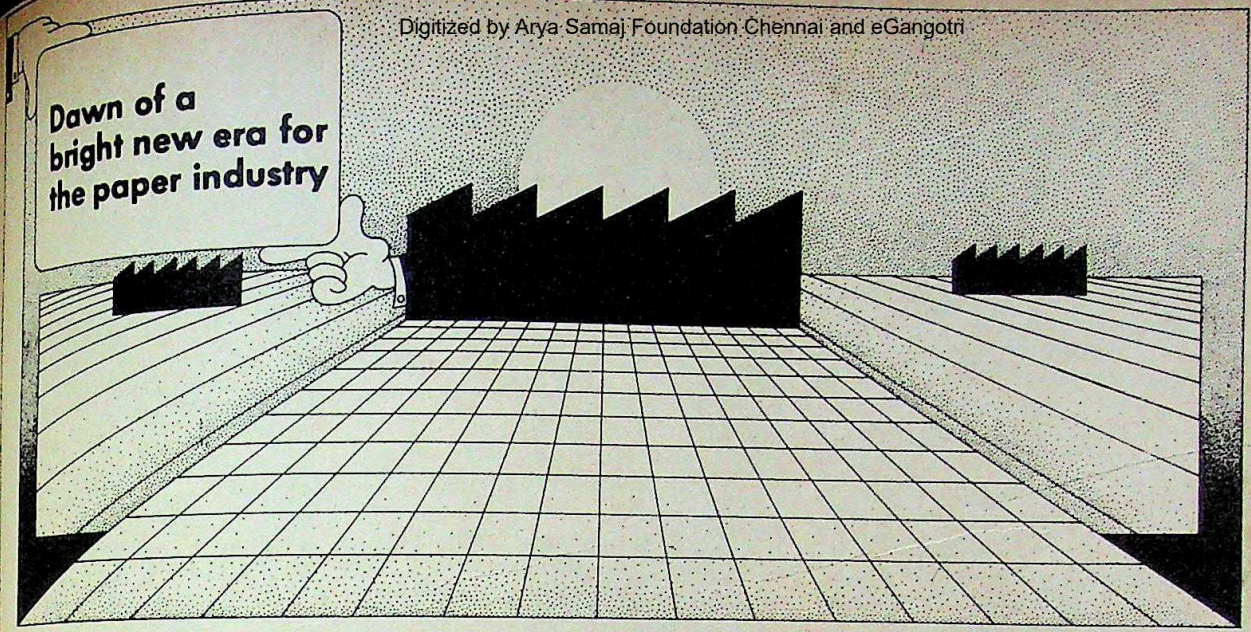

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PUNJAB

A Turning Point

BAISAKHI, for Punjabis, heralds, the season of hope and change. But in Amritsar, the Sikh Vatican, it is also the time for people to count their beads. They remember only too well the Baisakhis that changed the course of history. In 1919, General Dyer's murderous troopers left Jallianwala Bagh littered with corpses on that day. In 1978, the fratricidal clash between the Nirankaris and Bhindranwale supporters set the stage for a bloodier agitation that still holds the state to ransom. And year after year, the Akali Dal has chosen Baisakhi as the ideal time to intensify their agitations.

Cassandras were out in force last fortnight in Amritsar as tension rose like mercury. With the Akalis set to resume their agitation from the Golden Temple and the Government firm on holding a national integration meeting in the adjoining Jallianwala Bagh as part of its "peace offensive" it was going to be another landmark Baisakhi.

A landmark it certainly was—but of a vastly different kind, not the cataclysm that was feared but a welcome turning point in the fortuitous Punjab saga. For once, Baisakhi was truly what it should be, the beginning of a new season of hope. Even as 50 companies of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Border Security Force (BSF) fanned along the common approaches to the Golden Temple and Jallianwala Bagh and people waited tensely for the moment of reckoning, the news from Delhi came rattling over the teleprinters, drowning the din of contention with its forceful message. In a flash, the Centre announced it had ordered a probe by a sitting Supreme Court judge into the riots in Delhi following Mrs Gandhi's assassination, lifted the ban on the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) which provided Bhindranwale many of his key stormtroopers and all his gun-fodder, and gave broad hints of release of more Akali and AISSF leaders. In one stroke the most relevant of demands of the Sikhs, had been conceded.

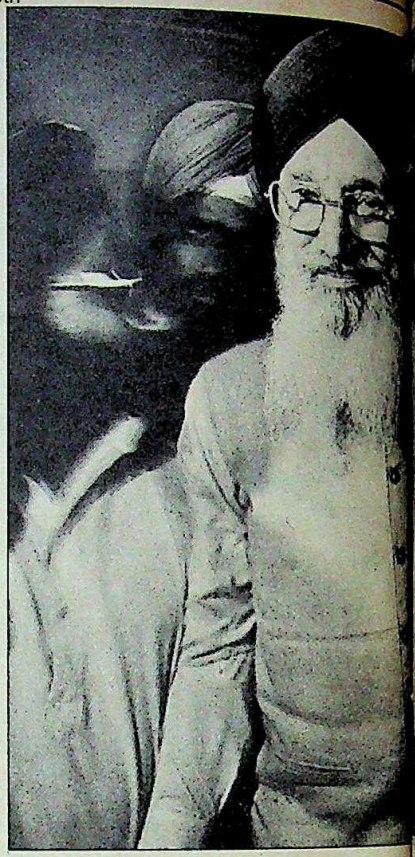
For the usually sombre-looking Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan, this was certainly the most important announcement of his political career. With Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in attendance, he rose laboriously from his seat in the Lok Sabha on April 11 and read out the text of a highly conciliatory statement which, besides specific concessions and a thinly veiled invitation to the Akalis for fresh talks, dropped hints that it would think again about the special courts set up to try suspected Punjab extremists which the Akalis resent so much.

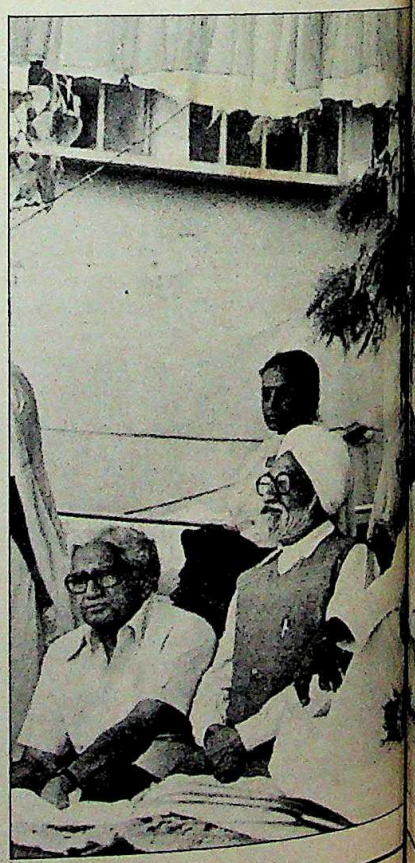
And while there is widespread difference of opinion on the timing of the announcement—from those who argued it came too late to those who felt it was premature appeasement—no one could fault the way it was worded. For example, the most significant concession, and one that was least expected, that of lifting the AISSF ban, was shrewdly couched in words that at least sought to separate the quasi-religious organisation's rank and file from its militant leaders, now dead or in prisons. Said Chavan: "The AISSF was banned because some of its office-bearers had indulged in actions detrimental to the unity and integrity of India. We understand that a majority of the Sikh students represented by the Federation are eager to play their part in building a strong and united India."

For once, a decision on Punjab from a government that has for long been badgered for lack of ideas and political will on this crucial question evoked unanimous welcome throughout the country. Even opposition leaders like Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Janata Party's Madhu Dandavate, who have often accused the Government of pussyfooting on Punjab, welcomed the announcement. Similar nods came from elsewhere, from Farooq Abdullah to Ramakrishna Hegde.

Among Sikhs, there was at last a moment to shed the wearying suspicions of the past and welcome something positively. Said writer Khushwant Singh: "I am delighted at the announcement even though it is a delayed step. I hope the Akali leaders will now break the impasse and accept the hand of friendship that is extended to them." Condemning Harchand Singh Longowal's statements lauding Mrs Gandhi's alleged assassins, he said: "Longowal should keep a *maun vrat* (vow of silence) for a month!"

Manmohan Singh of the Sikh Forum,





Akali leaders after postponing the agitation (top) and Congress(I) leaders at Jallianwala Bagh: "peace offensive"

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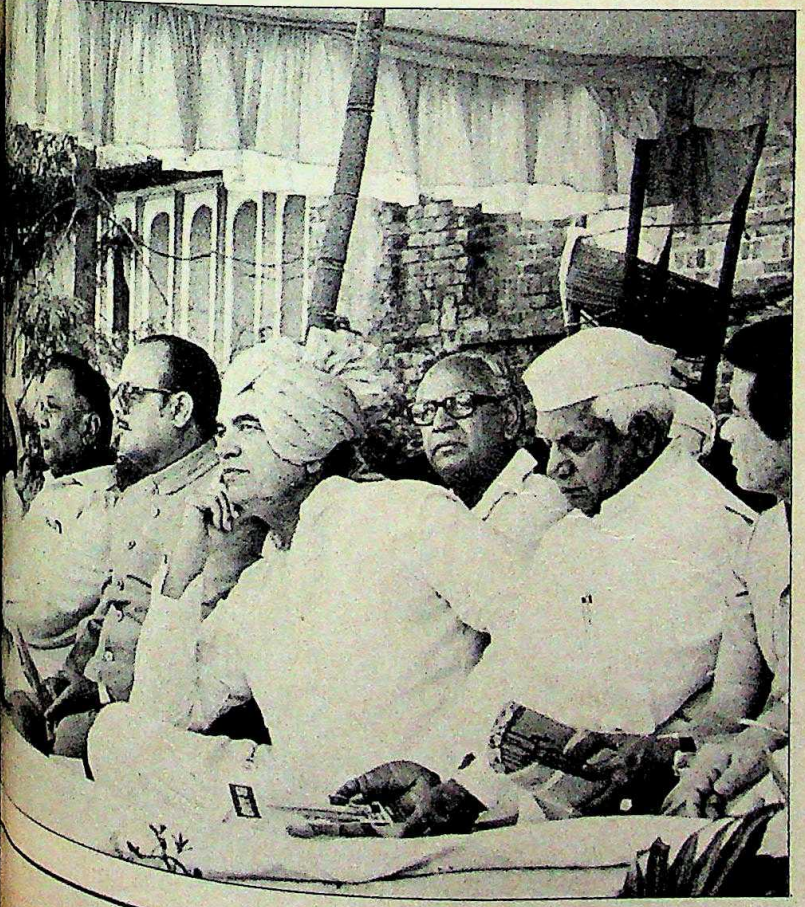
Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

"This is a partial concession. We will never let anyone settle with the Government on anything less than the Anandpur Sahib resolution in its undiluted form."

JAGDEV SINGH TALWANDI

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"The Government has made it clear that it does not stand on prestige and is willing to consider any suggestion which helps in solving the outstanding problems."

ARJUN SINGH
Governor of Punjab

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a non-partisan organisation of urban Sikhs, felt a word of regret about Operation Bluestar and the destruction of the Akal Takht would have helped. Arguing that the concessions did not go far enough, he still believed: "This will set the Akalis thinking, it should calm them down, have a soothing effect." But there were also doubts, particularly among the riot victims themselves. Said Sarjit Kaur, a Delhi riot widow: "I am not sure if any action will be taken. The Government has already released the attackers we had earlier identified."

IN THE Akali ranks there was a touch of glee. After all, by making the announcement on the eve of a threatened Akali agitation, the Government had lent the Akalis some credibility. Said party president and morcha dictator Longowal: "This is a good step and we welcome it. But it has come too late, after so much bitterness. Also, if the Government wants durable peace in Punjab it should accept our other demands including the Anandpur Sahib resolution and the abolition of special courts." Nevertheless, at their Amritsar strategy meet on April 12, they agreed to postpone a decision on their planned agitation to June. Ominously, they also called for the observation of "genocide week" to coincide with the anniversary of Operation Bluestar, but it was clear that the Government's initiatives had queered their pitch.

"Too little, too late," is often the instinctive reaction of an agitation leadership to any set of concessions made by the Government and thus political observers in Delhi were inclined to leave Longowal's conditional welcome at that. Said a senior Union Home Ministry officer: "Even we had not expected the Akalis to head straight for our arms the moment the announcement was made. They also have to play their own game and go through the necessary motions."

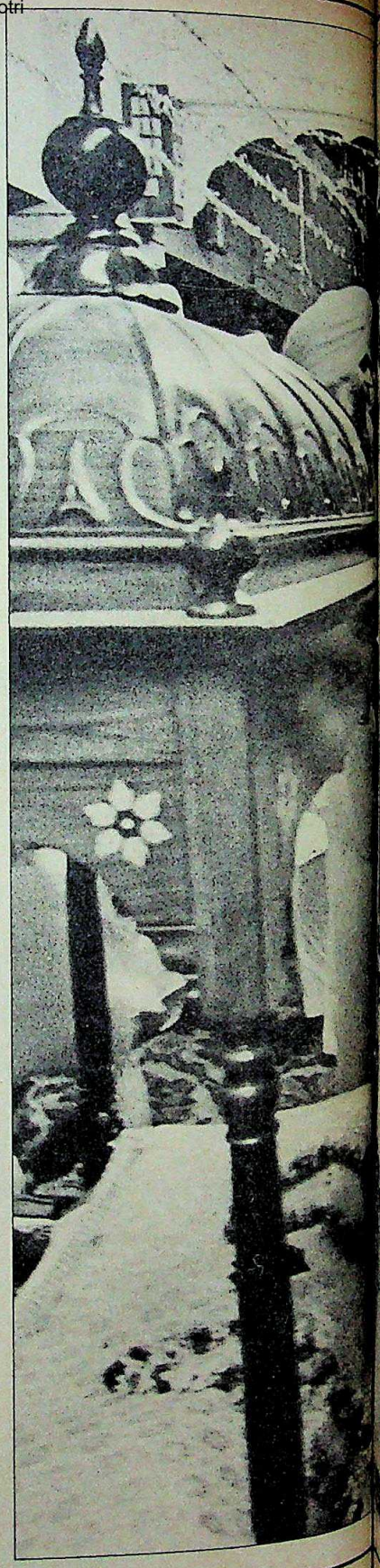
Apparently, this was also the presumption at a series of top-level meetings in Delhi last fortnight, in the course of which the Government shrugged off its lethargy after five months of vacillation. The Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs met at South Block on April 9 and took stock of the situation, assessing intelligence reports on the likelihood of trouble in Punjab in case the Akalis were allowed to go ahead with their agitational plans and the views of the three-member cabinet subcommittee which had visited various parts of Punjab on a fact-finding mission. Both sets of assessments decisively defeated the hardliners who wanted the agitation met and crushed with brute force. The subcommittee members were firm in their view, on the basis of their visits, that the Akalis could be counted on mustering enough support to create chaos and conditions rife for violence, and a renewed confrontation was the last thing the Government could afford.

The plea for defusing the tension came from both the ministers and officers leading the law and order machinery. It was followed by another informal session on April 10 attended by Punjab Governor Arjun Singh and his key aides who flew in by the state government aircraft. The discussions took off from where the previous ones had left off, and the opinion was crystallising that it would be futile to wait any longer. The prime minister met the Political Affairs Committee again on the following day. Singh was again summoned and the confabulations went on reportedly till 2.30 a.m. The committee met yet again on April 11, with Singh sitting in, before the decisions were finally taken. Of the seven issues considered for immediate announcement, four were held over. These were:

- a unilateral announcement giving Chandigarh to Punjab;
- setting up of a new tribunal to sort out territorial issues between Punjab and Haryana;
- appointment of a Supreme Court judge to adjudicate the river waters issue;
- immediate release of all young men jailed in Punjab on suspicion of extremist activity.

As a matter of fact, the lifting of the ban on the AISSF was not even on the first list of options. This was finally decided on the argument that one of the major problems in Punjab today was the anger of the youth and much of this could be neutralised by this one step. Summing up the new approach of the Government, Governor Arjun Singh told INDIA TODAY: "The Government has made it clear that it does not stand on prestige and is willing to consider any suggestion which helps in solving the outstanding problems. We should realise that any confrontationist approach is not only harmful to the country as a whole but also to this prosperous state of Punjab."

Government officials say further steps would depend on the response from the Akalis but, even among official circles in Delhi, there was a clear realisation that this was at best a starting point in a new quest for solution to the chronic problem.



Extremists take control of Akali meeting at Amritsar: anger of youth

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BHAWAN SINGH

"The Akalis and the Government should continue this forward propulsion together. As the Chinese say, with one hand you can wash the other, but with two you can wash the whole body."

Lt Gen GURBACHAN SINGH (retired)

"I was very glad to hear about the inquiry. The *zaalims* (tyrants) must be punished."

NARINDER KAUR,
a Trilokpuri widow

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There were words of caution from the Opposition as well. Veteran parliamentarian Madhu Dandavate reminded the Government that the main issue in Punjab, that of the Anandpur Sahib resolution and the old Akali demands, had not yet been touched. Atal Behari Vajpayee went a step further, echoing the feeling that the concessions were made under pressure. "Why announce these on the eve of the Akali agitation?" he asked, implying that this could give the extreme elements a feeling of victory. But the reply came the following day from Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself who grimly stated at Calcutta: "We have not succumbed to any pressures. If necessary we will take harder measures to reduce tension and keep the nation together as there could be no compromise on the question of the country's unity and integrity." He reportedly told opposition leaders who met him after Chavan's announcement that the Government's cupboard was now bare of concessions, implying that beyond what had already been announced and long-agreed action on such outstanding issues as Chandigarh and the river waters dispute, further progress would depend on how the protagonists reacted to the Government's initiatives.

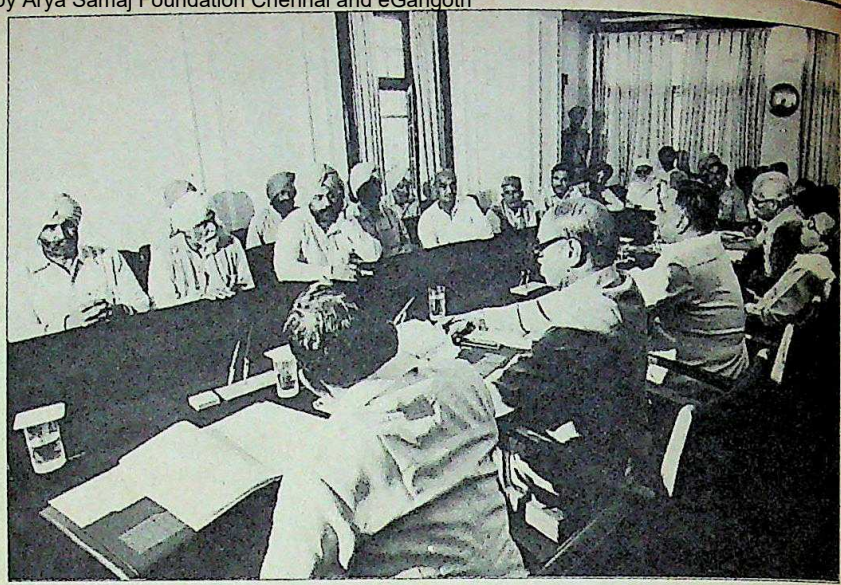
While there is enough uncertainty on just how they will, there is little doubt that with the Lok Sabha and assembly elections out of the way, the Gandhi Government was finally coming to grips with the problem that it had always held to be topmost on its list of priorities. It was catalysed by the emerging pressures in Punjab and plans announced by the Akalis to resume their agitation. On March 8, meeting at Anandpur Sahib, the historic gurudwara 83 km north-west of Chandigarh at a spot sanctified by Guru Gobind Singh, the Akalis issued an ultimatum to the Government to accept their demands by Baisakhi and set the ball rolling. Three days later the Government responded by releasing Longowal, Talwandi and seven other prominent leaders including former Union agriculture minister Surjit Singh Barnala. Further steps, all conciliatory, followed in quick succession and included:

► appointment of Arjun Singh as the new governor of Punjab;

► withdrawal of the Punjab Special Powers(Press) Act on March 14;

► Rajiv Gandhi's announcement of a package of economic concessions at Hussainiwala on March 23;

► prime minister's discussions with the national opposition leaders to evolve consensus on Punjab on March 29;



Cabinet subcommittee at Patiala meeting: mixed success

► announcement of a wheat bonus of Rs 5 per quintal to appease farmers on March 30;

► the tour of the cabinet subcommittee starting April 2, and;

► the mass contact programme of Congress(I) MP's and MLA's from April 5.

GOVERNMENT spokesmen deny the charge of making concessions under duress, arguing that the strategy was to make concessions slowly, without seeming to give in, but to do it all before the Baisakhi deadline. "There were many occasions," said a Home Ministry official, "when the temptation to retaliate was strong." Among the provocations were the renewed terrorist killings—BJP leader Krishan Lal Manchanda was shot dead by extremists the day after Rajiv's Hussainiwala visit and a police officer a week later—Buta Singh's excommunication and the Akalis' blatant, public glorification of Mrs Gandhi's assassins. But, said the official, "We were firm on ignoring it all for once in the hope that ultimately wise counsel would prevail."

In other words, this time, the approach was of political realism and not of knee-jerk confrontationism. This, indeed, has been a major departure from the past when Mrs Gandhi trusted none else but the coterie of bureaucrats around her to tackle such major political problems. Rajiv's decision to get moving on Punjab as soon as the assembly elections were out of the way, Arjun Singh's appointment and the formation of the cabinet subcommittee on Punjab had signalled a departure from this legacy.

But the subcommittee's initial forays were far from pathbreaking. Belying expectations that it would manage to reach out to various sections of society, the subcommittee followed the pedestrian approach of visiting major cities in the state —barring Amritsar, the most crucial of all—and issuing front-page advertisements to local dailies inviting everyone to come and see them. This had no impact and the district administrations, assigned the task of specifically inviting opinion leaders in their regions, miserably failed to do so. The ministers, thus, had to contend with an endless stream of delegations led by Congress(I) legislators saying the same thing over and over again. Remarked an elderly police constable standing guard at the Patiala Circuit House: "This is like the famous Punjabi saying, that when a blind man distributes sweets he keeps on giving them all to his own kinsmen."

In fact Chavan admitted this, arguing, "But we haven't forbidden anyone from coming." Asked if that did not rob the exercise of much of its purpose, he replied tentatively: "Well, there is some point there. But we will think about it later."

Yet even the feedback from their own partymen was good enough to convince the ministers of the futility of pursuing a line of confrontation. One after the other, party members pleaded for unilateral action that could render the Akalis irrelevant. The plea was almost invariably for a fresh round of elections which would give the state a popular government which might better tackle the problems.

Bir Devinder Singh, chief whip of the state Congress(I), told the subcommittee:

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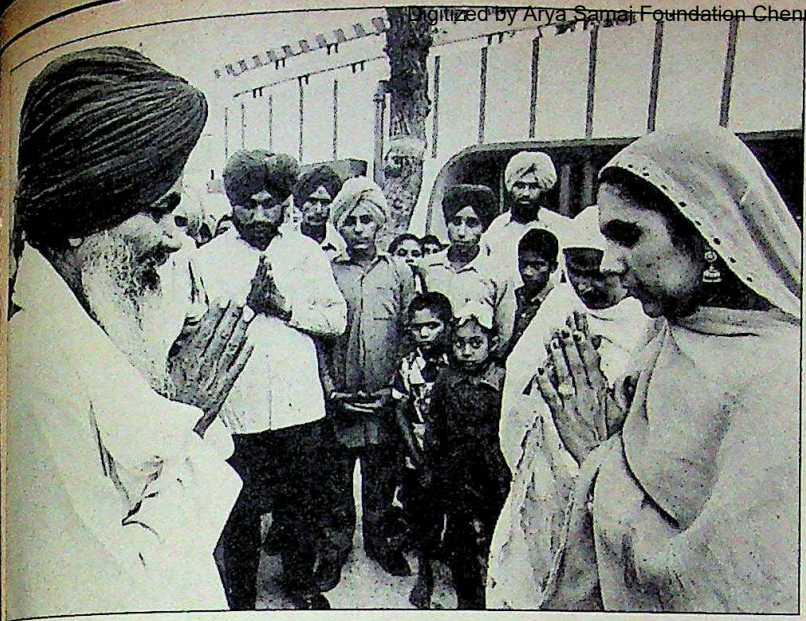


Longowal meeting a bereaved family: seeking support

"The problem requires a political solution. While a political governor is welcome, this alone will not do. We also need a political government that could look after Punjab's interests. Why should we always allow the Akalis to speak on behalf of the Sikhs?" Practically all Congress(I) leaders said that it was impossible for them to defend the Government's hesitation in ordering an inquiry into the Delhi riots and the unprecedented violence.

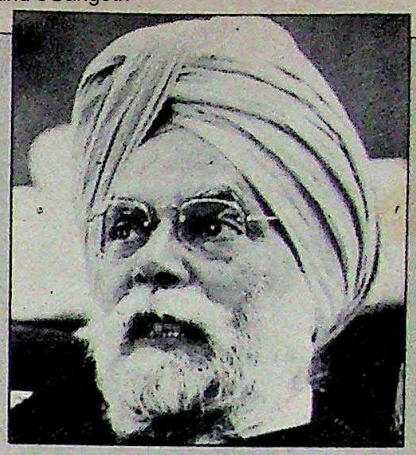
The theme was taken up by the few independent individuals who met the committee. By and large, they too supported the idea of unilateral, quick action without further dilly-dallying. At Patiala, Lieutenant-General Gurbachan Singh Bajwa, who retired as northern army commander five years ago, told the sub committee: "Gentlemen, after four years of troubles have you now come on a fact-finding mission or a decision-making one? Talking to the status quo people like us who live in cities and sleep on Dunlopillow mattresses is of no use now. The situation is grave and old political methods will not do. We need statesmanship." The Central ministers thus returned with the unanimous vote in favour of a unilateral announcement.

While the ministers scoured the state, supplementing the effort of the party legislators and 24 MP's participating in the Congress(I) mass contact programme, political activity was no less hectic on the other side of the fence. The Akalis too were sniffing round the countryside, feeling their constituents' pulse. Basically, there was a desperate bid to regain the credibility they lost partly during the Bhindranwale phase and partly because of the widespread belief among the Sikhs that they surrendered to the army inside the Golden Temple without a fight.

In fact, this quest lies at the core of Akali politics today and causes much of the inconvenient compulsions that Longowal and his supporters face, limiting their options. Also it explains many of their actions that, on surface, look so irrational, and provocative. Last fortnight, Longowal traversed the state, shuffling repeatedly in the cramped confines of the Premier Padmini loaned to him by a follower. But the perpetual furrows on his forehead were due to much more than travellers' fatigue. He was a worried man, one short on advisors and ideas and long on insecurities. At village after village Sikh youths barracked him, shouting pro-Bhindranwale slogans.

Initially he tried to deal with this by admonishing them, saying that they were only strengthening the hands of the Delhi durbar by making all that noise. But soon enough he began to acquiesce, joining them in slogan-shouting at Batala looking on when Satwant Singh's father was garlanded at Batala, and then felicitating Beant Singh's widow at Ropar. The very man who once made no secret of his contempt for Bhindranwale now referred to him with an overdose of honorifics such as "Sant Mahapurukh-(great soul) Sant Baba Jarnail Singh ji" and asked every audience how could there be a rift between him and Bhindranwale when their relationship was steeped in religious tradition.

At Zira, a teeming little town in Ferozepore district known for its large sugar



"This will set the Akalis thinking, it should calm them down, have a soothing effect. But a word of regret about Operation Bluestar would have helped."

MANMOHAN SINGH
Sikh Forum

BHAWAN SINGH

"We also need a political government now. The need of the hour is to make Akalis irrelevant. Why should they be accepted as the only spokesmen for the Sikhs?"

BIR DEVINDER SINGH
state Congress(I) chief whip

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HUKAMNAMA'

Plain Politics

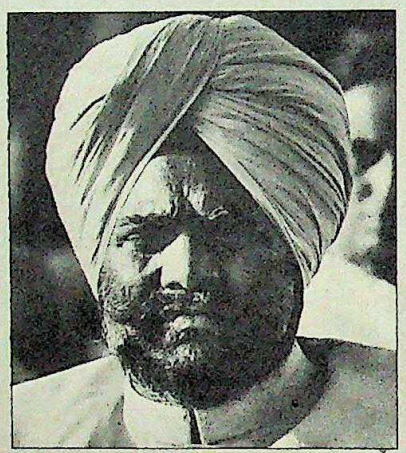
RARELY, in Sikh history, has the clout of the *hukamnama*, a kind of ecclesiastical bull, been used as frequently as in the recent months. And rarely has one raised so much controversy as the one issued last fortnight, excommunicating Union Agriculture Minister Buta Singh from the *panth* for his alleged anti-Sikh activities.

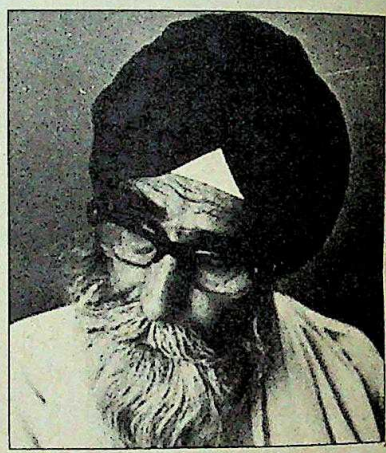
The five high priests who signed the *hukamnama* jointly in Amritsar had probably underestimated the dust they would raise. While Buta Singh, a devout Sikh, insolently ignored the order, saying, "I don't care as long as I am allowed to read my Gurbani every morning," there was a flurry of protests from *mazhabi* (Scheduled Caste) Sikh organisations and even some priests. For the first time in recent years, doubts were publicly cast on the tenability of a *hukamnama*.

Leading the campaign was a man who is by no means an outsider to the issue. Bhai Man Singh is the jathedar of Takht Patna Sahib, one of the five preeminent seats of Sikh faith, who along with the jathedar of Takht Sri Huzur Sahib, Nanded, in Maharashtra, is often left out of the process of issuing *hukamnamas*. Said he: "This is a politically motivated step. How can they issue *hukamnamas* without asking us?" The high priests in Amritsar were immediately put on the defensive and claimed that they had been authorised by Man Singh in writing to act on his behalf. Brandishing Man Singh's letter, Kirpal Singh accused him of being a "prisoner of Buta Singh" and stated angrily, "in fact we should have declared him a *tankhaiya* when he attended Buta Singh's sacrilegious *Sarbat Khalsa*. But he said he was brought under duress. Now they are again using him."

But Patna was not the only direction from which the high priests faced attacks. The excommunication of Sant Narain Singh Kaleranwale, on the charge of associating with the Government's rebuilding of the Akal Takht, had also upset a number of sants running *deras* in the countryside and commanding substantial local following. Like Buta Singh, Kaleranwale too had ignored the *hukamnama* and went about preaching, visiting gurudwaras and criticising the high priests as "the chickens who surrendered the moment Bhindranwale showed up with his Sten guns and fled with their arms raised at the first glimpse of armymen." Says he: "I just do not understand this logic. They destroyed the Akal Takht and call themselves devout Sikhs. I helped build it and they call me a *tankhaiya* and yet they continue to live off the earnings of the same shrine." Buta Singh, on the other hand, was quieter, but showed his defiance by addressing gurudwara congregations outside Punjab where he drew large Sikh crowds.

But the Buta Singh counter-





Buta Singh and Kirpal Singh: class conflict

offensive had deeper, political implications. His excommunication was followed by widespread insinuations by his supporters that while President Zail Singh had been allowed to seek pardon from the high priests, Buta Singh had been made the sacrificial goat. The Anandpur Sahib head priest Harcharan Singh Mahalon's statement that Zail Singh should be punished now for presenting gallantry awards to soldiers involved in Operation Bluestar too was viewed in this light.

With controversy involving the Rashtrapati Bhawan now, Giani's aides were rushed to his defence. Rawail Singh, a former Akali minister who had acted as a mediator between Giani and the high priests, asserted that Zail Singh had neither submitted an apology nor any official documents. The high priests partly concurred. Kirpal Singh, displaying a bunch of photographs taken during Zail Singh's visit to the Golden Temple given to the priests by Rawail Singh, said: "He was not pardoned, he was acquitted. He submitted these official photographs to prove that he did not enter the temple wearing shoes and that he did commit sacrilege by walking under an umbrella. At the same time he convinced us that he did not sign the order deploying the army in Punjab." But, he quickly added: "At the same time he apologised for whatever had happened to the temple, no matter who was responsible for the destruction."

A *hukamnama* is normally not revoked and that leaves Buta Singh with the prospect of spending the rest of his life in excommunication. But he is in a defiant mood and is confronting the priests and the Akalis with some inconvenient questions. The Gurus had founded the *panth* as a classless society. But now, suddenly, it is seized by an unfamiliar class-struggle of sorts with many of the *mazhabis*, in a rebellious mood following the Sikh high priests' order excommunicating Buta Singh, himself a *mazhabi*. "This is an utterly destructive approach," lamented Longowal, adding, "anyone who talks in terms of caste among the Sikhs is not a true Sikh." In the same defensive vein, Kirpal Singh asked: "Haven't we been acting against Jat Sikhs like Talwandi, Sant Fateh Singh and others in the past? Why did no one protest then?"

But the fact remains that a large number of *mazhabis* have an inbuilt resentment against the more dominant Jat. They identify with Buta Singh's plight. And if the campaign to isolate them from the mainstream of Sikhism succeeds to any degree the high priests will have only themselves to blame.

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small, he continued the same effort to take over Bhindranwale's mantle by thundering along, saying, "For the Sikhs the choice now is between Takht(the throne) and takhta(the gallows). The Government wants us to talk to them and here we do not even want to listen till all our demands are conceded... even Gandhi had said that if the promises made to the Sikhs at the time of Independence are not kept they will be within their rights to reach for the scabbard." His routine fare included references to Sikh babies in Delhi "barbecued like chicken", people "torn apart by trucks pulling their limbs in different directions" and "our mothers and sisters subjected to gang-rapes". He didn't go so far as to call Beant Singh a martyr but seemed to justify the assassination as the expected outcome of the sacred resentment of one who saw the damage at the Golden Temple and "naturally" decided to take revenge.

What was even worse, however, was that he sat through the wild and inflammatory speeches of his followers and party workers as if endorsing them. At the Jra meeting, for example, Joginder Singh Jagi, an SGPC member screamed to the accompaniment of enthusiastic shouts of *sri akal* from the charged-up audience: "Watch out, Rajiv Gandhi You justified the Delhi killings saying that when a large tree falls there are bound to be tremors. Let me assure you, you have felled even bigger trees and will have to face the consequences."

In a swathe that cut across all parts of the state last fortnight, the Akalis were engaged in the same do-or-die bid; to win for themselves the mantle of Bhindranwale's Teutonic knights. If they lacked his followers' proselytising zeal they tried to make up for it by matching at least his compelling rhetoric.

The same Longowal who, cornered by the AISSF stormtroopers in the Golden Temple had counter-attacked with the setting up of the Akali Dal Youth Wing now went from village to village, consoling parents of AISSF members killed or captured by the security forces. At the village of Mahesari near Moga he paid such tributes to Amrik Singh and his supporters, speaking from a stage bedecked with the AISSF insignia and the portrait of a student killed in an encounter with the police. Reacting sharply to President Zail Singh's statement that people who killed Mrs Indira Gandhi could not be true Sikhs he shot fiercely back: "Let Zail Singh ask his own conscience. Can he call himself a true Sikh?"

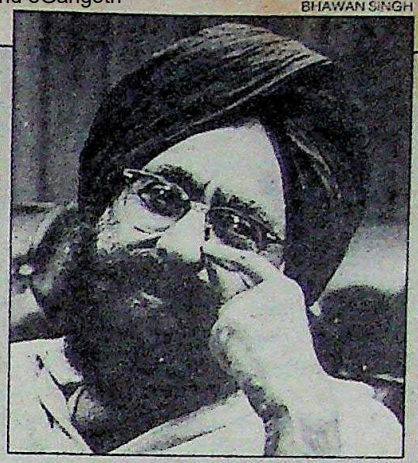
But even in the web of this violent verbosity one significant factor stood out: the thrust of the Akali offensive was—and is—invariably directed at the Congress(I) and not the Hindus. Practically every speaker thanked the Hindus who helped Sikhs during the riots and was at pains to say that their fight was with the rulers in Delhi and not with the Hindus in general. "The Congress(I) is our biggest enemy," says Surjan Singh Thekedar who headed the Akali Dal in Longowal's absence, and adds, "even in the Congress(I) our main target should be those *sikkhads* (derogatory for Sikh), like Darbara and Randhawa, who betray the quam."

The approach makes the battle political and it enables Akali supporters to argue that their intentions are not as black as their innuendo. Explains Janata Party leader Inder Kumar Gujral, who was one of the four-member non-political team that met Longowal last week: "Don't take at face value whatever Longowal has been saying. After all, he also has his compulsions. He has to face the people and he can't help saying some of these things." The government's initiatives indicate that this assessment is also echoed in official thinking.

It stands to reason that the concessions should give the Akalis a sense of victory and thereby a short-cut to credibility which, in turn, should reduce their reliance on rhetoric. Said *Ajeet*, a relatively moderate Punjabi daily published from Jalandhar, in a front-page editorial: "This can be called a major victory for the Akalis. We appeal to the Akali Dal to reciprocate this gesture of goodwill by putting off the agitation. Now there is a great responsibility on the shoulders of Sant Longowal and he has to win back the trust of his comrades, workers and Punjabis." All over Punjab, the announcement was greeted by youngsters with jubilation and the Akalis had their best chance in a long time to reassert their stature as a responsible political party holding sway over the Sikh majority.

But if the Akalis had their political compulsions so, obviously, did the Congress(I). It is well known that their mass contact programme is a probing mission in preparation for the assembly poll which may be scheduled for June or September, depending on the way the situation develops in the state. And thus there has to be a limit to which the party leaders would want the Centre to let the Akalis regain hold over the rural Sikh masses. Said PPCC(I) General Secretary Vinod Sharma: "There is no denying that the Jat Sikh is not with us today. But he is also not with the Akalis. What we need is a strong

BHAWAN SINGH



"I am delighted at the announcement even though it is a delayed step. I hope the Akali leaders will now break the impasse and accept the hand of friendship that is extended to them."

KHUSHWANT SINGH

BHAWAN SINGH

"No matter what the Government does I am sure there can be no settlement with the Akalis. Their intransigence will have to be fought politically, in the villages."

RAJINDER KAUR BHATTAL
Former Congress(I) minister

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campaign to win him over to our side." Other state Congress(I) leaders, though wary of speaking on record make no secret of their resentment against giving too many concessions to the Akalis which could be self-destructive in the election".

With elections widely accepted to be an inevitability the old, internecine rivalries which have much to answer for the present troubles in Punjab have also come to the fore. The appointment, last fortnight, of Santokh Singh Randhawa, a Darbara Singh camp follower as the new PPCC(I) chief, was thus seen in this light. Subsequently, Darbara Singh, guarded constantly by six carbine-carrying policemen, has been leading the mass contact programme, making statements that his own party leaders find hard to defend. At Jalandhar he blamed the Pakistani and American governments of having masterminded Mrs Gandhi's murder and at each meeting that he addresses he rejects the Anandpur Sahib resolution in its totality though Rajiv Gandhi himself stated recently that the Government had an open mind on discussing the resolution as long as it was within the constitutional framework.

While this pushed the Government to untenable positions, Darbara Singh's new high-profile role was causing more damage in another sense. The Akali campaigners identify him with fake encounters and, for some reason, most people believe this. Thus the threat of Darbara Singh's return as the next chief minister gives the Akalis a great rallying point. Besides, this has brought sharp counter-attacks from the strong pro-Zail Singh group which questions the wisdom in rehabilitating the same person who was sacked for incompetence while the state was being virtually run by the extremists. Time and again party leaders made the same point to the cabinet subcommittee. "I can't understand this. These are the very people who ignited the flames in the first place. Now how can you bring them back to extinguish the blaze?" asked Rajinder Kaur Bhattal a former dissident member of Darbara Singh's cabinet. Ultimately, it was at Amritsar that the rivalries showed up in the ugliest form as factions fought with each other, using firearms including a Sten-gun at the circuit house where party General Secretary Rajendra Kumari Bajpai was staying.

Factionalism apart, the prospect of elections is also bound to let loose other pressure. The Akalis, for example, are committed to opposing an election held without a settlement and this leaves the Centre in a Catch-22 situation. If it makes concessions and settles with the Akalis they will become a threat in the election. If it doesn't, the Akalis will try and prevent election, leading to an Assam-type nightmare. And yet the election cannot be put off for ever. In fact, the Akalis are already creating a psychosis that the Centre wants to do an Assam with their state. "Let them remember this is not Assam. People have already lost so much. If an election is forced on them they will pull out all stops and there will be bloodshed," warned Surjan Singh Thekedar.

Yet, last fortnight, indications were that the stage was being set for the poll. The Government was reported to have informally sounded the Election Commission and intelligence agencies were working overtime assessing the situation on the ground. According to highly placed sources the Government's main worry is violence and the fact that in the past, the Election Commission has made no exception to the rule that the army cannot be

H.S. MAHALON

"They were no Heroes"

AFTER 80 zig-zag kilometres through some of the most backward parts of Punjab, the road abruptly terminates in front of the majestic, white shrine, set atop a daunting hillock. Surrounding, wooded mountains give it the look of an impregnable fortress, which is what it was during the days of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh who gave birth to the concept of Khalsa *(the pure Sikh) here. Since then, Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, at Anandpur Sahib, is considered the second most important seat of Sikhism after the Akal Takht in Amritsar and its jathedar one of the five high priests who hold ultimate sway on the religious and temporal affairs of the Sikhs.*

The current jathedar of the Takht is Harcharan Singh Mahalon, an erudite scholar who has been preaching and baptising Sikhs since 1953. He has signed all the recent hukamnamas *issued by the Akal Takht including the one excommunicating Buta Singh.*

But he did cause a stir by asking why the jathedars of the two Sikh takhts outside Punjab, at Patna and Nanded, should not be made party to future hukamnamas. *At the same time, he sought discussion among high priests on possible action against President Zail Singh for presenting gallantry awards to soldiers involved in Operation Bluestar. "On* hukamnamas *issued so far," he says, "I have no difference with the Akal Takht or the other high priests." But he does have acute differences with the Akali leadership, particularly on the question of Mrs Gandhi's assassination which he called "cowardly" and "treacherous" in a wide-ranging interview with Principal Correspondent* SHEKHAR GUPTA. *Excerpts:*

Q. *There is a certain amount of controversy about your statement that jathedars from Patna and Nanded should be involved in the decision-making on* hukamnamas. *What exactly do you mean?*

A. There should be no controversy. I have only raised an academic point. I feel that a *hukamnama* signed by all the high priests will prove much more effective. At the same time there is no contesting the supremacy of the Akal Takht. It was set up by Guru Hargobind while the remaining four were set up by Guru Gobind Singh, his grandson.

Q. *And your suggestion that Zail Singh be declared* tankhaiya *for giving away the gallantry awards to soldiers involved in Operation Bluestar.*

A. I did not exactly make a suggestion. A lot of wise men and intellectuals who come to see me have been raising this point and I only conveyed it to the other Singh Sahibans.

Q. *How do you find the situation in Punjab today? Who is responsible for bringing things to this pass?*

A. The situation is not happy. A lot of youngsters are upset. Basically, the anger is on the total absence of any inquiry into the riots after Mrs Gandhi's assassination. If the culprits for the killings are punished, and victims given as much compensation as soldiers killed in Operation Bluestar, the situation will improve. As for the responsibility, I think it lies with both, the Government and the Akalis. The Akali leaders too do not speak with one voice and are often inconsistent.

Q. *Do you agree with the Akali reticence in condemning Mrs Gandhi's assassination and now hailing Beant Singh as a martyr?*

A. I just do not understand that. How could the assassination be an act of bravery. I am quite clear about this. She

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deployed in a peacekeeping role during elections. It is unlikely that they will resident now, after staying firm in Assam in 1983 and in West Bengal during the Naxalite movement. A poll with the total absence of the army from the scene will prove to be a tricky affair unless a decisive majority of the rural population participates in it willingly.

The most politic approach to the problem would be a combination of political manoeuvre and economic sops, some of which were offered by the prime minister at Hussainiwala last fortnight. Now, his secretariat is studying an economic package for Punjab prepared by the Sikh Forum on Rajiv Gandhi's request. The proposals include:

► declaring the state as an industrially backward area;

► setting up at least two large industrial units in the state, each generating 25,000-30,000 jobs;

► clearance of the proposal for setting up a nuclear power plant in Punjab;

► subsidy on diesel generating sets and a moratorium on agricultural loans that remain unpaid due to disturbed conditions;

► provision of more agro-based industry and cotton spinning mills.

On another plane the Punjab Government has already set up a committee led by Financial Commissioner S.L. Kapur to travel round the country and persuade major industrialists to invest in the state where industry remains poorly developed. The Centre has also decided to exert pressure on big industrialists who have for years been sitting over licences to set up plants in Punjab. At the state level, the administration is likely to lift the freeze on ad hoc appointments which will at once clear the decks for filling up the nearly one lakh vacancies in government services.

But sops can never fill in for statesmanship and, ultimately, the fate of Punjab will depend on the extent to which both the Government and the Akalis are able to display that quality. Both have daunting compulsions, but also limited options and common reasons to hurry in the direction of conciliation. For example, if further delay in resuming a meaningful dialogue will lead to the resurgence of extremist power and embarrass the Government, it will also destroy the Akalis who, in any case, should be the best people to know how hard it is to counter the lure of an extremist movement among a directionless, frustrated population. The Bhindranwale phase and all that it stood for is much too recent to be forgotten and that is the challenge they will face if they fail to shrug off their political astigmatism.

On the other hand, the Centre and the Congress(I) will have to acknowledge that there is no wishing away the Akalis in Punjab. And because it is impossible to destroy them, the best course for the country would lie in living with them, as is the case with many other regional movements, such as the DMK in Tamil Nadu and Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh. The Akali inability to see themselves in a national or even a more complete Punjabi perspective and the Congress(I)'s paranoid distrust of regional forces are factors that make the Punjab problem so intractable. But after a three-year long impasse the Government's Baisakhi-eve initiative gives both sides an opportunity to disown this self-destructive legacy. It is an opportunity they cannot afford to lose.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA with bureau reports.

BHAWAN SINGH

"How could the assassination be an act of bravery? What is so heroic if my servant, whom I trust, kills me tomorrow?"

was killed by two persons who were employed to protect her, took their salaries from the Government, touched her feet every morning and called her, mother. How one day if they killed her what is so courageous about it. It was nothing short of "noon-harami" (betraying salt). What is so heroic about it if my servant, whom I trust, kills me tomorrow? I could understand the Akali attitude if they said they had sent the two to kill her. But they did it on their own.

Q. *But many people justify the murder drawing parallel with the beheading of debauch Massa Rangar outside the Golden Temple.*

A. I will tell you the history. Massa Rangar desecrated the Golden Temple by getting prostitutes to dance there. So the Nihangs in far-away Bikaner vowed to go and kill him. They galloped through the whole territory controlled by the Mughals, reached the temple, beheaded Massa Rangar, brought his head back to Bikaner, once again defying the Mughal forces, and fed it to dogs. Now that was courage. What happened in Delhi was entirely different.

Q. *President Zail Singh recently stated that people who killed Mrs Gandhi could not be real Sikhs. Do you agree?*

A. To my mind, anyone who commits treachery cannot in fact be called a true Sikh.

Q. *You signed the* hukamnama *declaring Buta Singh* tankhaiya. *What was his fault?*

A. He had let us all down. He met us on June 16 (1984), accepted our 14-point charter of demands and promised to come back with the prime minister's approval. But he turned up instead with Nihang Santa Singh to begin the *kar seva*. Similarly later he went back on promises made to Baba Kharak Singh in front of us all, the high priests and organised *Sarbat Khalsa*. But in spite of that when we gave him a lot of time to come and explain his conduct he stayed away, thereby committing contempt of court. Akal Takht is the highest religious court of the Sikhs.

Q. *What kind of support does the Khalistan demand have among the Sikhs? Is there a real threat of secessionism in Punjab?*

A. No one wants Khalistan, believe me. A very, very small number of people talk about it but they also do not mean it. This is their way of expressing frustration on the other issues where the Sikhs feel they are being wronged, for example the Delhi riots. Nevertheless if some corrective steps are taken even now to remove these grievances, the threat of secession will quickly disappear. I hope *waheguru* gives people wisdom and things get better.

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BHOPAL TRAGEDY

Case Against Carbide

THE will-it-won't-it phase in the traumatic saga of the Bhopal gas tragedy finally came to an end last fortnight when the Government filed a case in a New York court seeking compensation from Union Carbide Corporation Ltd (UCCL) for the death of some 2,500 people last December. The case was unique in more senses than one. Apart from being potentially the biggest compensation claim in legal history and pertaining to the world's worst accident, it was the first time that a government was taking such a step against a multinational corporation. The outcome is certain to have significant long term repercussions on the relationship between multinationals and developing countries.

The case will make legal history—if it is heard to the end. The decision to lodge it came after negotiations between UCCL and the Indian Government broke down. The Government had originally planned to file the case on March 16 but decided to postpone it awaiting an offer of an out of court settlement from the American company. In the event, two American lawyers representing UCCL met Petroleum Secretary B.B. Singh on March 27 and made an offer. But, as Chemicals and Fertiliser Minister Veerendra Patil told Parliament last fortnight, it was "so ridiculously low that it wasn't worth considering". While officials declined to say how much was offered, INDIA TODAY has learned that UCCL volunteered to pay US $ 200 million (Rs 260 crore) over 35 years with an immediate first instalment of 40 per cent. The first payment was raised to 60 per cent when Indian officials demurred, but UCCL didn't raise the overall amount. UCCL also wanted an assurance that the Government would not file any suits against it as a part of the settlement.

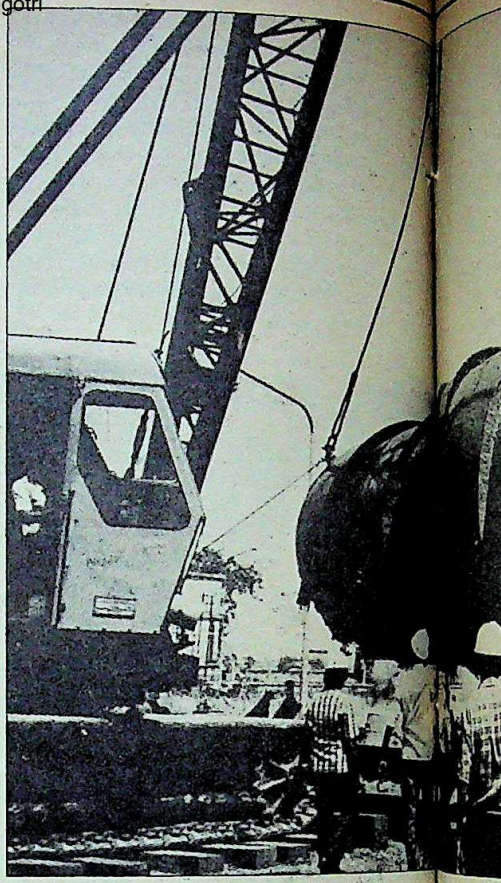
The offer was rejected outright and within days a team of Indian officials headed by the Law Secretary B.S. Sekhon had left for the United States to initiate legal proceedings. In spite of this, however, the Indian side hasn't closed its mind on a possible out of court settlement—provided the amount offered is right. One reason, of course, is that a lawsuit could well take many years to yield any concrete benefit to the victims of the disaster. Law Minister Asoke Sen told INDIA TODAY: "We shall wait and see."

The decision to file the suit followed the visit to the US of Attorney-General K.Parasuram last January. Parasuram returned to advise the Government to take the legal battle—till then being waged by scores of American and Indian lawyers acting independently on behalf of several thousand victims and survivors—into its own hands. The first step was the promulgation on February 20 of the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Procedure of Claims) Ordinance '85 which made it difficult for American lawyers to represent clients in India. Even though some American lawyers threatened to sue the Indian Government for promulgating the ordinance, officials say that the measure was in the best interest of the Bhopal victims. Patil told Parliament that its main objective was to ensure that the claims arising out of the gas disaster were dealt with "speedily, effectively, equitably and to the best advantage of the claimants".

In the meantime, the suit filed in the US accuses UCCL of "wanton disregard of the rights and safety of the citizens of countries where they do business". Represented by the firm Zelle, Larson and Kaplan of Minesotta, the Indian Government has argued that UCCL is "absolutely liable" for the disaster.

The suit filed in the US accuses Union Carbide of wanton disregard of the rights and safety of the citizens of countries where they do business.

The court's verdict will, naturally, depend on the case that the Indian side makes out. In the first weeks of the disaster, when America's so-called ambulance-chasers—lawyers who represent victims of accidents in which culpability can be established—descended on Bhopal, the prevalent view was that the mere fact that UCCL owned more than half the Indian subsidiary's equity would be sufficient to establish liability and responsibility for the accident and the deaths caused. But legal opinion is divided. "If it were as easy as all that, we would have sued them long ago," said one senior Law Ministry official.



The Government case must obviously be stronger and the American court will have to be convinced that Union Carbide was responsible for the design of the Bhopal plant, that it was aware of the shortcomings of the Bhopal plant, that it was party to the supervision of safety measures, and that it ignored tell-tale warnings. The Government is confident. Says Sen: "Our case is strong."

The confidence is based on several facts including a report by UCCL saying that in 1982 it had warned Union Carbide India Ltd (UCIL) about the laxity of safety measures in Bhopal. It was this report which enabled UCCL Chairman Warren Anderson last month to attempt to put the blame for the accident on the Indian subsidiary. That particular attempt carries little conviction in the light of another, more recent UCCL document examining the possibility of a runaway methyl isocyanate (MIC) reaction at its Institute, Virginia plant in the US. That report, dated mid-1984, just months before the Bhopal accident, listed as a major concern a "potential for runaway

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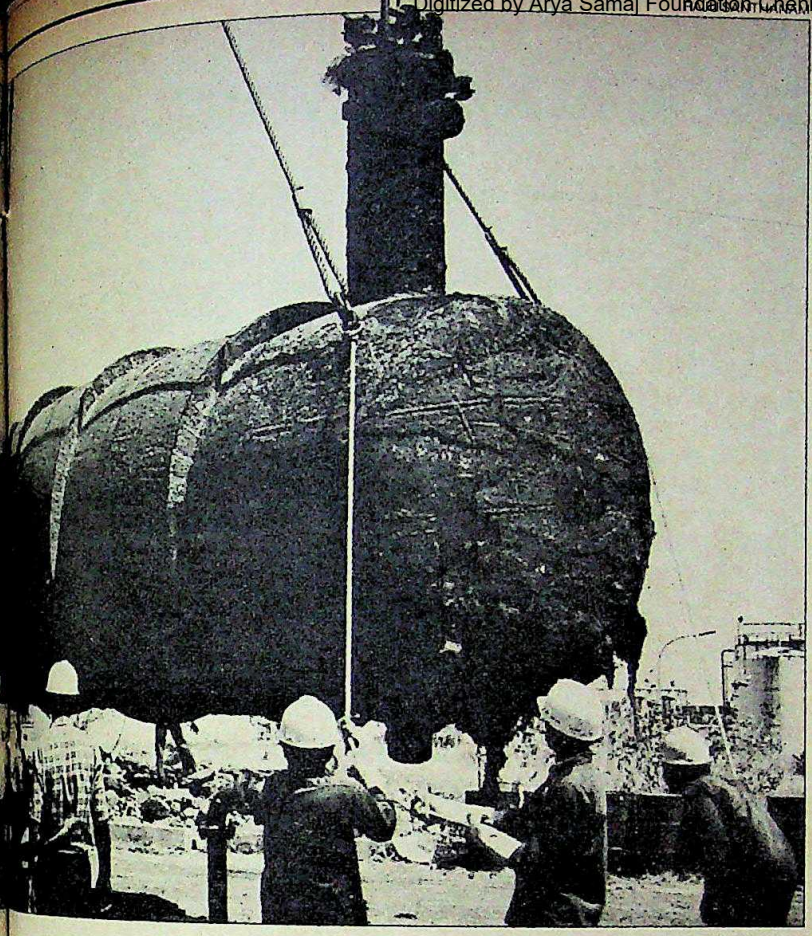

The tank which contained the gas being filled for examination: awaiting a verdict

reaction in (MIC) unit storage tanks due to a combination of contamination possibilities and reduced surveillance during "shock reaction". The Indian subsidiary wasn't sent this report and it isn't clear whether this had to do with design differences between the two plants at Bhopal and Institute, or whether there were any design differences at all. Conflicting reports have been made with some spokesmen saying that the two plants are of different design and others the opposite.

Meanwhile, the investigating authorities in Bhopal—the Central Bureau of Investigation as well as scientists—are still unsure of how the runaway reaction occurred. Some light was shed last fortnight when tank number 610, which contained the lethal MIC, was finally opened up. The start to the inquiry was hardly auspicious: the tank with an estimated 12 tonnes of residue in it proved too much for the crane that was to lift it and for a while, instead of the tank being lifted by the crane, it was the crane which found itself tilted by the tank.

When it was finally opened, scientists found carbon deposits within the tank suggesting that it wasn't just MIC that escaped. One of the scientists at the site, C.S.P. Iyer said: "This is a research-oriented investigation which may take a very long time." The most favoured theory is, of course, that water found its way into the tank—a possible cause of the reaction which has been suggested both by Indian scientists like Dr. S. Vardarajan of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research who headed the Indian scientists investigating the accident, and Carbide managers working on the basis of 'limited data'. Vardarajan and his team —which includes Iyer who is a senior scientist with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Asad Ali Khan of the Regional Research Laboratory and N.R. Iyengar of the National Chemical Laboratory at Pune—have now taken 25 samples from tank 610 and will analyse the compounds in the residue to reconstruct the chemical reaction of December 2/3 night. The problem of course is that the victims and survivors have so far had little to do except wait. And the waiting will go on till the accident is analysed, the court case heard and a verdict reached—unless, the Indian Government and UCCL do manage to come to an out of court settlement.

—RAJU SANTHANAM in Bhopal

ASSASSINATION

Slender Lead

FIVE months after it was set up, the Anand Ram Commission probing the assassination of Indira Gandhi is still unable to establish whether or not the conspiracy extended beyond the alleged assailants, Satwant and Beant Singh.So far, the commission has been painfully following up slender leads arising out of the evidence they have managed to collect. Their latest investigation involves a young 28-year-old former press superintendent of *Hitavad*, a prominent Bhopal newspaper, Attinderpal Singh. Singh is currently the focus of a massive manhunt launched in Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajastan and Uttar Pradesh.

Singh went underground after Operation Bluestar and is now ranked in police files as one of the most wanted extremists at large. After the death of Bhai Amrik Singh, vice-president of the then outlawed All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) Attinderpal was elevated as his successor.He was reportedly the leader of the group of Sikh youths who hoisted the Khalistan flag on top of the Golden Temple on October 1 last year.

But the Anand Ram team believes that Attinderpal may have had knowledge about the conspiracy to assassinate Mrs Gandhi. Team sources say that a group of conspirators led by Attinderpal met at Nagpur on September 13 and discussed the matter at length. According to evidence collected by the commission, the idea was eventually abandoned but they believe Attinderpal may have been part of an aborted conspiracy to assassinate Mrs Gandhi on September 15 during her visit to Nagpur.

In Bhopal, however, the possibility of Attinderpal's involvement is scoffed at. He was employed at *Hitavad* for barely six months and his colleagues say that he was extremely vocal about the Punjab issue and had decidedly extremist views. But even so, he was hardly considered terrorist material. Even the Madhya Pradesh branch of the Intelligence Bureau did not have him on their known extremist files till the Special Branch of the state police detained him as a security risk when former Punjab chief minister Darbara Singh visited Bhopal on April 15,1984, before the assassination.

But after the Golden Temple action he went underground and surfaced in September in Calcutta. In an interview to a Calcutta daily, Attinderpal claimed res-

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ponsibility for masterminding the hijacking of an Indian Airlines aircraft to Pakistan. He also admitted that he never stayed in one place for more than a day and travelled under assumed names and various disguises.

Some of his statements to the paper:

On the killing of bus passengers in Punjab

"It is a reaction to years of subjugation. It was a means of letting the community know of our struggle. These acts will continue.

On the Sikh demand.

"Before Operation Bluestar all we wanted was implementation of the Anandpur Sahib resolution. Now we will settle for nothing less than independence."

On the 'struggle'

"It is not against the Hindu community but against the Hindu-minded government."

While in Calcutta, Attinderpal was known to have contacted the suspects arrested with Simranjit Singh Mann, the former police officer, on the Indo-Nepal border. Authorities believe that he may

Attinderpal Singh: massive manhunt

have fled to a neighbouring country but judging by their past record, that could merely mean that he has evaded the dragnet. He is known to be controlling certain Sikh extremist groups in Durg and Indore in Madhya Pradesh. In a bid to flush him out, the authorities are considering releasing his photograph publicly and asking for help in tracing his whereabouts. "He may not have been directly involved in the assassination but nevertheless he will be a crucial witness in the case," says an official.But to obtain his evidence, they first have to catch him.

—RAJU SANTHANAM in Bhopal

GUJARAT

Escalation Threat

From all indications, the two-month-old anti-reservation stir in Gujarat could well escalate into a major caste war. With the more strident anti-reservationists enlarging the scope of the agitation to question reservations per se and the Harijans increasingly realising the need to protect their rights, the portents last fortnight were ominous. Should the stir intensify, the casualties of this round between the state's feuding social groups could dwarf those in an earlier round in 1981. Warned Surendra Rajput, Youth Congress(I) Leader and MLA, "Lower castes who did not till now know that they were entitled to concessions are now getting conscious because of the agitation. There is bound to be a backlash."

The biggest tragedy, of course, is that the agitation is totally pointless. This is not merely because Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki announced last month that the January 18 decision increasing reservations would not be implemented for a year and that the whole reservations policy would be reviewed.

More important is the fact that the quota of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the socially and educationally backward castes (SEBC's) in the state's colleges is hardly ever filled up. The controversial January decision had increased the quota from 31 per cent to 49 per cent but in the state's medical and engineering colleges, which are the twin eyes of the storm, the actual utilisation of the quota has never exceeded 17.4 per cent and at times been as low as 11.6 per cent.

In the medical colleges barely a sixth of the quota was filled up in the last academic year. In the engineering colleges the situation was still worse, with only around 12 per cent of the reserved seats actually being taken by candidates from the deprived castes.

Explains Niranjan Singh, secretary of the Social Welfare Department, "Under utilisation of the reserved quota is mainly due to the inadequate facilities for teaching English, science and maths in the backward areas of the state. A good grasp of these subjects is necessary to get admission into technical institutions."

But logic and sane thinking had few takers in Gujarat even though there was a lull in the agitation after the communal riots in Ahmedabad last month in which 13 people lost their lives. The first signs of a looming confrontation war were visible on April 7 when pro-reservationists clashed with anti-reservationists in Ahmedabad at a meeting of the newly-formed Parents' Association. The meeting was convened to decide on how to intensify the agitation by emerging as a new pressure group aligned with the students.

The fall-out of the clash was predictable. Schools which were supposed to hold examinations hastily closed down as anti-reservationists went around threatening office-goers and indulging in brickbatting. As attitudes stiffened, sociology professor and convenor of the Parents' Association Shankerbhai Patel threatened: "There will be no examinations unless this issue is solved."

Though the Akhil Gujarat Navratna Samiti, a federation of students spearheading the agitation, still continued to maintain that it was only against the increase in reservations, the Samiti was discovering that not all agitators were prepared to be so reasonable. Though not grouped under any organisation, many agitators stepped up their demand to total abolition of reservations. The recurring manifestation of this feeling was the ubiquitous 'funeral procession' of reserved seats which came out in various parts of the state. At one such ceremony on April 2 at the affluent Satellite Road area in Ahmedabad a student dressed as a pujari performed the last 'rites' after the 'death' of the reservations system while a large number of women looked on approvingly.

There were similarly strident stirrings on the other side of the social spectrum. The Harijans have begun to realise that their rights are under attack. Meetings were held in various labour localities to spread consciousness on this issue. Their endeavours were buttressed by those of human rights organisations like the Lok Adhikar Sangh which also held a meeting to urge the oppressed castes to stand up for their rights.

Meanwhile, the agitation took another turn when examinations became the prestige issue. The tenth and twelfth standard board examinations, along with the college exams, were scheduled to commence last fortnight but

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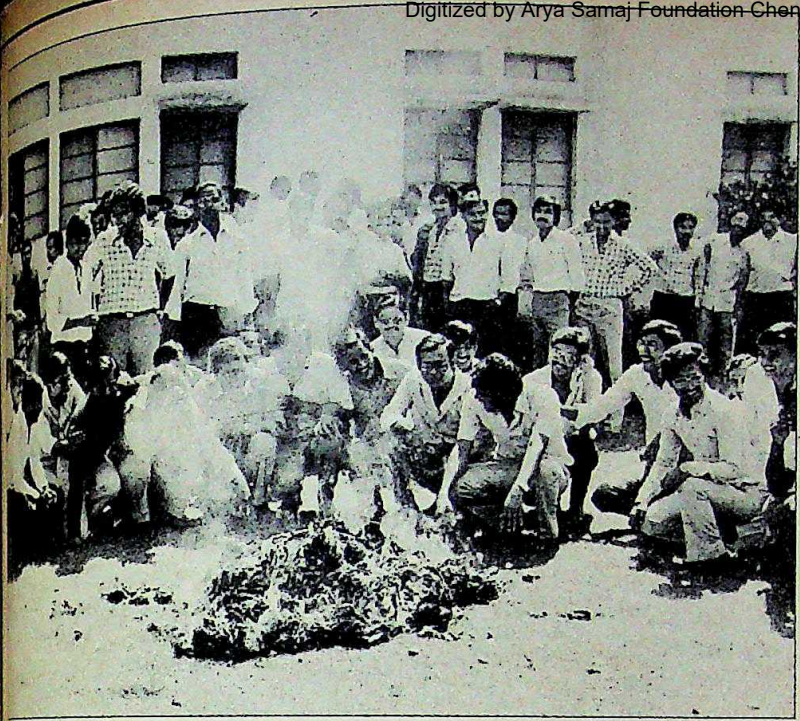

Striking doctors burn termination notices: grave reservations

are been indefinitely postponed due to the disturbances. This has only aggravated matters as the schools have been caught in the crossfire between belligerent agitators and an unbending government. Even as most schools announced that there would be no examinations and vacations would start immediately, state Home Minister Amarsinh Chaudhari warned that he would stop grants to schools which did that. Asked a helpless school supervisor: "Will the Government guarantee the safety of every child if we decide to hold examination?"

The students are adamant that they will disrupt examinations if held now. Says Gaurang Shah, student leader, "The final showdown will start if the Government insists on holding examinations." Defending their belligerency, Shah adds: "We realise that the future of several lakh students is involved but even if they pass the exams what is their future with such a reservation system where no merit is ever recognised?"

To hold exams in such a potentially explosive situation will not be easy for the Government. As many as 4.8 lakh students of the tenth standard and the twelfth standard are scheduled to appear for the secondary school board exams at 4,95 centres in 1,300 buildings. There are almost half as many college students also waiting for exams.

The Government's ineptitude was not just confined to its inability to solve this dilemma. Almost everything it did boomeranged. It decided on a tough line by arresting the three leading student leaders, Vivek Patel, Kanu Patel and Amit Desai. While this suppressed the agitation briefly, as the other leaders went into hiding, it soon created a backlash in the shape of the Parents' Association which not only widened the support base of the agitation but also served to give it a greater credibility.

A similar fate attended the Government's attempt to discipline the students. When 1,500 junior doctors from government hospitals in Ahmedabad, Surat, Baroda and Jamnagar went on strike demanding the release of the student leaders, Chaudhari promptly issued termination notices to them. But the medicos treated the notice as a joke and made a bonfire of them in the civil hospital campus in Ahmedabad. Later, they got an order from the Gujarat High Court staying the termination notices.

Even its employees were turning belligerent. Some 600 government employees took out a huge procession in Gandhinagar, the state capital, demanding the abolition of reservation. The Government had them all arrested.

Increasingly being pushed into a corner, the Government could only repeat its conviction that 'vested interests' were behind the agitation. Asked Solanki: "When we have categorically stated that we are not going to implement the decision, why is the agitation continuing?" Chaudhari had an explanation for the seemingly baffling phenomenon. "Obviously some politicians who were defeated in the last elections are using this (agitation) to get back into public life."

Gujarat's Congress(I) leaders had obviously taken their cue from Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's statement that the Opposition was behind the communal riots last month. But local leaders have expressed reservations regarding this charge. Maulana Habiburrehman, general secretary of the Jamait-e-Islam-Hind, told a committee set up by the Lok Adhikar Sangh that the riots were the handiwork of Congress(I) elements trying to divert attention from the reservations issue.

The Government was similarly embarrassed when it decided to table the Rane Commission report, which was submitted in 1981 and which the Government accepted in a modified form in its infamous January 18 announcement. The tabling of the report only gave verbal ammunition to the anti-reservationists because the Rane Commission had categorically stated that family income and occupation, and not caste, should be the sole criteria for determining social and educational backwardness for reservations. Identification of backward classes in terms of caste would only perpetuate the evil of the caste system, the report had noted. But the Solanki Government, predictably enough, did the opposite of what the commission had recommended and plumped for the more politically advantageous retention of only the caste criterion. Now it is trying to order the genie back into the lamp but the genie has become a Frankenstein.

The Government is not the only one guilty of looking for short-term gains. Many so-called student leaders have jumped into the fray only because reservations was a readymade political issue which could give them instant prominence. Their political ambitions are the only motivating factors behind their participation in the stir. Similarly it must also be remembered that Shankerbhai Patel of the Parents' Association has long been an activist in the Gujarat Adhyapak Sangh, the association of university teachers.

The overall picture from Gujarat was of unremitting gloom. About the only glimmer of hope was provided by the residents of the riot-affected Dariapur area in Ahmedabad who met under one roof and chanted prayers from all religions and thanked army jawans for helping to restore normalcy. Good sense held sway in at least one corner of the scarred state.

—RAMESH MENON

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WEST BENGAL

Unexpected Change

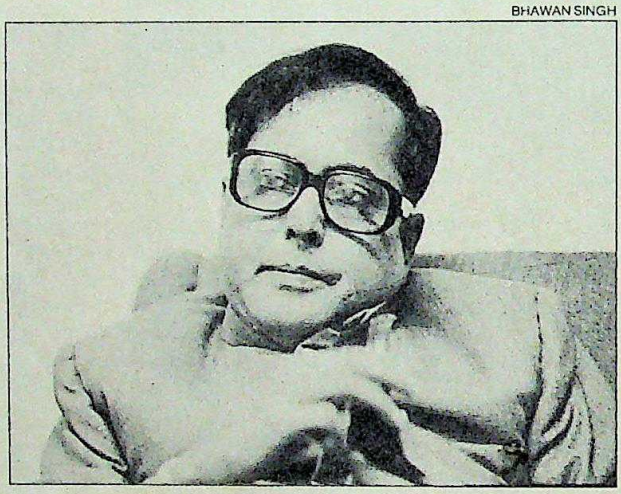
THE REHABILITATION of Pranab Mukherjee last fortnight was as surprising as it was inexplicable. In the three months that had elapsed since the No 2 in Mrs Gandhi's cabinet was dropped by Rajiv Gandhi, the former finance minister had largely stayed in the shadows. When two Congress(I) MP's hinted in Parliament on April 1 that Mukherjee had had some connections with the discredited Rajendra Sethia, it seemed that his detractors in the party would not even let him lick his wounds in peace. Yet, within 48 hours of this public mudslinging, Mukherjee was named as the new president of the Pradesh Congress(I) Committee, the most crucial office a Congressman can hold in an Opposition-ruled state.

Not suprisingly, the announcement was received with a mixture of shock and dismay in party circles. "It was like a bolt from the blue," said Gyan Singh Sohanpal, MLA. Somen Mitra, a known follower of Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Mukherjee's political opponent, asked pointedly, "Can a man who the Prime Minister says is too 'goody-goody' manage the party of a volatile state like Bengal?" Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, MP and known to be close to Union Law Minister Asoke Sen was all praise for the decision in public but in private reportedly said that Mukherjee's appointment would only accentuate the party's organisational weakness in the state. Even the party high command was somewhat equivocal about the merits of its candidate: as general secretary, Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, who handles West Bengal said, "Pranab's choice was the best—under the circumstances."

Admittedly, the high command was faced with a difficult decision: the range of candidates who could replace the ailing Ananda Gopal Mukherjee as the PCC(I) chief was limited while it was necessary to appoint an effective head to combat the Left Front politically with elections only two years away. The task is to win the elections, and only a dynamic PCC(I) president would be able to exploit the full potential of the growing support for the Congress(I), most dramatically brought out in the Lok Sabha elections where the party virtually matched the Left Front vote for vote. That this upsurge had come about inspite of a moribund Congress(I), riven with dissensions, has been due largely to the lacklustre performance of the Left Front in the eight years it has been in power. But the parliamentary results had shaken the Front and there have been clear signs that the CPI(M) has finally decided to shake off its complacency. Most important, the CPI(M) has Jyoti Basu, whose charisma and popularity is still unmatched in the state, as its mascot. The Congress(I) high command was enjoined, therefore, to find a leader who would not merely galvanise its workers but also be able to measure up to Basu's image in public. The choice was between Mukherjee, Chowdhury and Sen: Mukherjee won out because Chowdhury's image is too controversial while Sen, who re-entered politics only recently after a break of two decades, has been out of touch with things for too long.

Pranab Mukherjee: reinstated

BHAWAN SINGH



The task is to win the next elections and only a dynamic PCC(I) president would be able to exploit the full potential of the growing support for the Congress(I).

While that was the rationale, the actual method of selecting Mukherjee was instructive of how the party is run now. The exercise began by Rajiv asking Sen, Khan Chowdhury and Subrata Mukherjee to give their recommendations for the post in writing. Sen was asked to comment on Mukherjee and Khan Chowdhury, Khan Chowdhury on Sen, and Mukherjee and Subrata on all three. Next, Rajiv interviewed all three and asked them what their priorities would be if they were given the post. Mukherjee said his aim would be to extend the mass support of the party by highlighting the bad policies and management of the Left Government so as to win the next elections. Nobody else was as clear-headed or showed as much motivation as he did.

There was also the factor that in his dealings with the Left Government as Union finance minister, Mukherjee had been very much a hawk, refusing to do any favours even though it was his home state. This was in marked contrast to Khan Chowdhury who had gone out of his way to push projects in Bengal, which had earned him the grudging admiration of the Left Front.

Once the job was his, Rajiv held another meeting with Mukherjee at which the two discussed how best to go about the task of politically combating the CPI(M)-led Front which was in retreat but still had unassailable pockets in many rural areas. Of the 16 Lok Sabha seats that the Congress(I) won in the last poll, as many as 13 were in predominantly urban areas. Rajiv found that Mukherjee had equally clear views on how he would galvanise the party. Mukherjee thinks that district Congress committees have outlived their utility and should be replaced by sub-divisional committees as the fulcrum of the party's contact with the masses. That, he felt, was the best way to take the party to the villages, a game plan that Rajiv approved and that might go into operation

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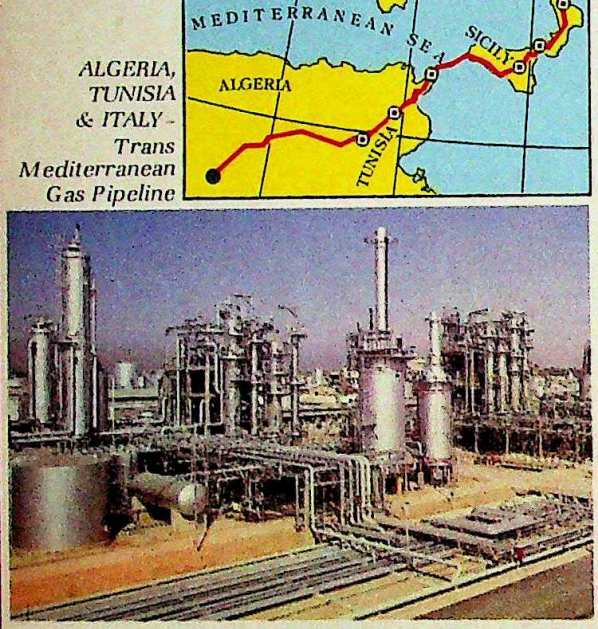

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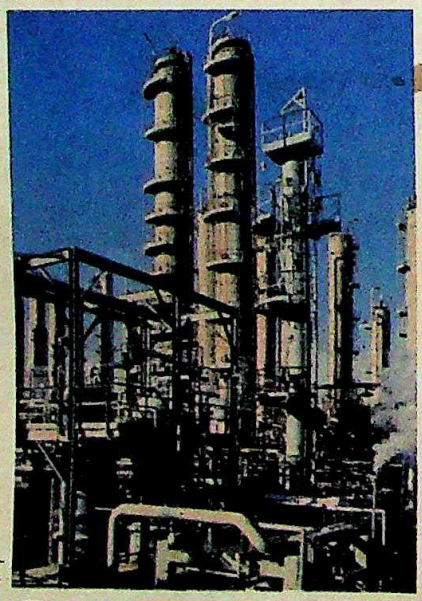

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in the coming months.

But having named the 'general' the party again hesitated to give him his lieutenants. Conventionally, the PCC chief and his office-bearers have always been appointed together but even though Mukherjee's appointment was announced on April 3, the full list of the PCC(I) had not been announced till late last fortnight. It was learnt that the major hitch was over Das Munshi, who the high command reportedly wanted appointed as the general secretary. Mukherjee, it was learnt, was reluctant to accept him but wanted at least one more general secretary.

But on the face of it, Mukherjee was not letting all the doubts and uncertainties get to him last fortnight. "Factionalism will not pose any problems for me because this is a choice by the Congress(I) president," he told INDIA TODAY, clearly happy to be once again active in politics. He demonstrated his clout with the state Congressmen by persuading them to abandon the boycott of the Assembly, and even as the high command pondered over the PCC(I) list he gave them, flew off to north Bengal to campaign for the party in the three by-elections due on April 24.

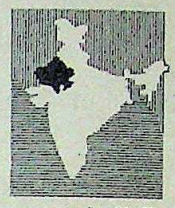
Mukherjee can expect no quarter from the Left Front. The Front's members regard Mukherjee as part of the clique in Delhi which has denied the state its share from the Central kitty. Posters naming Mukherjee as a "conspirator" in this design came up on Writers' Buildings wall within days of his appointment. And Prasanta Sur, the CPI(M)'s urban affairs minister, indicated the bitterness with which his party regards Mukherjee when he said: "If the prime minister is advised on West Bengal affairs by men like Pranab Mukherjee then why Calcutta, the whole state of West Bengal will die."

Mukherjee's political mettle is currently undergoing what is perhaps its severest test. His handicaps are well known: having been away from Bengal for so long he does not have many grass roots contacts in the party; having spent most of his political life holding posts in various governments he is more a file pusher than a motivator of partymen; not having ever won an election he is now being entrusted with the electoral fortunes of an entire state. For starters, he must ensure that his party wins the by-election in Hassan, which falls in his home district of Birbhum. History can wait for the rest.

—SUMIT MITRA with INDRANIL BANERJIE

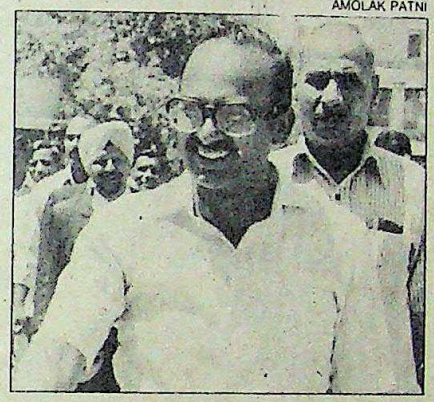
RAJASTHAN

Case Celebre



LAST fortnight saw the prelude to a trial, the kind which Rajasthan has never witnessed before. Kan Singh Bhati, deputy superintendent of police, who stands accused of killing independent legislator Man Singh of Deeg in Bharatpur district on February 21, was arrested on April 6—along with his driver Mahendra Singh and Deeg's station house officer Veerendra Singh. The arrests were made by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which is handling the case.

AMOLAK PATNI



Bhati: in the dock

On April 7, a day after his arrest, Bhati was remanded to police custody by Giriraj Prasad Sharma, special judicial magistrate for CBI cases, Jaipur, and his application for bail rejected. After spending four days in police custody, Bhati was then remanded to judicial custody for 14 days. The time, it was stated, was necessary for the further interrogation of Kan Singh Bhati.

This was challenged by Bhati's lawyer Dalip Singh, who took the case before Justice Vinod Shankar Dave of the Jaipur bench of the Rajasthan High Court. The CBI is represented in Dave's court by their standing counsel S.P. Tyagi. Although this was not the beginning of the main trial, the arguments augur much of what is to come in one of the most interesting cases of recent times.

The Deeg tragedy occurred when Man Singh—following alleged hooliganism by Congress(I) workers before the assembly elections—drove his heavy jeep, in a fit of rage, into a podium constructed by the ruling party. Still seething with anger, Man Singh drove down to an airstrip where a helicopter that had brought in the then chief minister Shiv Charan Mathur was parked, and rammed his jeep into the plane. Since a pilot was in the plane at that time, a case of attempt to murder was registered by the police.

According to Bhati, he was in the Deeg police station on February 21, when he got reports that Man Singh and his men—armed—were creating disorder. He immediately rushed to the spot along with a posse of policemen and tried to persuade Man Singh to surrender. Bhati says that the legislator did not respond and he and his men opened fire. In the return police fire, Man Singh and two of his men were shot dead.

The CBI came into the picture soon afterwards when Vijay Singh, Man Singh's son-in-law, lodged a complaint alleging that Bhati and his policemen came to the Deeg marketplace with the specific objective of murdering Man Singh. Vijay Singh also alleged that the murder was pre-planned by senior state government officials.

What is of interest is not the view of Vijay Singh alone: at this point, the CBI too seems to be following the same line. The CBI's application in Sharma's court for a police remand reveals its startling stand on the case. It reads: "He (Bhati) is the best person to reveal the complicity of other high officials of the Government of Rajasthan. For the purpose of fair and effective investigation, all the real culprits responsible for the commission of the crime directly or indirectly within the purview of investigation/law irrespective of their higher status, position in society and in administration are necessary to be brought to book."

Tyagi said as much in court when he referred to the helicopter smash-up and of chief minister Mathur's anger afterwards. He immediately drew a parallel to the celebrated case of dacoit Sunder during the Emergency, who was said to have been killed by the Delhi police because of the danger he supposedly posed to Sanjay Gandhi. At another point, Tyagi also said that the whole department had helped Bhati. Some of Tyagi's contentions in court:

- 67 neutral witnesses questioned by the CBI at Deeg said that the first shot had been fired by Bhati which hit Man Singh in the head. Police firing broke out only subsequently;
- the police version of the jeep's occupants being heavily armed was wrong;
- the bullet that killed Man Singh ent-

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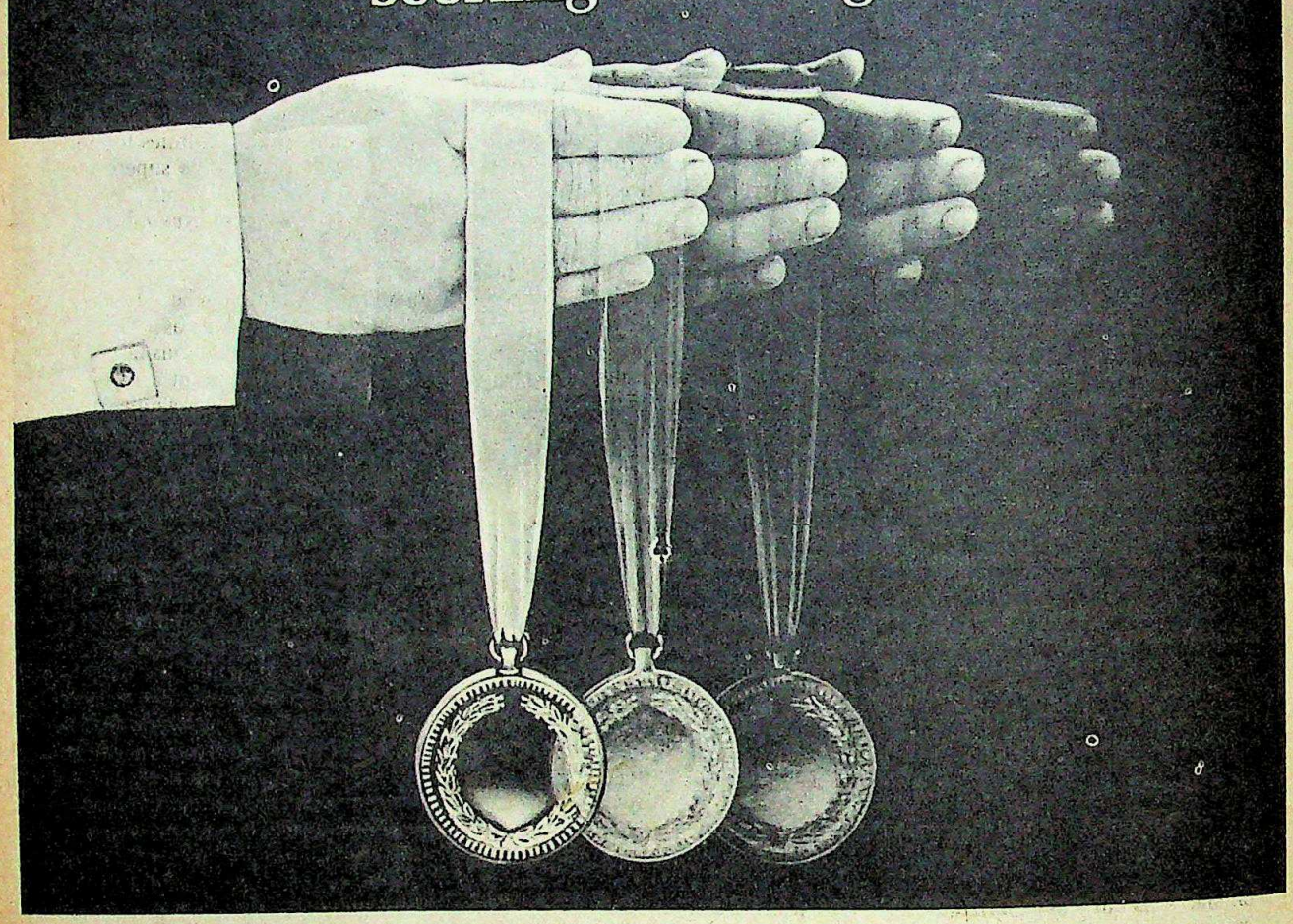
Outstanding achievement comes from seeking challenge.



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ered behind his right ear;

▶ Bhati had been issued 12 bullets for his .38 calibre revolver. Only 11 were recovered from him.

Bhati's lawyers have several options open to them in pursuing his defence. If ballistic and forensic experts establish that the bullet that killed Man Singh did, in fact, come from his revolver, he could take the plea that his firing was in self-defence or that his action does not amount to murder.

Section 300 of the Indian Penal Code lays down some exceptions in which culpable homicide is not murder, one relating to a public servant causing death by exceeding the powers given to him under law. Bhati could seek refuge under this, but he will have to show that he believed his action "in good faith ... to be lawful and necessary for the due discharge of his duty" and that he bore no ill will toward the deceased.

Section 46 of the Criminal Procedure Code states that the police can use "all means necessary" to effect arrest but can cause death only if the accused is involved in a case which could bring him life imprisonment or the death sentence. Since Bhati contends that Man Singh resisted arrest—and was an accused for attempt to murder—a defence could be built up on that.

The CBI investigations are still to be completed. They have asked for, and got, judicial remand for Bhati. If the prosecution can establish that the daylight killing of Man Singh was preplanned, with Bhati the willing tool in the hands of police and political high-ups, it would not only decide the case, but also shake the entire police administration to its roots. Of course, the defence may just work, but till then the ghost of Man Singh continues to loom over the fortunes of deputy superintendent of police Kan Singh Bhati.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

RAJASTHAN POLICE

Dubious Deed

NOTHING seems to be going right for the Rajasthan Police. The storm which broke over their involvement in the sensational killing in Deeg of the independent legislator Raja Man Singh has barely died down when they have been buffeted by another. Last fortnight, Bikaner's superintendent of police Rohitashwa Kumar was suspended and arrested for allegedly molesting the wife of his Additional Superintendent R.D Goyal. The unprecedented disciplinary action was taken only because the incident set off a furious debate in the state assembly and was reported diligently by the press.

The incident occurred in Bikaner on March 23 but was reported in the press only three days later. Though Kumar's and Goyal's versions are conflicting, it is certain that Kumar visited Goyal's house sometime after 9 p.m. In an interview to *Itwari Patrika*, a Jaipur-based weekly, Goyal said that Kumar had two drinks at his place. Goyal went out briefly to meet a complainant and returned to meet Kumar walking briskly out of the house. Rushing in he found his wife in tears and she told her husband that his boss had molested her. Goyal rushed to his superior's house in a fit of rage—stick in hand—but Kumar was not in. He immediately telephoned S.S. Pawar, the DIG of police who asked him to put down his complaint in writing. The complaint was then communicated to the Director General of Police, Raghunath Singh Kapoor.

Though the complaint was made, the police did not register a first information report (FIR) even as late as March 26. It was only after an uproar in the Assembly, when the Chief Minister Harideo Joshi said that he would not make a statement because the facts were being looked into, that he assured the agitated members that a case would be registered.

Kumar: an unsavoury past

Kumar, 38, in an interview to the same weekly denied the charge and said that the whole story had been fabricated. He claimed that the elaborate plan had been sprung because Goyal piqued by certain decisions made a few weeks earlier, which had reduced his power considerably, had decided to take revenge.

But Kumar doesn't seem to be a very popular officer: when the matter came up in the Assembly, there was a veritable tide of complaints about his past behaviour. Devi Singh Bhati, a Janata Party member, alleged that Kumar had also misbehaved with the wife of an official in Chittorgarh and a teacher in Bharatpur. Nathu Singh (BJP) said that Kumar had been notorious in Tonk and Jaisalmer as well.

Action against Kumar was taken only on April 1, more than a week after the incident, after a preliminary enquiry by DIG (CID) V.K. Kaul. A case was registered under Sections 354 and 451 of the Indian Penal Code—outraging a woman's modesty and house trespass to commit an offence punishable with imprisonment. Kaul ordered the arrest of Kumar but he was released on bail soon after.

Commenting on the pace of the action, a police official said: "A police officer's failure to immediately register an FIR is considered a serious offence for which several SHO's have been suspended in the part. But when one of our own is involved, we have taken a week to register the case." Had the press not reported the incident, had the assembly not been in session, it is doubtful if action would have been taken. The police brotherhood is strong and if Kumar had got off, he wouldn't have been the first: the standards applied to policemen and to the common public are rarely the same.

The event has had two spin-offs: one mildly amusing, the other more serious. Kumar, who is said to enjoy some political clout, has steadfastly maintained that after leaving Goyal's residence, he went to the residence of Kanta Kathuria, a Bikaner Congress(I) leader. Kathuria denied this—but only a week afterwards. The other feature is more unfortunate. So strong are caste rivalries in the state that some believe that Kumar is being victimised because he belongs to the Scheduled Caste section. A development that is certain to divert attention from the real issue at stake.

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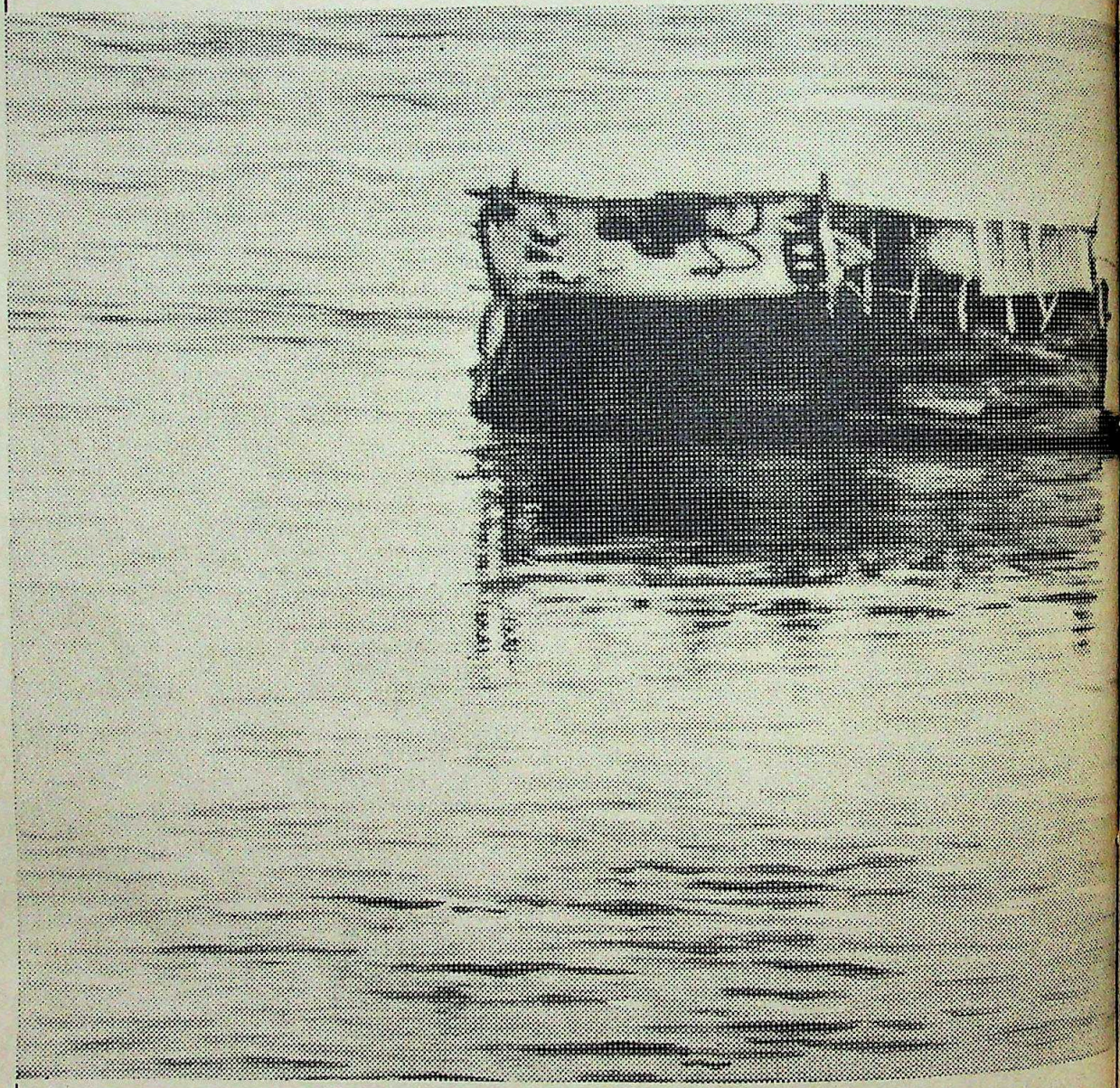

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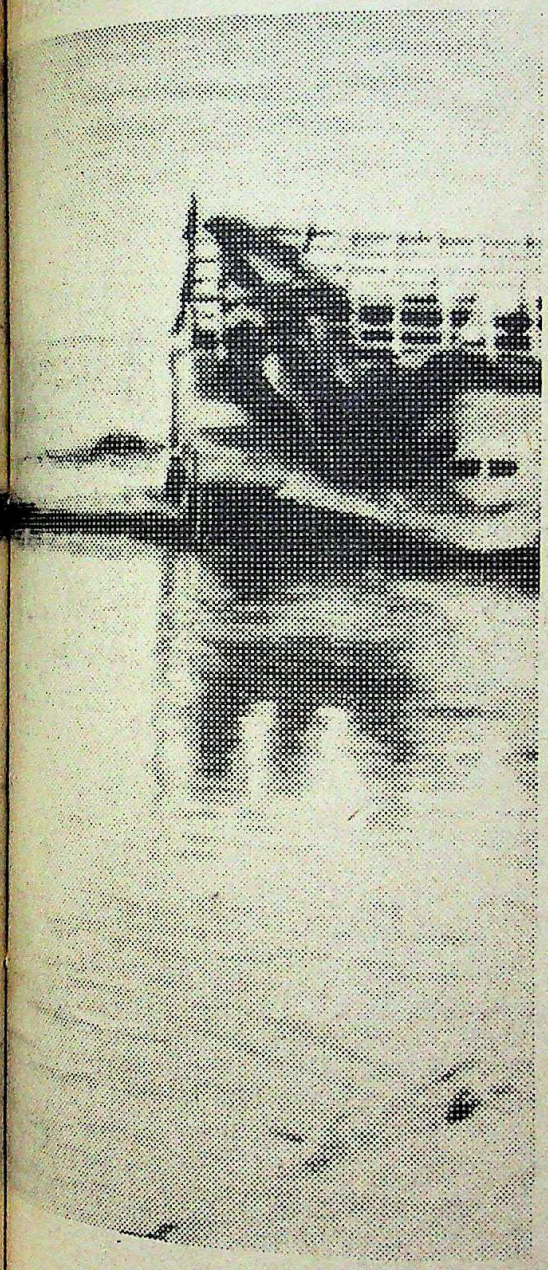

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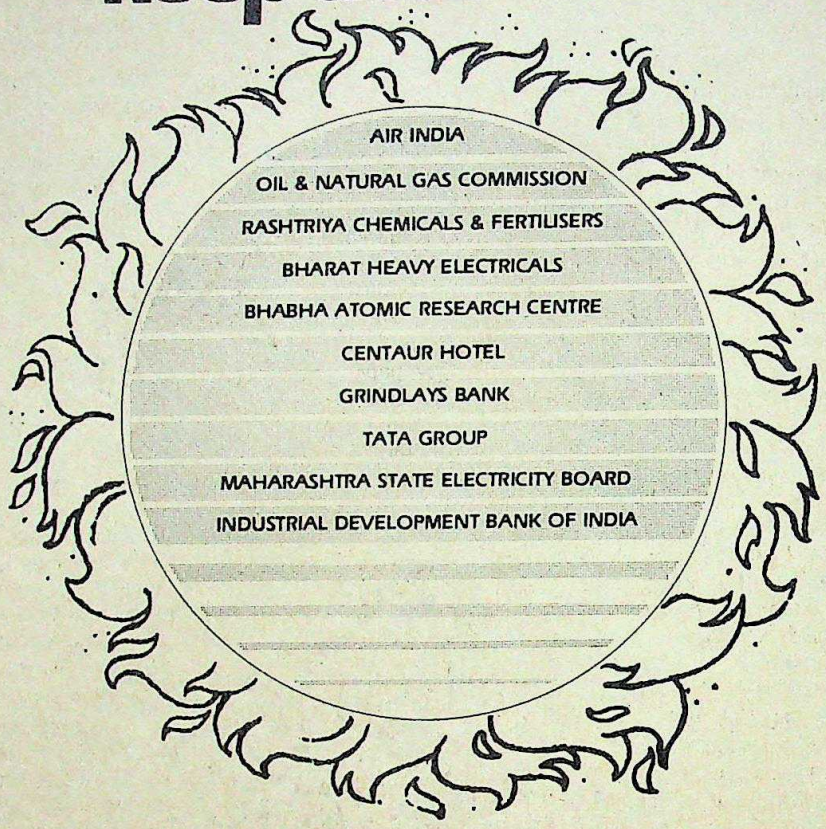

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MAHARASHTRA

Municipal Manoeuvers

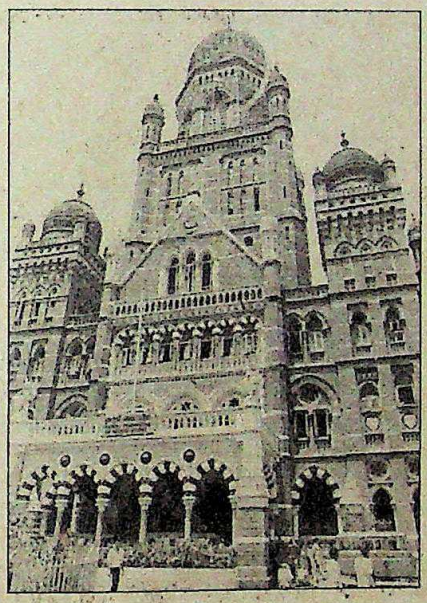
THE VENERABLE Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC), at 108 years of age, is not just the second oldest civic body in the country; it is by far the richest. With a budget of over Rs 600 crore, it earns a bigger income than some states do. Considering the many tenders it handles, rags to riches stories abound among members of the civic body. The best known is that of a deputy sanitary inspector who went on to hold political office and then became a millionaire—all in the space of a mere 10 years. With civic elections slated for April 25, the importance of the BMC can be gauged from the fact that some Union ministers flew down to Bombay to put in a word for their favourites while others telephoned in. In fact, the Shiv Sena's only MLA Chhagan Bhujbal, has said that he prefers to opt out of state politics if he can manage a berth in the corporation.

A phenomenal 4,000 applicants crowded the Congress(I) offices in the hope of contesting the 170 seats in the BMC—paying Rs 10 each for the forms. Of these, 2,516 finally paid up the Rs 400 deposit and formally applied for the ruling party ticket. When the Bombay Regional Congress Commitee (BRCC) insisted that all aspiring candidates submit a voter's certificate along with their forms, there was bedlam and a 1000-strong mob attacked the BMC election office. As they broke furniture and toppled tables in a frenetic effort to break queues, a municipal official surveying the damage remarked: "God help the city if these are the people who are going to represent us."

When the Congress(I) list was announced, there was an even greater rumpus. Angry aspirants and their supporters smashed furniture and telephones at the BRCC office and shouted slogans against BRCC chief Murli Deora. Similar protests were registered at Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil's residence where party leaders were gheraoed.

To add to the party's embarrassment, Shrikant Shenoy, general secretary of the Youth Congress(I) press cell, charged that the Congress list had a number of "rising sons, wives and PA's of MLA's and ex-MLA's." Rajiv Bodhankar, son of MPCC(I) president N.M. Kamble, is one of them. There are five journalists also in the list.

Bombayites, however, are distressed by the charge that members of the underworld as well as slum lords and *matka* kings have got a fair representation in several party lists. While Haji Mastan's Dalit Muslim Suraksha Mahasangh seems to have folded up, a city paper reported warnings from the underworld to some candidates against entering certain areas. Shenoy even



Deora (top) and the BMC: high stakes

named some Congress(I) nominees who are alleged to be slum lords involved in illegal constructions and accused of robbery and assault. Particularly damaging for the Congress(I) is the inclusion of Dilip Hire who was convicted of the murder of a communist worker but later let off on appeal. Hire also has a case of assault on a policeman pending against him.

But Congress(I) general secretary in charge of the BRCC election wing C.D. Oomachen feels the party's detractors are being uncharitable. Pointing out that Hire was formerly with the Shiv Sena, he remarked: "Will you not allow one who has been a sinner to reform?" As for the scenes of unruliness he said that heightened emotions were common before elections and "then it is each man for himself and God for all."

Deora was less complacent about party indiscipline, and warned that rebel candidates would be expelled, insisting that after the withdrawal date very few genuine dissidents remained in the field. Shenoy, he pointed out, had no business using the letterhead of the press cell of the Youth Congress (I) since that body had been disbanded two years ago.

The scramble for tickets belies the fact that the party has not gained a majority in city politics for nearly two decades. An opposition alliance was in power when the BMC was superseded in March last year for no ostensible reason. But the Congress(I)'s showing in the assembly elections where it captured 27 out of 34 seats in Bombay, has raised hopes of a repeat performance in the civic polls. All the same, it needs to be remembered that the percentage of votes for the ruling party fell from 60 per cent in the Lok Sabha polls to 43 per cent in the assembly elections just two months later.

The opposition parties in the fray are, however, desperately divided. Only the Janata, Congress(S), and PWP remain in the whittled down Progressive Democratic Front (PDF). The BJP, Kamghar Aghadi, Shiv Sena and other groups are fighting independently. The chief minister, meanwhile, who had little say in city ticket distribution, expressed his ire by remarking coldly: "Let the BRCC manage its own affairs." He has enough on his plate with another confrontation with the party high command seemingly in the offing. He is probably the only Congress(I) chief minister who can afford to defy party leadership —considering the Congress (I)'s thin majority, his departure could spell the fall of the Congress (I).

When the high command ignored Vasantdada's recommendations for five metropolitan council seats and suggested four names inimical to him, including those of potential rivals Nasik rao Tirpude and Pratibha Patil, the chief minister publicly threw the list aside and announced he would not tolerate it. Charging that it would be backdoor entry for those denied assembly tickets, Vasantdada flew to Delhi last week to see the prime minister—but returned without a meeting. And the issue of the MLC's still hangs fire.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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ORISSA

Lord of the Ring

THAT the fall of a politician can be just as dramatic as his rise is currently best illustrated by the case of Basanta Kumar Biswal, the controversial confidant of the Orissa Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik. Till barely over two months ago 50-year-old Biswal was lording it over the state as the so-called 'super chief minister' but today, when it seems increasingly clear that the Congress(I) high command is disinclined to give him an election ticket, the ex-minister is struggling to protect his fiefdom.

Biswal's decline began when he was among 45 party MLA's who were denied tickets for the Assembly elections last month. Biswal's followers had then pinned their hopes on their leader getting the party's nod for the Khurda seat which Patnaik had vacated after winning it. But even that hope was dashed last month when the party announced the candidature of Dr Baidyanath Mishra, an educationist, for the prestigious by-election. This fresh evidence of the high command's lack of enthusiasm came after both Biswal and Patnaik spent several days in Delhi lobbying for his rehabilitation.

Biswal himself was nonchalant about the reverses. "It hardly matters whether I am a minister or not," the contractor-turned-politician told INDIA TODAY, "I am still loved by the people, legislators and officials." He was also not prepared to commit himself on who he thinks is responsible for his fall from grace. Dismissing reports naming Patnaik as the moving force behind the latest setback, Biswal would only say, "I would not name anybody. But somebody conspired against me and wrongly briefed the high command. Everybody knows who the conspirators are."

Biswal's supporters, however, were prepared to be more categorical. They allege that Biswal's arch-rival, fellow minister Niranjan Patnaik, had teamed up with K.P. Singhdeo, the Union minister of state for personnel and administrative affairs, to plot their leader's downfall. They also think that Chief Minister Patnaik has been playing a dual role. Even while he and Biswal were lobbying in Delhi, hundreds of telegrams vilifying their leader were sent to the party headquarters. Biswal supporters believe that the two Patnaiks were behind the deluge of complaints. Biswal's men argue that Patnaik finally caved in to pressure from Niranjan. They point out that Niranjan's younger brother Samyo is married to Patnaik's daughter and that Samyo has constantly been taking swipes at Biswal in his Oriya daily, *Sambad*.

Patnaik and Biswal

"I am not a dissident. I am fully with Patnaik, my old friend. I have been telling the legislators and the people to fully cooperate with the Government."

—B.K. BISWAL

Biswal's eclipse has truly been unexpected. Seven years ago, his involvement with politics was confined to giving generous financial support to politicians. The Congress split in 1978 had shown him his true calling. "I still remember we had bought 32 air tickets to attend the AICC meeting called by Mrs Gandhi but only 28 people had turned up," Biswal recalled nostalgically. "We were with Mrs Gandhi when most people were afraid to support her," he pointed out.

Soon the large-hearted fund raiser became the treasurer of the PCC(I) and after his win in the 1980 elections was included in the Patnaik ministry as a minister of state. Before long he was functioning as a de facto chief minister: legislators, irrespective of their party affiliations, vied with each other in seeking his favour, bureaucrats feared his power and people queued up at his residence to seek redress. Biswal even attended cabinet meetings, which a minister of state is not normally supposed to do, and enjoyed instant access to the chief minister.

Though Biswal's political ambitions seem to have been temporarily thwarted, he was losing no time in flexing his muscle. His supporters claimed that the 40-odd legislators denied tickets and an equal number of MLA's have pledged their support to him. Threatened one loyalist, "He can topple the ministry any time."

But Biswal was at pains to reiterate his loyalty to the leadership. "I am not a dissident," he said, "I am fully with Patnaik, my old friend. I have been telling the legislators and the people to fully cooperate with the Government. Whatever decision the prime minister and the chief minister take, I will abide by."

Patnaik, for his part, has all along tried to appease Biswal his friend for more than three decades. When Biswal was denied an assembly ticket, Patnaik had persuaded the high command to appoint him head of the state campaign committee. Even now he has allowed Biswal to stay on in his official residence and retain his large ministerial staff. Patnaik told INDIA TODAY that Biswal did not get the Assembly ticket because the high command, appreciating his efficiency, wanted him to to work for the organisation. Admitting that Biswal's inclusion in his ministry would have greatly strengthened it, Patnaik hastened to add, however, that he had "full confidence" that Biswal would not encourage any dissidence. "I do not know of any conspiracy against him at the Centre," Patnaik also clarified.

"One reason why people conspired against me," declared Biswal, "was that I was a very effective minister. I had repeatedly asked the Government to order an inquiry into the charges of corruption against me. If I am found guilty, I will quit politics." It seemed last fortnight that the party high command was disinclined to leave the option to him. —FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

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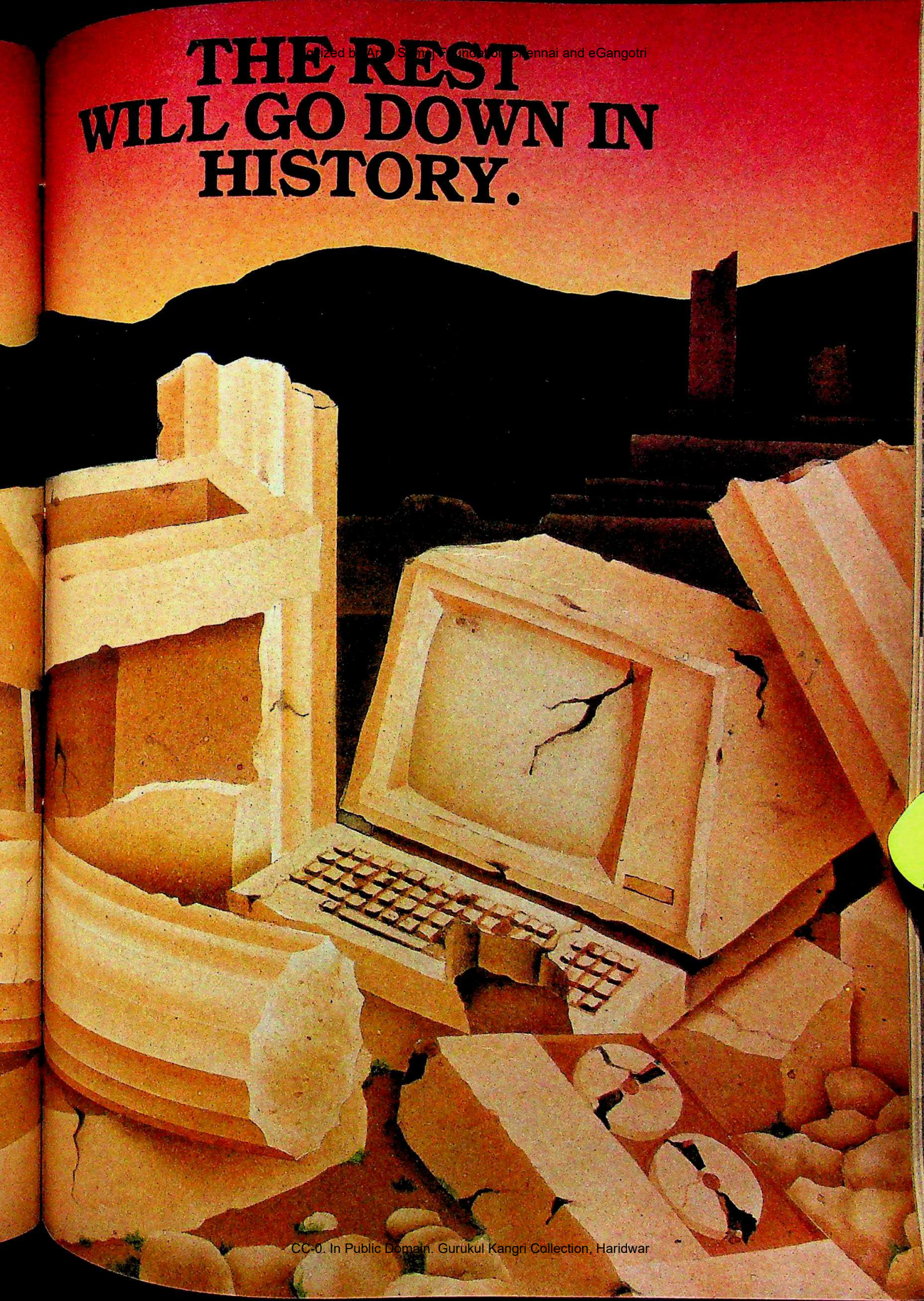
THE REST WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY.



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BIHAR

The Surprise Shift

EVEN Chandrashekhar Singh could not have expected his rehabilitation to come so soon, barely a month after he had been ignominiously removed from the chief ministership of Bihar. His tenure had been so lack-lustre that political oblivion loomed largest on the horizon.

Yet, last fortnight Singh was sworn in as Union minister of state for supply and textiles. An astonished Congress(I) leader from Bihar voiced the general feeling in the party when he said, "Something miraculous has happened. A person who was found unfit to run a state has found a berth in the Union ministry."

The surprise was only natural. The 18 months as Bihar's chief minister had done Singh little credit. When he had replaced Jagannath Mishra in September 1983 he had been welcomed as a clean and able administrator. But in March 1985 when Union Railway Minister Bansi Lal was drafted to assess Singh's popularity among the 240-odd members of the Congress(I)'s state legislature party, Lal found a mere 30 members backing Singh for the top post against over a hundred for Bindeshwari Dubey.

Singh's political eclipse began in mid-1984 when Rajiv Gandhi started visiting Bihar as the All India Congress(I) Committee general secretary. He was then given over a dozen memoranda by disgruntled party leaders about the growing corruption in government departments, encouragement given to Thakur officials, Singh's inability to take decisions on party matters and provide leadership to his ministerial colleagues. One memorandum lamented that a government file took an average of two weeks before it could get the chief minister's approval.

Initially, Rajiv dismissed the complaints as biased but his faith in Singh was somewhat shaken during the course of a visit to Bihar last October. At the end of a two-hour late night meeting between the two, when Rajiv asked Singh to recall the decisions taken in the course of the meeting Singh found he could not remember them.

Singh was similarly lackadaisical in managing the state's finances. According to Union Finance Ministry officials, in his ambition to minimise the overdrafts Singh even held back expenditure on development projects. At the end of December 1984 over 500 different projects in avenues ranging from irrigation to education had been awaiting the chief minister's approval for periods as long as four months and Bihar had a surplus of Rs 164 crore with the Reserve Bank.

What the future holds for Singh will depend on how he fares in his new assignment—challenges are not lacking.

But when the new Union Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh started pulling up states for not spending their plan allocations, Singh ordered a spending spree and Bihar was soon enough in the red. Singh's maverick approach to finances was perhaps best brought out in the 1985-86 budget he presented before the elections where he actually provided for a plan holiday.

Interestingly enough, a day before Singh was sworn in as a Union minister, the Bihar Government was pilloried in Parliament for encouraging unsafe private mining in the state. Union Minister for Steel, Coal and Mines Vasant Sathe was constrained to admit that the Centre had directed the state to prevent the working of abandoned mines by unscrupulous individuals. According to coal department sources, Singh and mines minister Budhdeo Singh had struck a deal with a few private firms to allow the mining of abandoned mines in clear violation of the Centre's directive. What is worse, the deal was struck barely three days before the Assembly elections.

The mining deal was not the only allegation against Singh. Some of the other charges framed by his own partymen were:

- encouraging casteism in the Bihar State Electricity Board by trying to foist his kinsman D.P. Singh as the chairman. D.P. Singh was given two extensions during which the board's functioning was paralysed;
- let a coterie led by his wife, Manorama Singh, MP, emerge as an extra constitutional centre of power. Evidence of the clout Mrs Singh came to command is the fact that the state publicity directorate would even circulate her tour programmes like it does for the chief minister;
- prevarication in dealing with two strikes called by government employees during his tenure. Even judges went on strike while he was in power, their first ever industrial action;
- sabotaging the election of some 30 party MLA's belonging to the Dubey faction.

Singh's popularity had dipped so low that last October even the usually pro-Congress(I) Patna Bar Council felt it necessary to censure him for his maladministration and casteism. Lamented a memorandum signed by over 50 advocates of the Patna High Court and addressed to the prime minister, "We are constrained to state that after few days of assuming office he started functioning in a most irrational and arbitrary fashion." Commented a venerable MP from Bihar, "He was sworn in as a clean chief minister but was ousted under a cloud."

Now that he has been inducted into the Union ministry his partymen are looking for a credible explanation for the rehabilitation. Though Singh himself was unavailable for comment, his supporters in the party were at pains to

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point out that he had been unfairly maligned by his detractors in the party led by former chief minister Jagannath Mishra. Singh's performance, they claim, was no worse than that of several other Congress(I) chief ministers retained after the assembly elections.

Congress(I) sources advance several credible reasons for Singh's rehabilitation. Most important, in a party not exactly flush with men of proven administrative experience, it would have been decidedly odd to have ignored one who had. Singh has not merely had administrative experience at the state level, he was the Union minister of state for power when he was drafted to Bihar.

Then, Singh is a Thakur and the powerful Thakur lobby in the ruling party needed to be assuaged after his ouster from Bihar and Arjun Singh's appointment as Punjab's governor. At one time during Mrs Gandhi's regime there were as many as four Thakur chief ministers; now there is only one: Virbhadra Singh in Himachal Pradesh.

It was also important, say Congress(I) sources, that Singh be removed from Bihar. True he had not been able to build much of a base among Bihar's Congressmen but his continued presence in Patna could only have made Dubey uneasy. Unable to be a state minister after having been the chief minister and unfit for an organisation post, he would only have been a misfit in Bihar.

What the future holds for Singh will depend on how he fares in his new assignment. Challenges are not lacking here: his textile portfolio would entail drawing up a comprehensive policy to rescue the ailing textile industry and to pull out the National Textile Corporation from the mess it has landed itself into.

The supply side of his portfolio is even more daunting. Corruption is rampant in the supply department which is responsible for purchases worth over Rs 4,000 crore for the Central and state governments. Vishwanath Pratap Singh, who used to look after this departmment earlier, had detected corruption of over Rs 100 crore in fixing contracts for iron pipes and related items.

Proceedings on this case have yet to begin. Singh has to carry the baton from his predecessor but his track record in politics does not promise either a clean or a memorable race.

—PRABHU CHAWLA and FARZAND AHMED

MEDIA

Prize Dispute

MANUSHI is a non-profit, feminist journal published from New Delhi with a committed following and circulation of about 12,000. *Eve's Weekly* is a popular, all-purpose women's magazine from Bombay with a circulation of over 41,000 and an interest in everything from cookery to consumer guidance. And the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* is a well-known Calcutta daily with a circulation of well over a lakh. These three utterly disparate organs of the Indian media are now locked in an unlikely legal battle with the charge of plagiarism at its heart.

Manushi recently filed a Rs 2 lakh civil suit in the Delhi High Court claiming that large chunks of an article by a 24-year-old freelance journalist in Calcutta, Saswati Ghosh, that first appeared in the pages of the *Patrika* and later in *Eve's Weekly* have, in fact, been directly lifted from earlier articles in *Manushi*. More serious than *Manushi's* infringement charge is the fact that Ghosh's crusading article on the working conditions and lack of legal land rights of tribal women in Bihar's Singbhum district won her the *Eve's Weekly's* Woman Journalist of the Year Award in 1984.

Ironically, it was neither the staff of *Manushi* nor the judges nor the editors of *Eve's Weekly* who spotted the uncanny similarities between the original *Manushi* articles on tribal women in Singbhum and Ghosh's award-winning entry but a discerning reader. On April 12 last year, Saroj Pal of Bombay who happens to be a regular reader of both magazines, pointed out identical passages in the articles in a letter sent to the two editors. These included verbatim repetitions from an interview with a tribal woman called Laro as well as a long paragraph of the narrative which appeared to have been copied word for word. Moreover, Pal pointed out that the entire analysis of the tribal women's lack of land rights in Ghosh's article seemed to be a summation of *Manushi* Editor Madhu Kishwar's petition filed in the Supreme Court in late 1982 which was widely reported in the press including INDIA TODAY (September 30, 1982).

(From left) Ewing, Kishwar and Ghosh: legal battle

When she received Pal's letter, Kishwar looked at the prize-winning article and alleges that she also found in it analysis and arguments she and her colleagues had developed in the course of several journeys to Singbhum to study, research and fight for the lack of land rights of tribal women.

Kishwar's repeated requests to *Eve's Weekly* have been to reproduce Pal's letter as explanation and apology. On July 31, 1984, she finally heard from *Eve's Weekly* Editor Gulshan Ewing saying that her magazine had made the award in good faith and that while it was not possible to publish Pal's letter in toto, it would publish "a brief note" from Kishwar recapitulating her objections. Kishwar refused. In subsequent correspondence, Ewing in fact said that Kishwar ought to have taken up the matter with the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.

Kishwar and *Manushi*, as a result of the deadlock, have taken all three—*Eve's Weekly*, Saswati Ghosh and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*—to court, claiming that the alleged plagiarism has damaged *Manushi's* credibility and standing as a non-profit publication. The petition, which may have far-reaching implications on infringements of the Copyright Act, will come up for hearing next month.

—SUNIL SETHI

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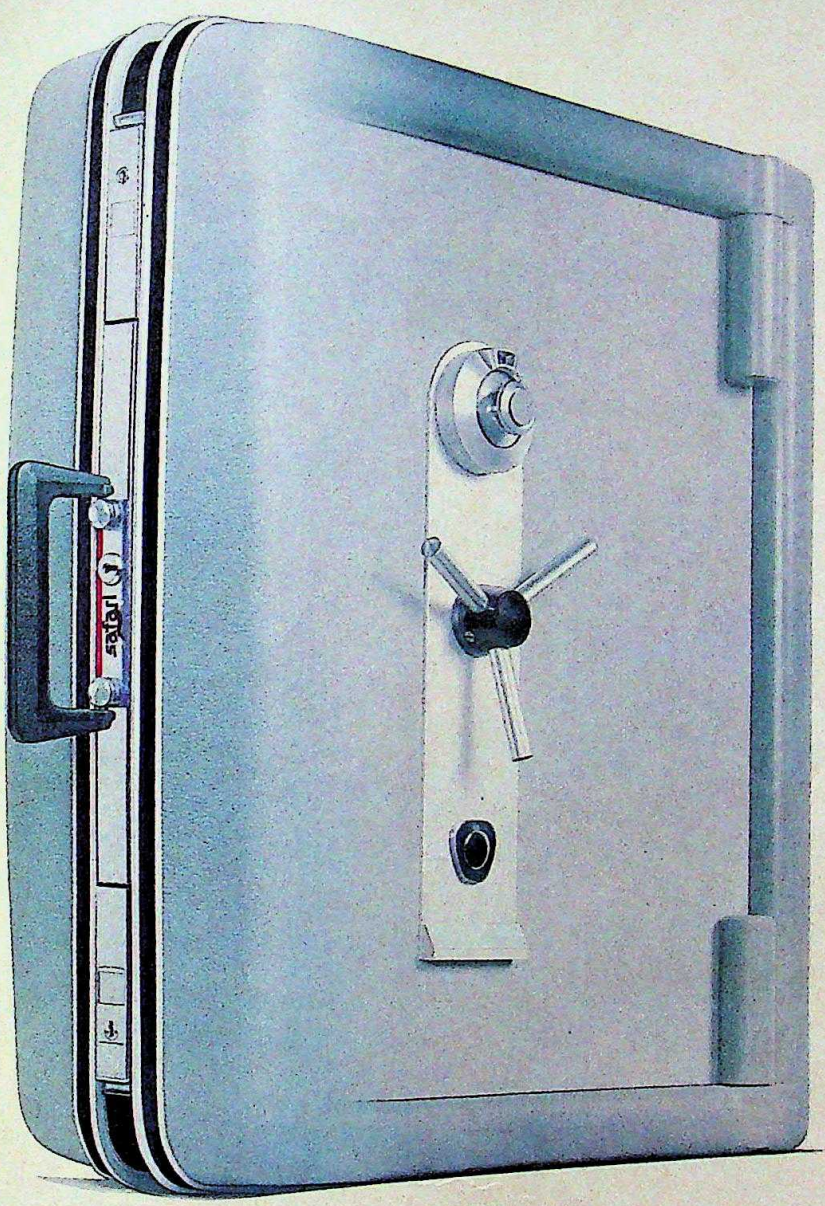

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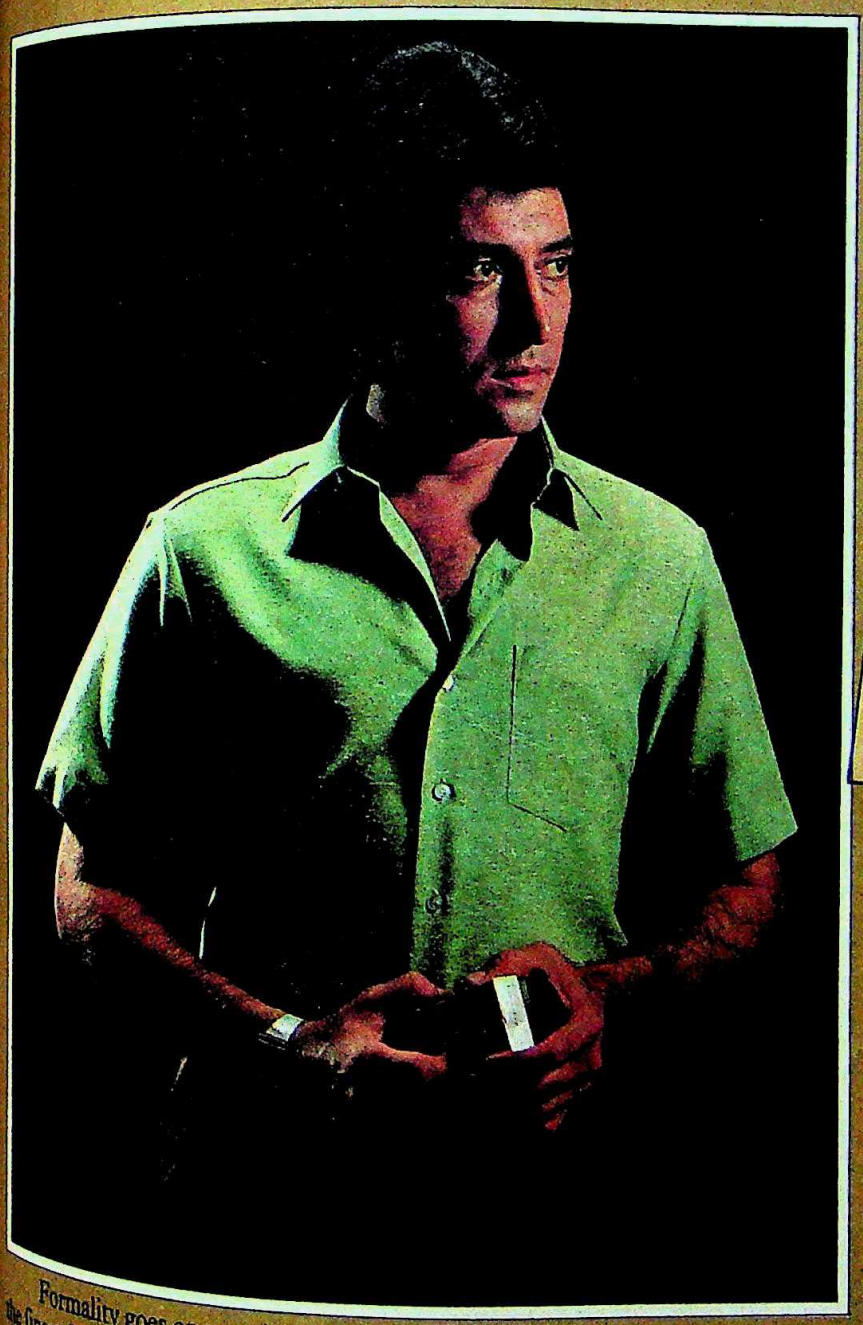

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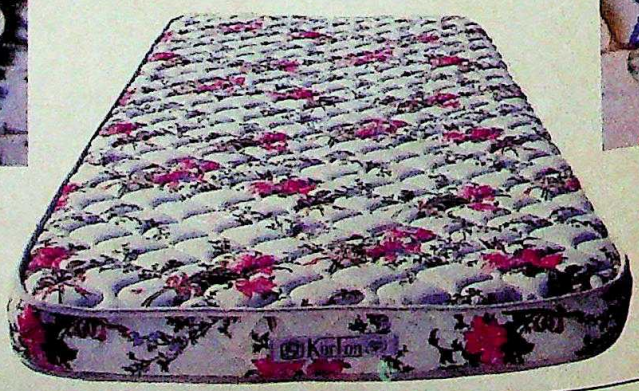

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TAMIL NADU

The Shanmugam Gift

CONTROVERSY and Pachaiappan Udhandipalli Shanmugam, the 60-year-old newly-appointed local administration minister in Tamil Nadu, have long been acquaintances. The association was renewed with great fervour recently when his 27-year-old son, S. Selvam, and his wife landed at Madras airport on February 21, hardly aware of the embarrassment their sojourn in Singapore would cause to his father. On arrival Selvam declared that he had brought with him a professional Sony video camera set for his personal use. Customs officials levied a duty of Rs 73,400, which Selvam paid in cash on the spot and released the item.

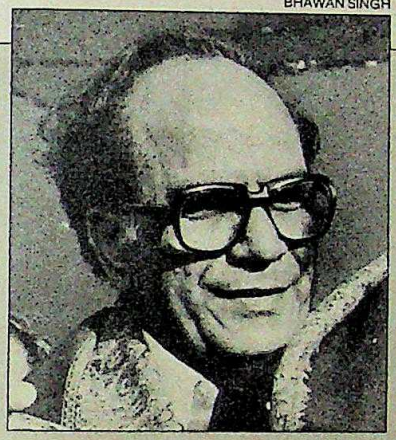
Three weeks later Selvam and his father, who stay in the same house, found themselves the focus of a bizarre controversy. It all began with a visit to their house by two officials of the Enforcement Department, directorate of revenue intelligence wing of the Union Finance Ministry. The officials wanted to enquire about the source of foreign exchange for the purchases abroad. The news leaked out to the media with the DMK mouthpieces predictably splashing it. While the *Indian Express* reported that some incriminating documents had also been recovered from Shanmugam's house, DMK papers alleged that gold biscuits had been recovered from Selvam's baggage. This part was, however, later denied by the customs authorities.

The controversy even figured in the Assembly where Shanmugam felt it necessary to make a personal explanatory statement. Said Shanmugam: "There was no search of my house on March 11. An officer from the foreign exchange department had come and enquired about the video camera. He was shown the necessary papers and also told that it was a gift. The officer was satisfied and left."

Selvam tells a different tale. Admitting that the enforcement officials had interrogated him, he told INDIA TODAY: "The two officers were in my house for exactly 45 minutes. They wanted me to prove to them that the video camera was a gift. I had a declaration from my aunt to that effect. The officers sought legitimate clarifications. My father was also at home during the visit."

Enforcement officials concur: they do not describe their March 11 visit as a 'raid'. They say that the team had gone to make some enquiries and taken away some documents, including the purchase receipt Selvam had for the video camera. Their differences with Selvam relate to the nature of the gift he got from his aunt. Though Selvam now claims that his aunt had gifted the camera to him, in his first statement, according to the enforcement directorate, he had disclosed that he had bought the video equipment for Hong Kong $5,000 (Rs 8,125) which he received from his aunt, and the $1,000 (Rs 13,000) he and his wife had carried under the First Travel Scheme. Consequently, the enforcement authorities had asked Selvam to give details about his stay abroad and the approximate expenditure he had incurred. This was followed by the controversial 'visit', following which the Deputy Director (Enforcement) C.S. Ahmad Shah had summoned Selvam for clarifications on the gift.

BHAWAN SINGH



The case would not have attracted the attention it has but for Shanmugam's controversial track record.

The enforcement directorate is now preparing to file a case against Selvam for alleged violation of Section 8 of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act. According to this provision no Indian can accept cash gifts of foreign exchange, and all such gifts must be remitted to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for conversion into Indian currency. RBI permission must also be taken to import professional equipment.

Even if this issue is resolved amicably, Selvam could find it more difficult to satisfy the income tax department about the cash payment of the customs duty. It is mandatory for customs authorities to inform the income tax officials about those who pay customs duty of Rs 25,000 and above. Selvam now claims that the duty paid was actually Rs 43,000 but even that figure does not let him off the hook. INDIA TODAY has learnt that the income tax authorities are also conducting a parallel investigation into Selvam's assets which they think are disproportionate to his income.

Selvam, who began his career as an advertising agent, has recently branched off into producing documentaries. According to income tax sources, his companies have not been doing so well as to justify the expenses of his foreign trips and the heavy customs duty he paid.

The case would not have attracted the attention it has but for Shanmugam's controversial track record. His earlier stint as a minister in M. Karunanidhi's DMK government was similarly marred by corruption allegations. The Justice Sarkaria Commission of Enquiry set up by the Centre in the 1970s to probe corruption charges against the Karunanidhi government, in which Shanmugam was food minister, had held that Shanmugam's guilt in the levy sugar case had been established "with a preponderance of probability". The commission had found that both Karunanidhi and Shanmugam had favoured private wholesale and retail dealers by appointing them distributors for levy sugar. Gratifications totalling Rs 13.21 lakh were allegedly involved in this deal.

Shanmugam hit the headlines again when he was named as one of the accused in what is known as 'the attempt to murder Mrs Gandhi case'. He, along with Karunanidhi, had staged a black-flag demonstration against Mrs Gandhi when she visited Tamil Nadu in 1979. The demonstration had turned violent and Mrs Gandhi had narrowly escaped

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the 'murderous attack'. The M.G. Ramachandran Government had launched prosecution proceedings against Karunanidhi, Shanmugam and other DMK leaders in the case which is still pending in a Madras court. Shanmugam, who joined the AIADMK later and was made a minister only recently, maintains that he will quit politics if the charges against him are proved.

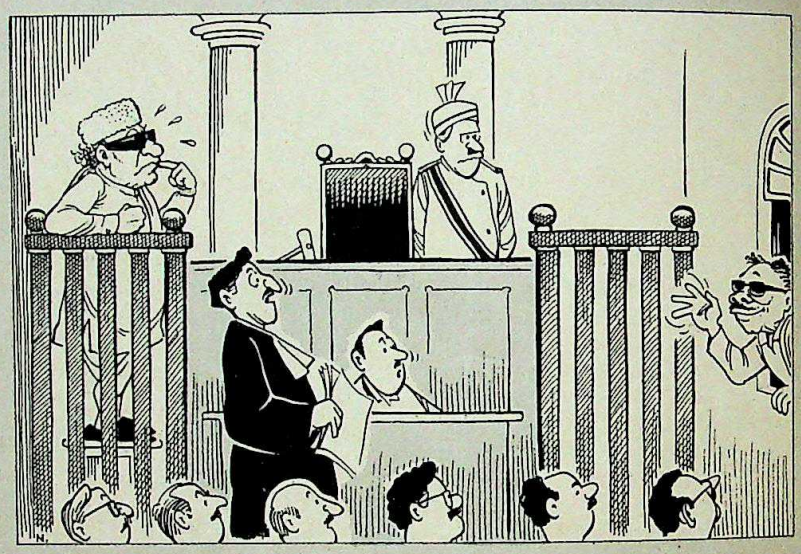
The Shanmugam family's latest brush with the authorities has only intensified the friction in the AIADMK. Believed to be a leading member of the anti-Jayalalitha group, Shanmugam may now find it difficult to sustain his tirade against her. In New Delhi, some AIADMK leaders were even actively pressurising the Finance Ministry to expedite the enquiry against Shanmugam. Even when Shanmugam was made a minister, MGR advised that by inducting an anti-Congress(I) minister he would be annoying the Centre. But the coterie comprising MGR's wife Janaki and Information Minister M. Veerappan prevailed over MGR and succeeded in having Shanmugam made a minister after a long break.

The Central agencies' resolve to prosecute the case suggests that the Union Government is not well disposed towards Shanmugam. If that indeed be so and if the Union authorities cannot be persuaded to turn off the heat, Shanmugam may find that his son's alleged indiscretions could prove fatal to his career.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Madras

LAW

Curious Case



CHIEF Minister M.G.Ramachandran and his AIADMK Government are caught in a curious bind. As a criminal case against the DMK President M. Karunanidhi came up for hearing last fortnight and the judge ordered that he be arrested for consistently refusing to appear in court, the prosecuting MGR Government took the extraordinary decision to file a review petition in the high court challenging the order. As advocate Sriram Panchu remarked: "It is all very funny, to say the least."

Expressing much the same sentiments, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate R. Manickam told INDIA TODAY, "The court has issued the non-bailable arrest warrant to the deputy inspector general of police, (CID). It is now for the police to produce Karunanidhi in court. Personally I don't think it behoves a former chief minister to act like this. It is an unprecedented case."

The Government's dilemma is only the latest in this bizarre drama which grew out of the death, in suspicious circumstances, three-and-a-half years ago, of its officer C.Subramania Pillai in the famous Tiruchendur temple. When the Opposition and the media raised a shindig about the death, the MGR Government reluctantly appointed a commission of inquiry headed by retired judge, C.J.R. Paul. But once the report was submitted the Government refused to release it. It was then that Karunanidhi hit the headlines by making public the contents of the report which, predictably, had found definite evidence of murder.

The MGR Government reacted by filing a criminal case against Karunanidhi and three associates charging them with theft, receipt of stolen property and violation of the Official Secrets Act. Karunanidhi soon hit upon the ruse that has so cleverly upset MGR's designs—he simply decided to boycott court proceedings on the ground that the case had been foisted on him to seek political vengeance. Neither did he bother to hire a lawyer to represent him.

Endless adjournments resulted over a tedious period of time which finally exhausted Manickam's patience and Karunanidhi was ordered to be produced in court on June 7 last year. There was great drama that day and violence was in the air even though Manickam adopted a conciliatory stand by releasing the DMK leader after directing him to appear for every subsequent hearing.

The appeal, of course, went unheeded and the Government then initiated the appointment by the court of F.A. Jayaraman as *amicus curiae* (a lawyer who appears at government expense for an accused who does not have the means to defend himself), a patently absurd provision for a leader of the eminence of Karunanidhi. But last fortnight even Jayaraman decided to cry off his job, pointing out that "the personal presence of the accused is necessary for the *amicus curiae* to discuss the facts of the case". It was then that Manickam issued the non-bailable warrant of arrest.

The Government's dilemma is understandable. Karunanidhi's arrest could result in a touchy law and order situation but its failure to act on the order would suggest that it was lukewarm about pursuing a case it had initiated. Manickam, however, will brook no further delay. Not merely has he ordered Karunanidhi's arrest, he has also announced that the trial would be subsequently taken up continuously until it was finished. The Tamil Nadu Government has much to ponder over.

—S.H.VENKATRAMANI.

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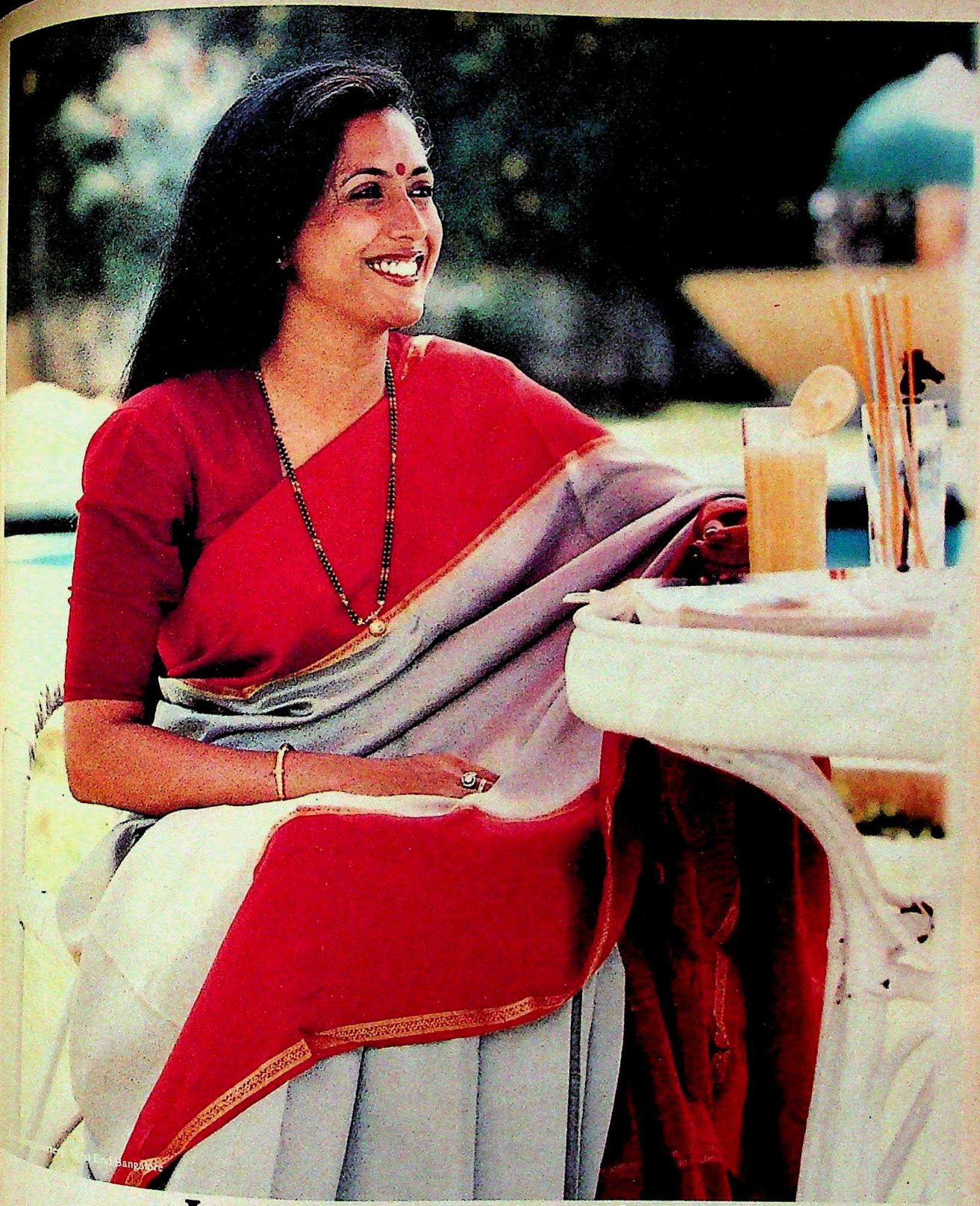

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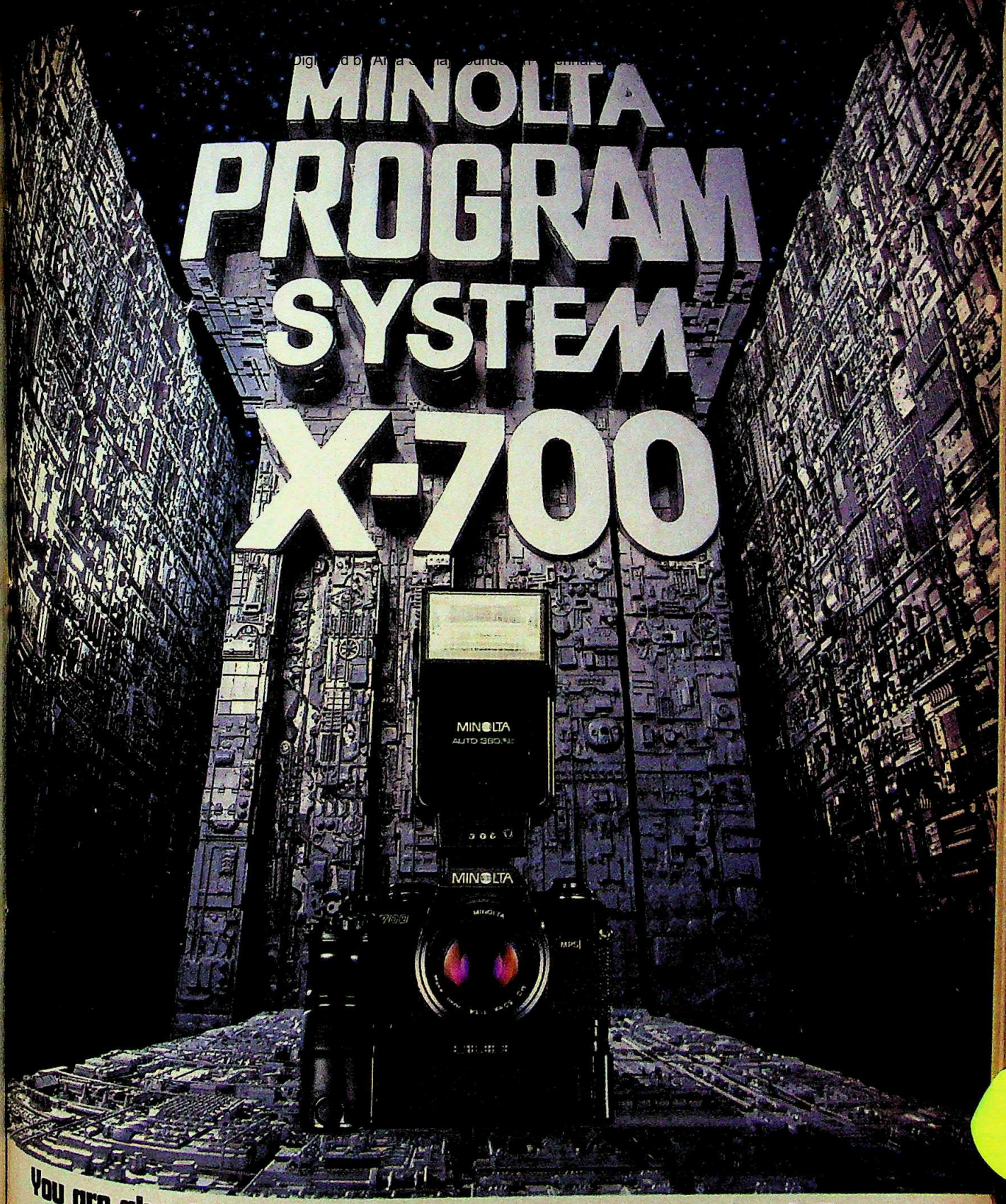

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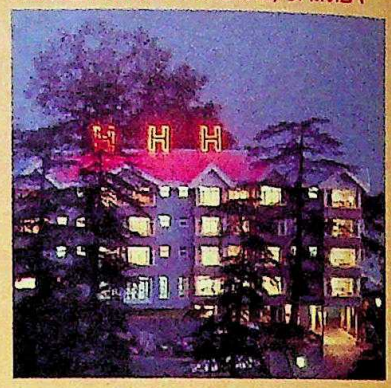

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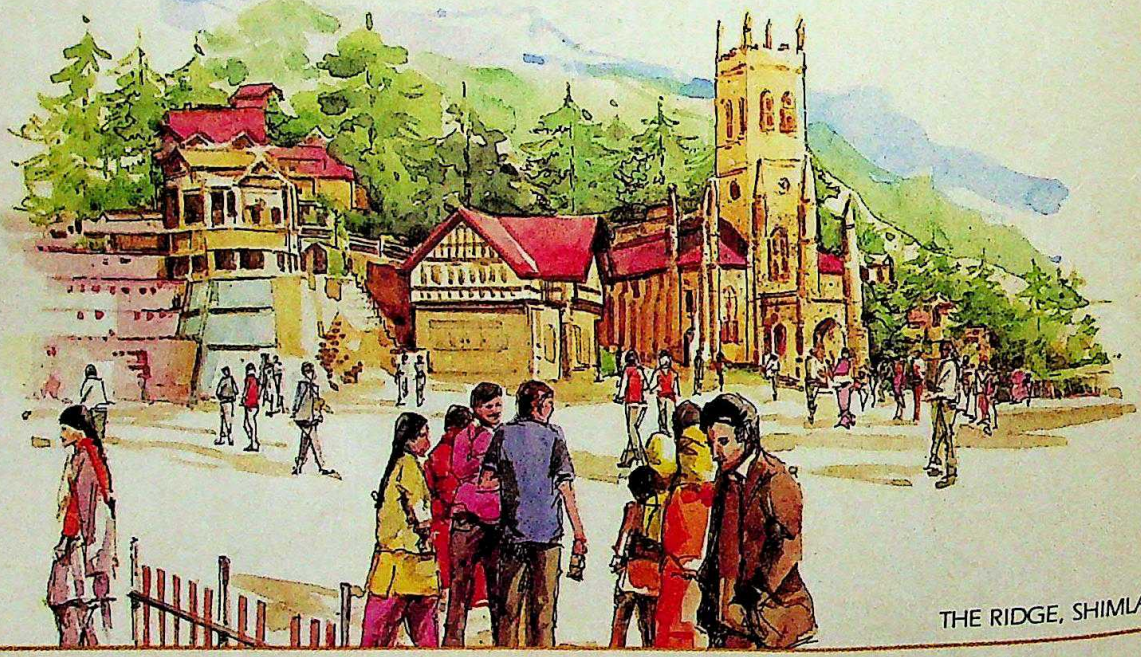

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SIKKIM

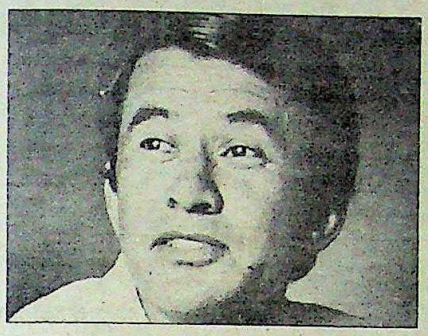
The Merger Moves

A RESOUNDING victory over the Congress(I) in the recent assembly elections notwithstanding, the benefits of keeping on the good side of the Centre has evidently not been lost on Sikkim's Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari. From the day of his party the Sikkim Sangram Parishad's victory, he has been making unabashed overtures to the Congress(I) high command.

His efforts obviously didn't go to waste, because the Centre showed signs of thawing last fortnight when Bhandari's wife Dil Kumari Bhandari was elected unopposed to the Lok Sabha by virtue of the fact that the Congress(I) agreed not to field any candidates. And if that is not enough, there is a decided uncertainty about action on the CBI inquiry instituted by the Centre into charges of corruption against Bhandari.

By preventing any Congress(I) candidate from contesting the Lok Sabha by-election, the party's high command has, however, thrown its Sikkim branch in a state of disarray. Sikkim Congressmen were particularly unhappy at the way their high command handled the entire affair. "At 11 a.m. on April 1, the last date of filing nominations, we were instructed to put up three candidates," recalls the president of the Sikkim Pradesh Congress(I) Committee Ram Chandna Poudyal. Of the three candidates, two were to have withdrawn their candidature on the last date of withdrawal. This plan went awry when the high command issued a second directive just about two-and-a-half hours later, saying that no Congress members should file nominations.

In response to this not only did the three candidates who had already filed their nominations refuse to withdraw but another three Congres(I) members—Srimati Durga Lama, Dambar Bahadur Basant and Y. Bhandari—also jumped into the fray. The three candidates who had already filed nominations were R.B. Subhash, Madan Kumar Chetri and Mrs Manita Pradhan. "Our candidates withdrew only after I convinced them that the high command must have had good reasons for supporting Bhandari," says Poudyal. Local



Bhandari: uncertain future

Congressmen, however, confess that their party's decision actually allowed them to save face since they would have been routed by Bhandari's wife.

What has and continues to intrigue Sikkim politics is "what precisely transpired between Bhandari and the high command," wonders the outgoing Sikkim PCC(I) Vice-president C.D. Rai. The obvious inference that Bhandari must have struck some deal with the Centre is, however, dismissed by both the chief minister himself and by Congress(I) leaders. "Politics is not the only consideration of the high command which must also balance the demands of national integration and harmony," explains Rai. "Having got the mandate of the Sikkimes people, Bhandari went and surrendered to Rajiv who must have felt it unwise to open another front in the country," adds Poudyal.

Bhandari on his part explains: "The prime minister had told me when I met him after the elections that the important thing was to have a good Lok Sabha representative from Sikkim and I had told him of my wife's selection. Since I had assured my full cooperation to the Centre and had allayed concern about Sikkim's integration with the mainstream, he agreed to support my wife.

Poudyal: biding his time

But no matter how secure Bhandari might seem at the moment, local Congress leaders have not lost all hope of gaining power in the future. According to a senior police official, the CBI has recently submitted its report on the chief minister to the Union Law Ministry for vetting and once this is complete the next step would be to approach the Sikkim Governor Kona Prabhakar Rao for starting prosecution proceedings. Bhandari however airily dismisses all this with: "Let them do what they want but I will not ask for withdrawing the investigations." But obviously the Centre still holds the trump card.

Bhandari has also proposed that his party be merged into the Congress(I). The Congress(I) high command has yet to accept the proposal, mindful, no doubt of how the local unit would react to it. As it is, the Sikkim PCC(I) is deeply divided at the moment. As Bhutia Lepcha Congress leaders admit, the rift between leaders of their communities and the pro-Nepalese Poudyal had crippled their unit's organisation. So pronounced were the dissensions that the PCC(I) President Poudyal resigned on March 8 just after the assembly election results. Though his resignation has yet to be accepted, Congress(I) Bhutia leader Sonam Tshering says: "He was the factor for the Congress(I) debacle." Yet, last fortnight, all local Congress(I) leaders affirmed faith in Poudyal by passing a resolution urging the high command to allow him to continue as president and prepare a list of PCC(I) committee members.

"At the moment we are a disorganised party and need time to secure a firm foundation," says Tshering. And to achieve this Poudyal is ready to go along with whatever the high command thinks is politic even if it means cooperating with Bhandari. "But taking Bhandari into the party at the moment will be disastrous since he will not allow it to take root and break it whenever he wants to walk out," says Poudyal.

According to him the fact that 27,000 Sikkimese out of 1.5 lakh voters voted for the Congress(I) even though Bhandaris' victory in the Lok Sabha elections last year had presaged that his party would come back to power is taken as an index of the growing pro-Congress(I) nationalistic forces in the state. The CBI inquiry is not the only issue Bhandari should be worried about.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Gangtok

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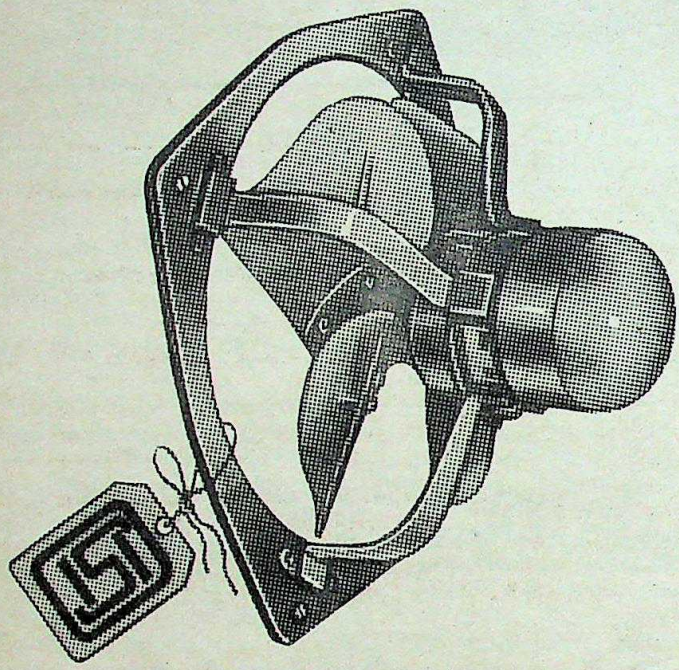

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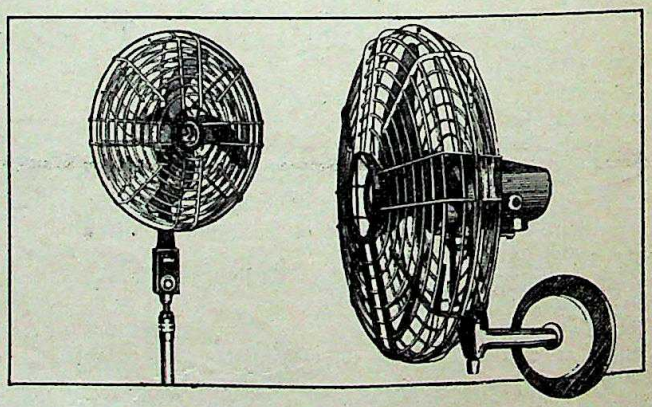

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KERALA

Car Crazy

IT ISN'T enough to be a mere minister, at least not in Kerala where status symbols are worshipped with the same fervour as deities. Inspired by Chief Minister K. Karunakaran's example, his ministerial colleagues are tripping over each other in their latest game of one-upmanship. The prize—a metal three-pointed star that adorns the radiators of Mercedes Benz cars.

In a country where the prime minister uses a lowly Ambassador, the sudden proliferation of foreign cars in the driveways of ministerial bungalows in Kerala smacks of vulgar wastefulness, specially at a time when the state is supposedly strapped for finances. But if wishes are Mercedes—or Toyotas—then ministers will ride. At last count, no less than 13 of the state's 19 ministers were zipping around in Mercedes or Toyotas, most of which are being routed through the state tourism department.

That figure would have been more were it not for the fact that Karunakaran, not satisfied with a mere Mercedes, requisitioned an additional Toyota from the quota of cars imported for other ministers. Last year, the Karunakaran Ministry imported three Mercedes, four Toyotas and a Ford at a cost of Rs 30 lakh. The Toyotas were purchased from Japan by the Tourism Department, Government of India, and sold to the Kerala tourism department for Rs 2.5 lakh each while the Mercedes were bought by the Kerala tourism department from the State Trading Corporation at Rs 5 lakh each. Now, the tourism department has requested for a supplementary grant of Rs 55 lakh ostensibly to "promote tourism in the state", a request that opposition spokesmen charge is only a thinly-veiled camouflage to make the remaining Toyota-less ministers happy. Says a tourism official: "All these ministers demand foreign cars and some even want to use the luxury Buick and Chevrolet meant for the use of the President and visiting foreign dignitaries." The tourism department has little say in the matter. It receives instructions on allocation of vehicles from the department of general administration (political).

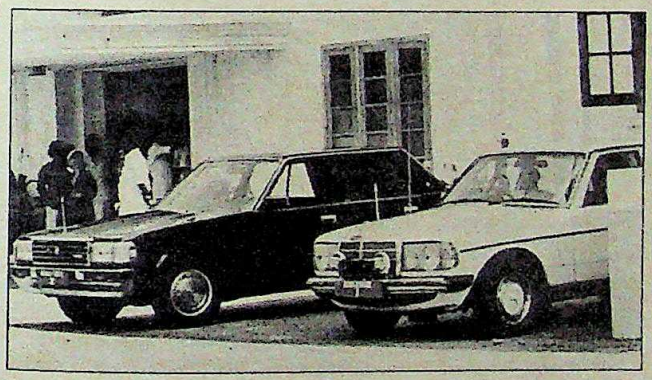
Tourism is not the only guise under which ministerial cars are being procured. Electricity Minister Balakrishna Pillai uses a Toyota belonging to the State Electricity Board while Congress (I) Irrigation Minister M.P. Gangadharan travels around in a Mercedes purchased by the aptly-named Kerala Water and Waste Water Authority of which he happens to be chairman. Says he by way of explanation: "As chairman, the board has insisted that I use the Mercedes because on long trips it is more comfortable than an Ambassador." The car was bought from a private owner in Bangalore for Rs 5 lakh but ran into a bus two months later. The repair bill was an estimated Rs 2 lakh.

Other ministers have demanded imported cars on the most ridiculous grounds. Industry Minister E. Ahamed requested for his on grounds of health while C.M.Sundaram, minister for Local Administration went one better—he threatened to go on a padayatra from the secretariat to his residence last November if he was not provided with a car. A brand-new Toyota arrived at his door within a week.

The flagrant extravagance has, however, given rise to other more dangerous evils. Recently, firebrand Marxist MLA M.V. Raghavan charged that the reckless speed with which the ministers were driving around on the state's narrow and congested roads was posing a major hazard. According to one estimate, ministerial cars and their escorts have been involved in a total of 40 accidents so far in which four people have been killed and another 70 injured. But statistics like those are of no concern to Kerala's car crazy ministers. After all, the record timing of two hours and 10 minutes between Cochin and Trivandrum—a normal car journey generally takes a minimum of four hours—was set last year by none other than Chief Minister K. Karunakaran himself.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

Imported cars belonging to the chief minister (below); and his ministers: new status symbol



PANORAMA/EPC/861

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"Ooops... I forgot..."

"I think I've got it right - this time!"

"Oh no!"

"Did I? Didn't I?"

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"Wait a moment..."

"I'm positive. I'm almost sure. I think...maybe..."

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UAE

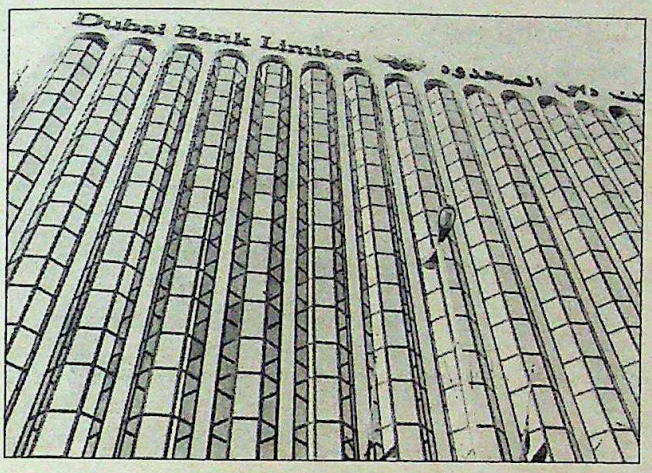
A Risky Enterprise

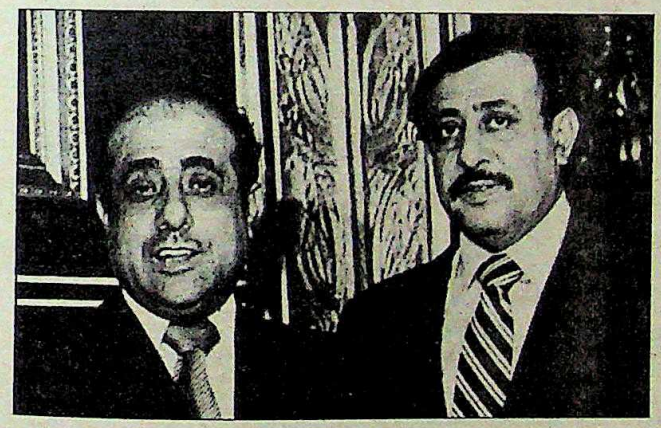
BUSINESS failures and recession are suddenly taking a toll of Indian bankers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the latest crisis rocking the industry two senior bank executives, R. Narayanan and R. Seetharaman who had resigned from the Indian Overseas Bank six years ago to run Dubai's Emirates National Bank (ENB) were detained by the Government. In another instance P.C.D. Nambiar, vice-chairman of the Dubai Bank and a former chairman of the State Bank of India, was dropped from the board, controlled until this month by two Galadari brothers, Abdul Rahim and Abdul Latif.

ENB has been managed by Indian bankers since 1978-79 when its owner, Majid Al Ghurair, brought in two executives to run the fledgling institution. Its crisis began with the bankruptcy of Abdul Wahab Galadari in November 1983 (INDIA TODAY, January 15, 1984) and snowballed last year with the collapse of the Agra Group. Simultaneously, a string of bankruptcies, mostly of Indian merchants in Dubai, drained the liquidity base of the bank.

The two Indians, Chief General Manager R. Narayanan and General Manager R. Seetharaman, had steered ENB out of its troubled initial years and in the process involved the institution with what was then a thriving Indian and Iranian business community in Dubai. By 1982, ENB's capital had risen from its initial dirham 33.7 million in 1977 to dirham 132 million (Rs 12 crore to Rs 46 crore). But quarrels within the Ghurair family, relating particularly to the involvement of three Ghurair brothers with the Bank of Oman preventd ENB from becoming adequately liquid.

According to the UAE Minister of State for Finance and Industry, Ahmed Humaid Al Tayer, by the end of last year ENB's bad loans were as much as dirham 200 million. (Rs 70 crore). Bankers who have been dealing with ENB say there are bad loans of another dirham 200 million although these are provided for from reserves. In early 1985, ENB's assets and liabilities were taken over by Union Bank of the Middle East (UBME), 73 per cent of which is owned by the Dubai Government.





The Dubai Bank (above); Abdul Rahim and Abdul Latif Galadari

Al Tayer who heads UBME says the acquisition has been necessary because the Government "does not want to see any bank or business collapse here. So what they are doing is for the country's reputation and also to help the private sector."

Like most other UAE banks, ENB has been a victim of recent developments that have adversely affected Dubai's role as an entrepot—the Iran-Iraq war, a slump in oil prices, budgetary deficits in Gulf states and a consequent decision to cut down development schemes. By 1983, ENB's profits had come down by half and the bank could declare a dividend at the shareholders meeting last year. The collapse of Abdul Wahab Galadari's business empire wiped off at one stroke nearly dirham 88 million (Rs 30 crore) that ENB had given to the Iranian-born businessman. And when the Agra Group owned by the four Anand brothers from Punjab—who shifted their operations from Iran to Dubai after the revolution—was forced to close down, the bank lost another staggering dirham 83 million (Rs 28.7 crore). The Agra group had become a prominent Indian business house in Dubai with the take-over a few years ago of Intermagnetics Corporation of the US.

After ENB was taken over, the Government began a search for scapegoats and for weeks debated on the course of action. If precedents were to be the guide, ENB's owner Majid Al Ghurair should have been detained as was done in the case of Abdul Wahab Galadari. But because Majid is a *watni* (local) unlike Galadari, the Government could not even contemplate arresting him. Yet the Government could not ignore the ENB affair. Therefore, they finally decided to detain Narayanan and Seetharaman in addition to Venugopalan, who had a relatively minor role in the bank and was acting most of the time as secretary to Majid Al Ghurair. Though the three men have been in detention for a period of almost two months, until last fortnight, they had not been brought to trial on any specific charges.

Dubai Bank's problems, on the other hand, date back to early last year when it took over a dirham 400 million (Rs 140 crore) property development in Singapore belonging to Abdul Wahab Galadari. The decline in property values in Singapore and the Government's refusal to bale out the bank in this deal created difficulties for Dubai Bank. A major crisis was triggered off last month by the Dubai Government's decision to pull out hundreds of millions of dirhams deposited with the institution.

In the second half of February, the

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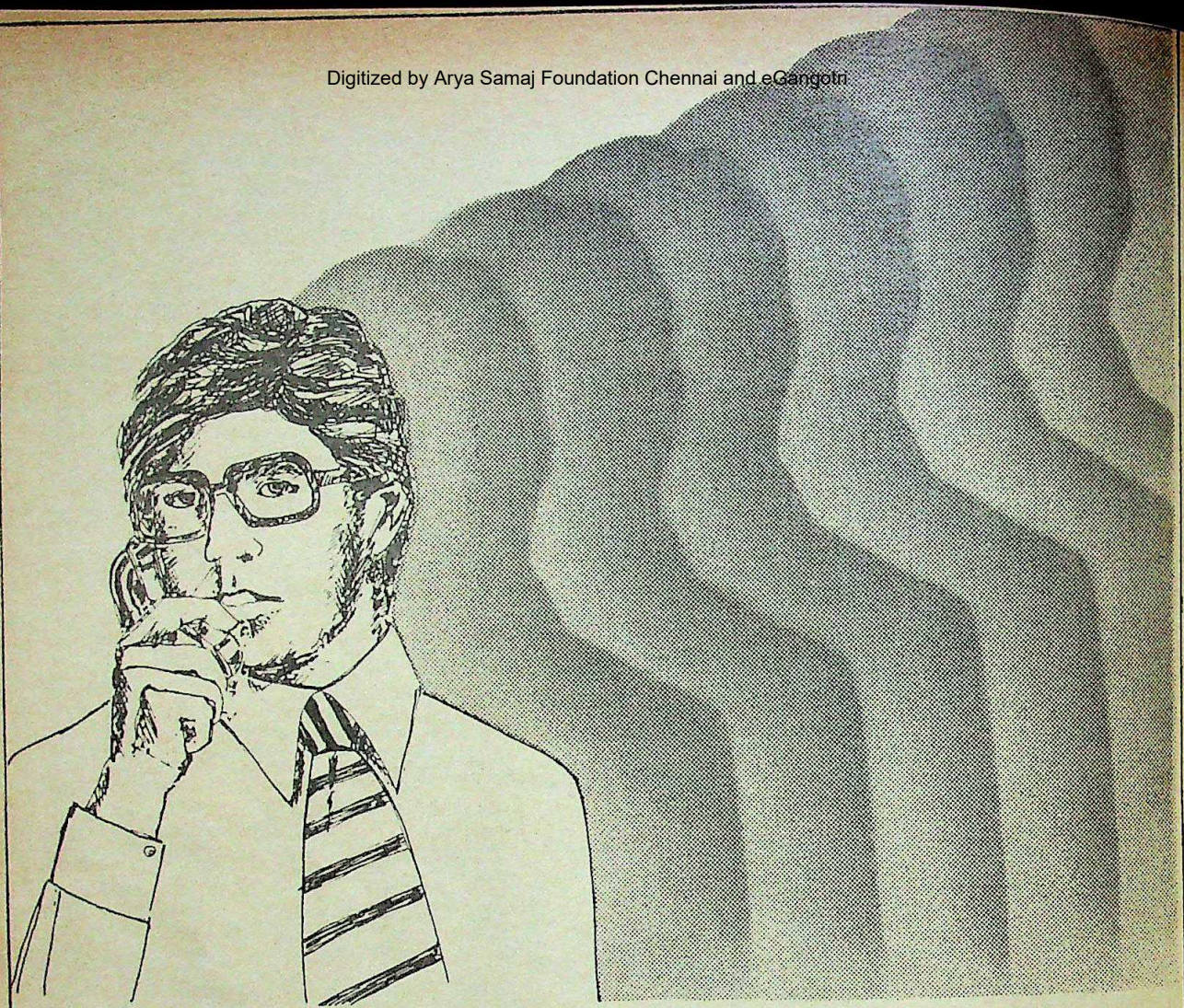

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UAE Central Bank reassured panicky depositors that the bank was functioning normally and that the Government was supporting it. Since then Abdul Rahim Galadari has been replaced as chairman by Sultan Ali Al Oweis and his brother Abdul Latif lost vice-chairmanship of the institution. The changes were made in the absence of the two Galadari brothers and at the instance of the Government which nominated two of its men on the board.

In 1983, the two Galadari brothers who own majority shares in Dubai Bank had brought in Nambiar as vice-chairman in a bid to improve its working. It was thought that Nambiar's experience with the State Bank of India and his professionalism would help at a time when most UAE banks were facing problems. Since his retirement, Nambiar has been working from a European base as an investment advisor to the Galadaris.

A fall-out of the ENB-Dubai Bank episode is that foreigners no working with banks in the UAE are no longer prepared to take decisions even on routine matters. Indians are among the largest group of foreign bankers, many of whom left nationalised banks in the '70s in the wake of a Gulf banking explosion fuelled by the rise in oil prices. They are already disturbed by the virulence of the campaign accusing Indian bankers of having financed Indian businesses of doubtful viability and colluded with dishonest businessmen in obtaining funds from UAE banks. "Bad loans are inevitable in our business," said one leading Indian banker. "If we are not allowed to take a reasonable risk, we will not be able to do any business."

Al Tayer, on the other hand, tends to blame much of the problems of UAE's family-owned banks on their structure and style of functioning. "They are in the past. There are strong regulations now. In the past, bankers did not care, but (this) is a good lesson for them."

—A. ZARIN in Bahrain

UK

Piracy Plague

FILM producers, both Indian and western, are a worried lot. Despite carefully-timed releases and lavish publicity, returns from the box-office are fast declining. Thanks to increasing video piracy, people just don't want to go to the cinema anymore when they can just as well see films in the comfort of their drawing-room. Even a prestigious film like *Gandhi* was available on the video circuit weeks before it was released.

Video shop in London: new focus

In order to combat this menace, for the past six months the British Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT), a non-profit private company formed in 1982, has been waging a relentless battle against video pirates, particularly Asian dealers. In 1983 as a result of pressure from the film and video industry, the Copyright Act became a law and those caught breaking it were liable for imprisonment or heavy fines. Since then a number of cases have been dealt with in the British courts. Last year the Indian Videogram Association (IVA), a group of eight Indian companies operating from London, joined FACT and instigated raids on Asian video shops.

FACT undertook raids on video dealers' premises in the Southall, Wembley and East End areas of London. In Southall where Asians comprise 40 per cent of the total population there are around 100 video shops selling and hiring video cassettes of over a thousand Bombay film titles. As a result of the raid two Asian video dealers were taken to court and punished with fines up to £3,000 (Rs 45,000). Said Peter Duffy, FACT director of investigations, "We raided 15 video shops and took away 15,000 illegal tapes. One place had 50 video recorders all linked up for copying."

Rajesh Mehra, chairman of the IVA, reckons that the average British turnover for Indian videos is between £8-10 million. The eight companies which make up IVA deal in 3 to 4 film titles per week. The master print is copied in Britain legally, the companies paying between Rs 75,000 and Rs 7.5 lakh per title copyright. The average selling price in Britain is £20 (Rs 300). Popular films like *Sohni Mahiwal*, *Qurbani* and *Shaan* sell between 300 and 3,000 copies. Says Mehra: "There are 1,500 video shops dealing in Bombay films in Britain. But our average sale per title is less than 500. The UK is a potential market for 10,000 sales per title."

According to Mehra illegal copying is done both by video shops and in private houses, Asian video dealers operate illegally not only in Britain but on the continent as well. IVA members are launching raids in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague this month.

Mehra blames the lax control exercised over the Santa Cruz Electronic Exports Processing Zone (SCEEPZ) in Bombay for the copyright infringement. In practice every film print exported from India should pass through the hands of the National Film Development Corporation of India. But original prints are often taken out overnight from cinemas by bribing hall attendants and are copied at the SCEEPZ laboratory, then exported to foreign countries.

The result of the illegal video trade in films has been the closure of around 180 cinemas in the UK specialising in Hindi films. "Where families used to spend £2 per head to go to the cinemas they can now see a film for £1 or even 50 pence, the price of one day's hire of a video cassette," says Mehra ruefully. The video business has also undercut Indian overseas distribution rights sales by 20 per cent.

The demand for video recorders is higher in Britain per capita than the US or Europe. And before the situation gets any worse, it is up to the film producers also to make an effort to curb this piracy which could well cripple both the British and Indian film industries. And this being British Film Year, it seems the appropriate time to start.

—BONNY MUKHERJEE

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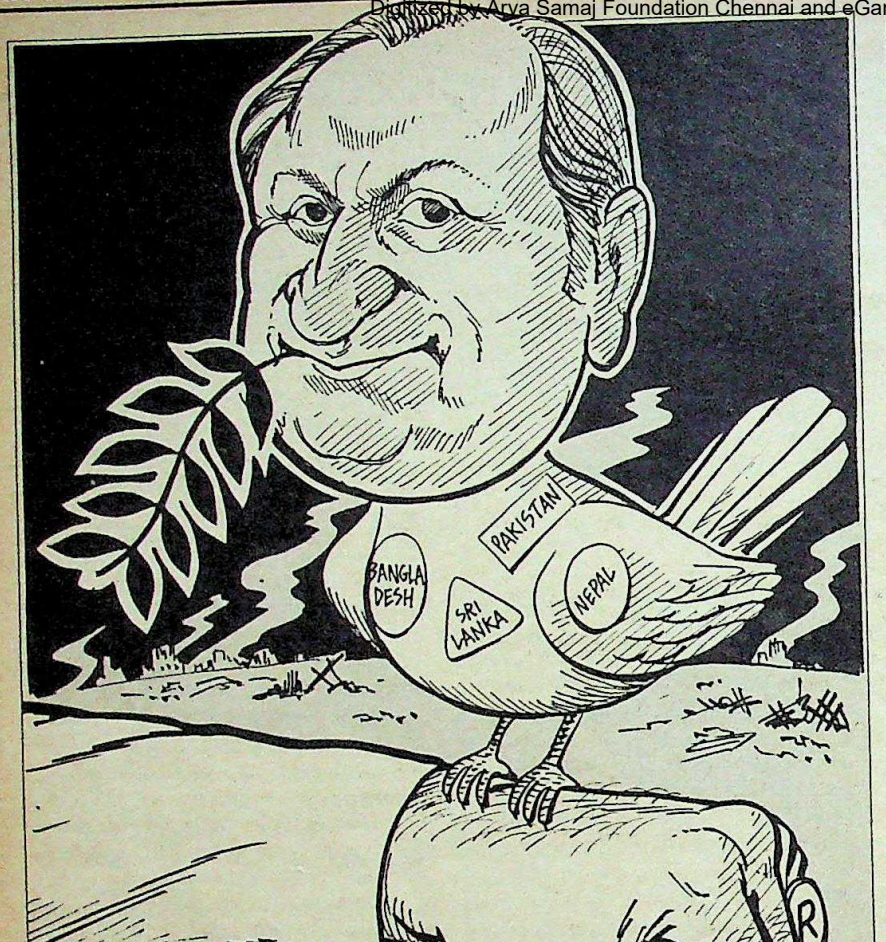

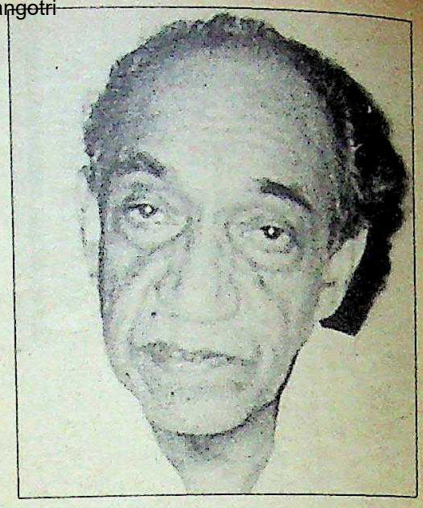

DIPLOMACY

Clearing the Air

INDIA has finally launched its much-debated offensive against its jittery neighbours. Not, of course, the type that was so vocally feared in close-by capitals. Instead of olive green, it is the olive branch that is spearheading the Indian invasion force under the command of its energetic, safari-suited general, Romesh Bhandari, India's new and upbeat foreign secretary.

Since his appointment barely two months ago, Bhandari has undertaken an 'if its Tuesday it must be Colombo'-type swing of India's neighbours in a high-profile bid to mend broken fences. Having bunny-hopped from Colombo to Kathmandu to Islamabad, Bhandari was off again last week to Kabul and Dacca to complete his South Asian itinerary. He had visited the Maldives for a South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) palaver immediately after taking over as foreign secretary and will set foot in Bhutan in May for the next high-level SARC session.

Bhandari's *tour de force* has been at the urging of his immediate boss, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who also happens to hold the External Affairs portfolio. Rajiv had outlined his good-neighbour plan —the cornerstone of his initial foreign policy edifice—to the foreign secretary during the two-hour discussion they had en route to Moscow to attend president Chernenko's funeral and a receptive Bhandari lost no time in setting the machinery in motion, though not without some tricky diplomatic jugglery. His scheduled visit to hyper-sensitive Nepal had to be postponed twice, once for a frantic —and futile—dash to Baghdad to mediate in the Iran-Iraq conflict, and again to ensure a meeting with Jayewardene before the Sri Lankan president met with his Pakistani counterpart, General Zia, in Islamabad.

At first blush, the Indian initiative seems to have yielded significantly positive results. For the first time in years, the constant crackle of vocal gunfire across India's borders has been reduced to sporadic sniping, specially in Colombo and Islamabad—the two capitals that currently hold the key to the success or failure of the Bhandari *bhangra*.

That in itself is a minor miracle, however temporary its existence. In the neighbourhood, undoubtedly the most significant thaw in India's bilateral relations has been felt in Colombo in the immediate wake of Bhandari's visit. The confusion and consternation (*see box*) over the press release issued at the tail end of Bhandari's visit apart, the dramatic change in the Sri Lankan Government's stand on the vexatious Tamil issue can hardly be mere coincidence. Bhandari's presence, in itself, was a major incentive for the Sri Lankans. Colombo has made it clear that the Indian Government's mediator on the ethnic problem, G.Parthasarathi, chairman of the (foreign) Policy Planning Committee, was no longer acceptable to them on the grounds that being a Tamil, his bona fides were su-

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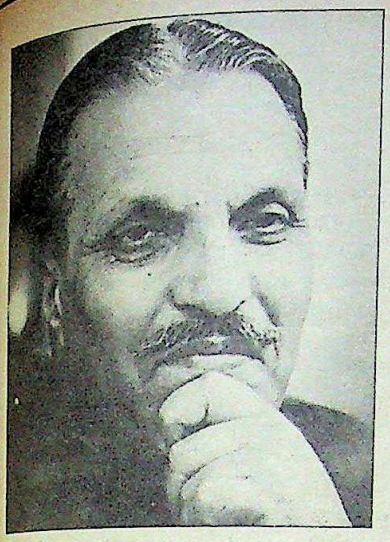

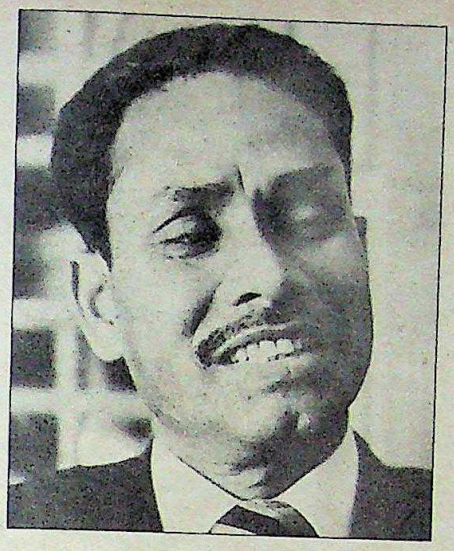

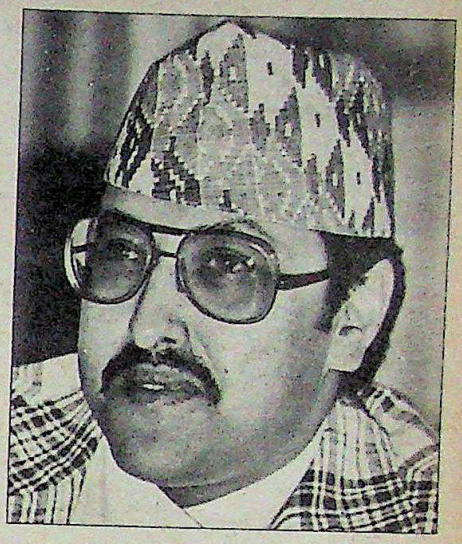

(From left) Jayewardene, Zia, Ershad and King Birendra: positive response

spect. "What we had to do was to convince them that the first step was for both sides to cool down and stop squabbling over minor issues like personalities. Only then could we tackle the real gut issues," says a foreign office source.

But even the Indian delegation was surprised at the almost immediate climb down by the Jayewardene Government on various vital issues. These were:

- the announcement by Jayewardene the moment his talks with Bhandari ended, of a general amnesty to the Tamil guerrillas if they laid down their weapons
- a revision of the controversial sixth amendment to the Constitution which disqualified members of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) from parliament
- release of detenus jailed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act
- confinement of the Sri Lankan army to their barracks in the Tamil-dominated areas in the north and the east combined with a relaxation of emergency regulations in those areas
- a rethink on the prickly settlement policy undertaken by the Government to resettle Sinhalese in Tamil areas
- resumption of the stalled negotiations for a final settlement of the ethnic problem
- relaxation of fishing restrictions that is causing acute hardship to Tamils in the 'prohibited zone' from Mannar on the western coast to Mullativu district on the eastern coast
- significant changes in the District Development Councils (DDC) Scheme and District Ministers with the possibility of setting up provincial councils

> **"At first blush, the Indian initiative seems to have yielded significantly positive results. For the first time in years, the constant crackle of vocal gunfire across India's borders has been reduced to sporadic sniping."**

All these are meant to be part of a package deal thrashed out in Colombo with a view to ending the ethnic strife and drawing the Tamils back into the mainstream of Sri Lankan life. The DDC's, for instance, now elected under the proportionate representation system, will be modified to include the individual popularity vote of candidates who will be considered elected even if their party gets a lower vote aggregate. The amendments also call for wider powers for the DDC's. Elected district ministers will enjoy a status equal to cabinet ministers. The new changes, according to reports in Colombo, will come in force during the fresh elections to the DDC's (This year's elections were postponed).

The package proposals, however, will depend on the response from Tamil circles regarding the willingness of the TULF to contest elections in Tamil areas; their agreement to restart negotiations and a ceasefire by Tamil militants. The Jayewardene Government has meanwhile dispatched at least three unofficial representatives to Madras in order to start a direct dialogue with Tamil militant leaders, including a former TULF MP and the editor of the influential Jaffna weekly, *Saturday Review*.

According to the *Saturday Review* report by its editor on his meeting with Jayewardene after Bhandari's visit, the Sri Lankan president stated that he was willing to meet Tamil militant leaders without any pre-conditions except that they agree to stop violence. Jayewardene, in a significant departure from his earlier stand, stated that he would not insist on their renouncing their demand for a separate state. The editor also quoted Tamil militants as saying: "Allow us to live in peace. We don't want power to suppress anyone".

According to External Affairs sources, the Bhandari mission returned convinced that there has been a marked change in the anti-Indian atmosphere in Colombo. "We had to convince them that what the Indian Government could do was limited to supplementing what the Sri Lankan Government did. We told them what we were doing on our part and that the rest was up to them".

Obviously, the recent events in Tamil Nadu—the eviction of Tamil militants from their bases along the Thanjavur coast and the capture of two separate arms consignments (*see box*)—has been seen in Colombo as a genuine attempt on the part of India to pave the way for an eventual settlement of the ethnic problem. Foreign office sources insist that the press note the militants are so upset about was release . ithout the consent of the Indian delegation and that they will be issuing a clarification soon. They also say that traditional India-baiters like Prime Minister Premadasa have mellowed their earlier stand considerably and opposition leaders like Mrs Bandaranaike have come forward to actively support

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negotiations for a peaceful settlement of the problem and suspend inter-party strife till that happens. The sources stated: "Jayewardene seems prepared to go the whole hog if it means restoration of peace in the island".

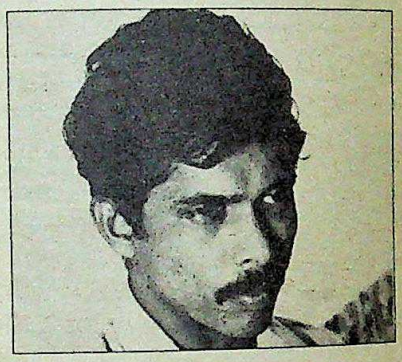
Whatever results from the altered stand and the new moves towards reconciliation in Sri Lanka, the Indian foreign office still feels that the subsequent visit to Islamabad was far more important, and understandably so. "We made it clear from the start that it was pointless raking up no war pacts and friendship treaties. These issues can only be tackled if there is a lowering of tension and a change in the mutual atmosphere of mistrust and confrontation," says the source.

With that brief in mind, the Bhandari delegation's strategy was to make haste slowly by insisting on a step by step approach with a basic idea of increasing the frequency of exchanges in various fields between the two countries. On their part, according to members of the delegation, the Pakistan side seemed equally eager to improve relations with its larger neighbour. The Indian delegation was given every assurance that the trial of the Sikh hijackers would be speedily completed —they gave a deadline of three months for the final judgement—and that anti-Indian publicity in the Pakistani media would be curtailed.

Much of the change in attitudes seems to be the result of pressure brought to bear on General Zia by both the Americans and the Soviets. Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev and General Zia had a 55-minute meeting in Moscow during Chernenko's funeral during which the Afghanistan issue featured prominently. Gorbachev reportedly did some tough talking on Pakistan's support to the Afghan Mujahideen. In any event, the Pakistan Government is already having second thoughts about the presence of the 3,000-odd armed Afghan Mujahideen in the country, many of whom are deeply involved in the illegal drug trade. There have been reports of serious armed clashes between various Afghan groups in the Peshawar area and if things get worse, Pakistan could have a major pro-

TAMIL NADU

Taming the Tigers?



HAVE the tigers been tamed? In Tamil Nadu, the shock-waves emanating from Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari's visit to Sri Lanka have stunned Tamil liberation groups into temporary immobility and helplessness, signifying as it does in their eyes, a dramatic shift in the Indian stand on the Tamil issue which bodes ill for their continuing struggle for Eelam.

What provoked their disquiet was the press release issued in Colombo after Bhandari's visit which stated: "It was agreed that cessation of all acts of violence is necessary in order to create an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of a political dialogue." Translation: not only must the Sri Lankan army stop its armed campaign against Tamil militants but the Tamils have to end their battle against Sri Lankan security forces as well Says A.S.Balasingham, spokesman for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE): "We are not happy with the wording of the statement which has confused between senseless army violence against innocent Tamil civilians and the resistance we are putting up against army violence. Some people perceive it as a shift in India's policy as regards Sri Lanka."

Most liberation groups and their sympathisers view the visit as a deliberate betrayal by the Indian Government considering the support they have been receiving from New Delhi so far. Charged the DMK's V.Gopalaswamy: "Mr Bhandari has sold out our interests." Added Janata Party Rajya Sabha member M.S. Gurupadaswamy: "The Indian Government seems to have accepted Sri Lanka's position that violence must cease before political negotiations can begin."

That was, unfortunately, not the only bad news in store for the liberation groups. The same night that Bhandari flew back from Colombo, an Indian coast guard vessel patrolling the Palk Strait intercepted a speedboat heading for Sri Lanka loaded with sub-machine-guns, 9 mm rifles and two bags full of grenades. The two-man crew, Sivanandan, 27, and Alfred, 24, who were dressed in battle fatigues, were arrested. INDIA TODAY has learnt that the two are members of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), one of the more active Tamil militant groups. Significantly, this was the first time that an Indian vessel had intercepted a Tamil gunboat.

Even more sensational was the seizure last fortnight of a container at Madras port by customs authorities stocked with 1,400 bolt-action rifles, 300 Sten guns, five Japanese wireless sets, an electronic radio with amplifier and three photocopying machines. The container manifest declared the contents as waste paper meant for a paper mill in Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh. Sympathisers of the Tamil cause were quick to put the blame on Andhra-based Naxalites and even Punjab terrorists but the cargo was precisely the kind of equipment that Tamil liberation groups are in desperate need of. That was not all. Reliable sources have confirmed that Tamil Nadu police have also arrested two members of the National Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam (NLFT) one of the smaller liberation groups, for illegal possession of arms.

Coincidentally or otherwise, the sudden succession of setbacks for the liberation groups has resulted in one advantageous fall-out. Last fortnight, four of the five major groups finally managed to come together under the banner of the Eelam National Liberation Front. The Front embraces the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam headed by Pirabhakaran, the Tamil Eelam liberation Organisation (TELO) headed by Srisabaratnam and the Eelam Revolutionary Organisers (EROS) of Balakumar. The fifth major group, the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOT) under the leadership of Uma Maheswaran has been left out of the Front. The abberation is curious since it

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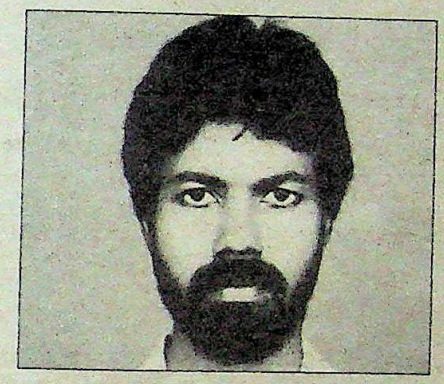
blem on its hands. There has also been increasing pressure being applied on General Zia by the American Government to improve relations with India.

According to the Indian foreign office, there is also a subterranean change in the atmosphere in Pakistan following the recent moves towards democratisation. "There are more people in influential positions now who are more favourably inclined towards normalisation of relations with India," says the source. Pakistan Foreign minister Yakub Khan agreed to a visit to New Delhi later this month to take the matter further and discuss the nuts and bolts of improving ties.

As far as the rest of the neighbourhood is concerned, there are no major problems that can prove intractable. In Nepal, the Bhandari bandwagon found them less touchy than before in spite of the visit having been postponed twice. King Birendra is still pushing for his Zone of Peace proposal and requires Indian support. As long as that is forthcoming, India and Nepal only have to sort out minor issues like the avoidance of double taxation to keep relations on an even keel. Similarly, Dhaka's protestations over the border fence and other related issues are more for internal consumption than external and the signals from General Ershad are that Bhandari will find a receptive audience awaiting him when he arrives there next week.

But even in the cloistered confines of the External Affairs Ministry, there is still an air of guarded optimism about what the future holds in store for the neighbourhood. Issues like Pakistan's nuclear programme, its acquisition of state-of-the-art weaponry and its alleged interference in India's internal affairs are major hurdles as is the external aid that Sri Lanka's security forces are receiving in their war against the Tamil militants. It would obviously be premature to conceive of a South Asia oozing overnight with neighbourly love and goodwill towards all men. It is, at best, a tentative beginning, an attempt to treat old wounds with a new ointment. But judging by the initial response of the patients, it is more likely to cure than to kill.

—DILIP BOBB



(From left) Srisabaratnam, Pirabhakaran and Padmanabhan: rumbling in the ranks

was with PLOT that the EPRLF, TELO and EROS were conducting unity talks and it appeared that LTTE was the odd man out. However, a EPRLF spokesman says that "our unity talks are continuing".

However, Front spokesman Balasingham says that the unity among the other four groups "will be both political and military. All four groups will be formulating our political approach and making political statements in future only after mutual discussions". On a military level, he says that "we are planning combined operations."

Clearly, the forging of unity among groups that have been at loggerheads with each other for years is the result of their suspicion of a change in the Indian Government's stand on Sri Lanka and the realisation that they will have to go it alone. Admits Balasingham: "Time is running out for us. We have to pool our resources and unless we change the balance of power in our favour, the Sri Lankan Government will not change its position."

The sudden panic in the ranks of the liberation groups could be a case of jumping the gun. While the groups and their sympathisers are convinced that the Indian Government has changed its stand on Sri Lanka, others view the latest events as merely a series of coincidences. The Foreign Ministry has assured members of Parliament that there has been no change in the Government's stand on the ethnic issue. Appapillai Amirthalingam, secretary-general of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), asserts:"I don't think that India has changed its policy on Sri Lanka."

Neutral observers say that the events are not being viewed in the proper perspective—as mere coincidence. Bhandari's visit, they say, was part of his routine round of neighbouring countries and he did not go there to specifically discuss the ethnic issue with President Jayewardene. Neither was Bhandari an accomplice to the wording of the press release issued by the Sri Lankans at the end of his visit; the EPRLF gun-runners were intercepted because the Indian Government wanted to ensure that there were no major attacks by Tamil guerrillas in Sri Lanka during or immediately after the visit (last year the EPRLF kidnapped an American couple during the visit of US Vice-president George Bush). The customs crackdown and the arrest of the NLFT militants was to put the brakes on the intermittent armed clashes between different Eelam groups in Tamil Nadu.

They also say that local pressure and sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamils must necessarily be a consideration as far as the Indian Government is concerned. The Tamil Nadu chief minister convened an all-party meeting on the Sri Lankan issue where it was decided that a delegation would meet Rajiv Gandhi and present him with a memorandum. The opposition (DMK) leader Karunanidhi has been invited to be part of the delegation. The DMK had earlier announced its programme to picket Central Government offices and the Sri Lanka Deputy High Commission in Madras from April 29 if the Indian Government does not take any positive steps.

But a new twist to the Tamil issue has been given by the Sri Lankan Government itself. Having failed in its 18-month dialogue with the TULF, the Jayewardene Government is now trying to build bridges with the Tamil militants in Madras. The editor of the *Saturday Review* was in Madras recently for unofficial talks with leaders of the liberation groups and now a Quaker Peace and Service group is busy shuttling between Colombo and Madras on the same mission. Obviously, the situation has changed but precisely what will eventually emerge is still anybody's guess.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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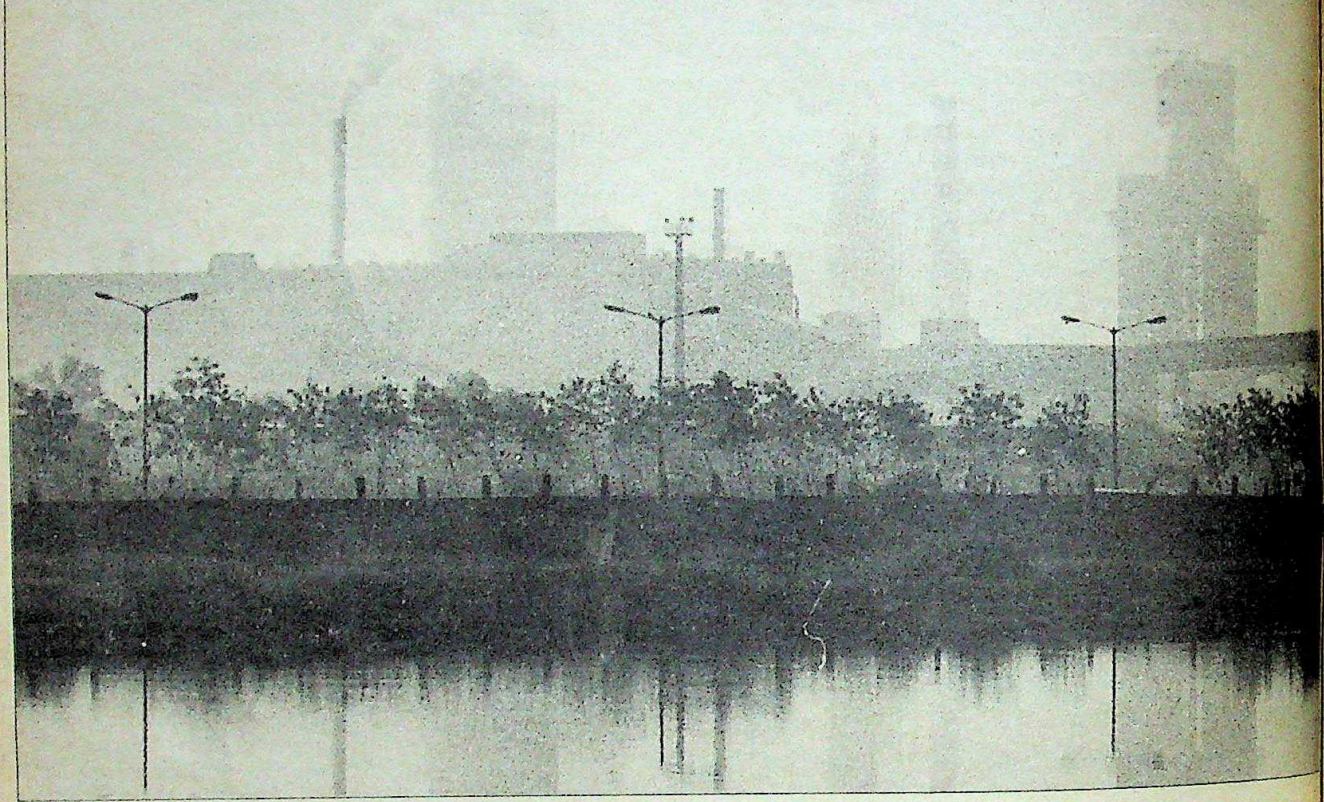
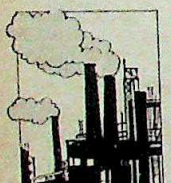
BOMBAY

The Poisonous Plants





FOR THE last century, the citizens of Bombay took the hundreds of factories, big and small, old and new, that dotted their bustling city very much for granted. Few cared about the smokestacks spewing gases into the air, or the streams of effluents allowed casually into the streams, or the masses of dangerous chemicals, tonnes of which were handled everyday on the shop-floor.

But Bhopal changed all that, perhaps forever. It didn't take much time for concerned citizens of Bombay to realise that if just one plant could take a city apart in that terrifying fashion, the factories of the country's financial capital could do much more, and much worse. From then on, every leak which might have gone unnoticed in the past received banner headline treatment, every industrial death was the target of close scrutiny. Both the Government and the public started taking a closer look at the cold figures like the spine-chilling one which puts the total amount of pollutant released into Bombay's already unhealthy atmosphere at 1,600 tonnes daily. In a telling comment on the state of the city's environment, a daily carried a grim April Fool headline, "Gas masks for Bombayites emergency ordinance to avert disaster".

The incident which really rubbed fears and consciences raw was the Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers Ltd (RCF) episode when the residents of the suburb of Chembur, a heavily polluted area of Bombay—not for nothing is it called, "gas Chembur"—panicked after noticing a strong smell of ammonia in the air. For over a week RCF Chairman and Managing Director, Duleep Singh and Maharashtra Pollution Control Board Chairman, C.D. Oommachen, MLA, traded charges before the board ordered the company's ancient urea plant, one of whose vents is said to have given rise to the leak, closed for repairs. Says Oommachen, "We had to take action in the public interest. This sort of thing cannot be allowed to go on." Singh admits that there was an "ammonia escape" but asserts that it was due to the fact that two effluent streams which are supposed to converge and neutralise each other did not do so. Says he: "In any case, ammonia is not a fatal gas, unlike methyl isocyanate (MIC), which is odourless and deadly."

But no one was really convinced by that argument and there were fears that the RCF episode was just the tip of an iceberg. Now the worst fears are confirmed by the first report of the Environmental Safety Committee constituted by the Pollution Board. The 12-member committee, headed by R.K. Garg, director, Chemical Engineering Group, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Bombay, had sweeping terms of reference to identify hazardous highly toxic and corrosive chemicals: to check existing safety measures and the adequacy and efficiency of storage and handling facilities and to verify if the present safety and pollution control measures implemented by the company are adequate and to suggest improvement if they are not. Last month, the reports on the first 15 companies out of the projected 40 including

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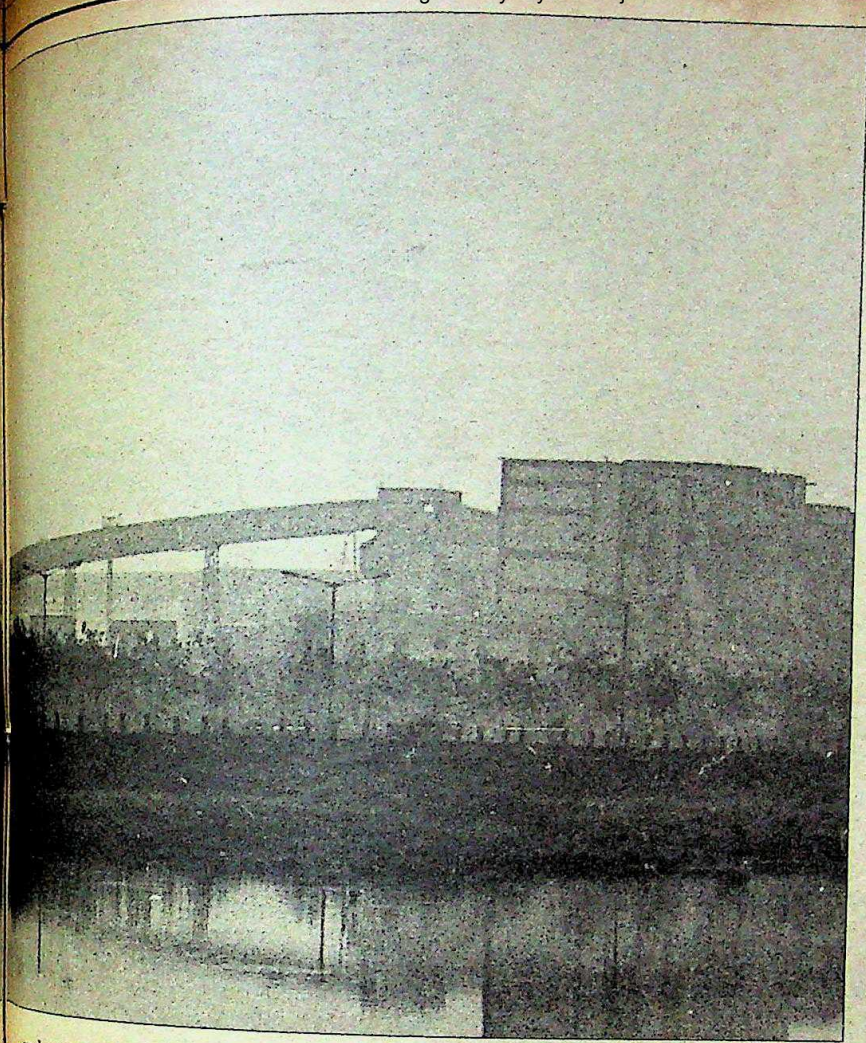
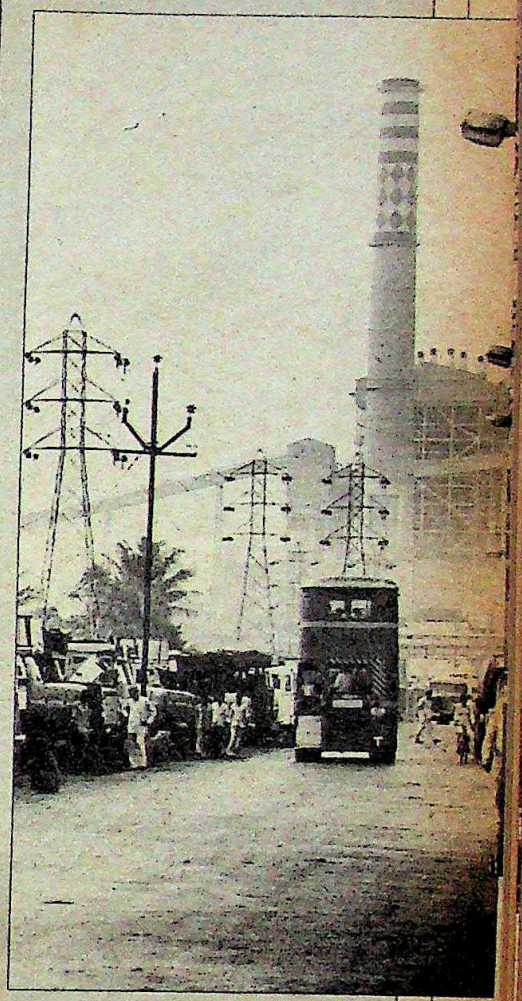


such giants as RCF and Hindustan Lever Ltd, piled up and the collective picture is frightening.

THERE is something wrong with every listed company. Hindustan Ciba Geigy Ltd, at its plant in Bhandup, handles nine hazardous chemicals from carbon disulphide to chloroform and although the general safety organisation of the factory is good, the company does not think it fit to monitor emissions into the atmosphere. Indian Explosives Ltd at Sewri handles 14 toxic chemicals but does not think it necessary to have a proper effluent treatment plant or to monitor emissions to ensure that none of the toxic chemicals escape into the atmosphere. As an investigating officer says bluntly, "There is a casual approach in safety measures while handling hazardous chemicals." Round the clock fire-fighting arrangements do not exist, despite the fact that four of the chemicals—ethylene oxide, aromax, methanol and butanol—are definitely fire hazards.

The same thread of casualness especially with regard to the outside world is a common factor in almost all the companies. Hindustan Lever Ltd working with about a dozen dangerous chemicals at its Sewri plant is yet to complete its new effluent treatment plant and particulate emissions from the detergent plant are not monitored. Sludge from the present effluent treatment plant are transported by road and monoethanol amine, a fire hazard, is stored in large drums far too close to the plant proper. It is a miracle that no major mishaps have occurred in the last three years.

By far the thickest file is devoted to RCF, which received particular attention. RCF is a huge and profitable government-owned fertiliser company whose sales turnover for 1983-84 was over Rs 400 crore, a whopping 53 per cent increase over that of 1982-83. It registered a net profit of Rs 50.06 crore which is more than double that of the previous year's figure, as the annual report proudly points out. It produced, last year, 4,32,000 tonnes of fertiliser—no wonder Duleep Singh is called the "fertiliser king".



Tata Electric Company,
Trombay

THE five units are situated "in a highly congested area". The units together generate 837.5 megawatts of power. The company is the only one in the report to get a 'satisfactory' remark: "The effluent standards are met as required. However, Bioassay Test should be done. Nearly 70 per cent of nitrogen oxide release in the Chembur area is due to Tata Electric Company. However, the concentration is very low," the committee points approvingly to the safety arrangements.

But here too, things are not quite what they should be and there are some rather hazardous drawbacks: The release of nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide and other suspended particulate matter is not monitored continuously; and neither is the temperature of the effluent at the discharge point. The committee recommends that there should be a definite time limit mentioned whenever a work permit is issued and repair and maintenance work is to be done. Also, "the fire drill should be done from time to time."

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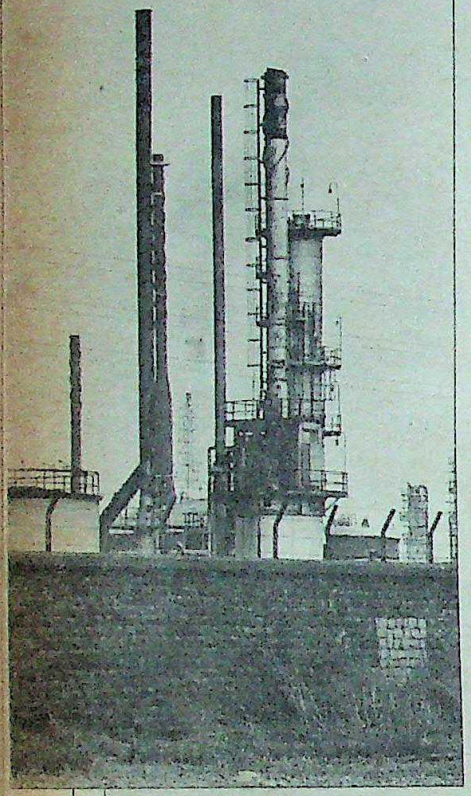


Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, *Chembur.*

THE refinery covers 450 acres and processes 6 million tonnes of crude oil a year using 20 chemicals, from caustic soda to carbon tetrachloride, in the refining process. Apart from the silica alumina catalyst, all other chemicals are toxic. The biggest fire hazard is the 3.5 million tonnes crude oil stored in 15 special steel tanks. In the effluent, the Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) level is 776 mg/litre while the standard is 250mg/litre. Both sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide emission is high but will be reduced after implementation of various measures.

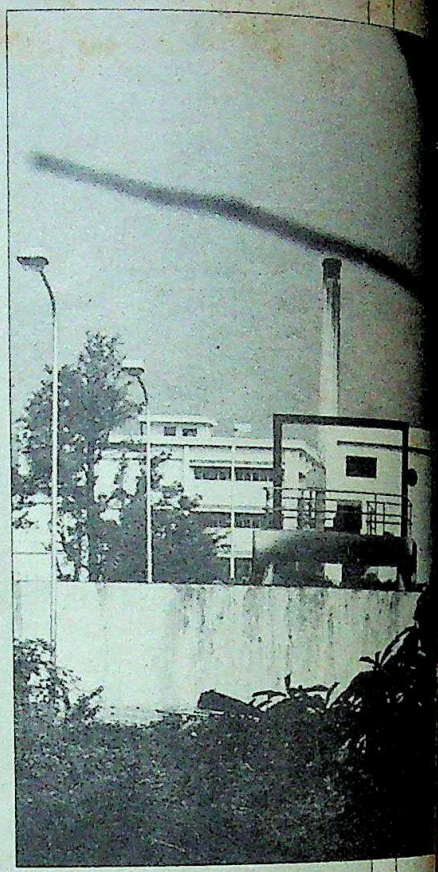
The safety organisation is well-oiled, with a three-tier safety committee overseeing everything. There have been no major mishaps in the last three years. However, there are faults: in case of power failure, switching from electricity to diesel driven generators is not automatic; tetraethyl lead vapours added to gasoline to reduce knocking are not monitored; neither are sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide and carbon monoxide; and the tetraethyl lead absorption system does not take into account the release from the storage tank.

Despite the money it is raking in, the company's safety measures leave much to be desired as the committee's investigations make absolutely clear, an indication of how primitive safety measures in India are. Examples are:

- operators are not trained to cope with abnormal situations like a pressure rise in the system and are not trained in using safety devices like self-contained breathing apparatus;
- continuous monitoring for ammonia (in ammonia plants), carbon monoxide (in methanol plants), nitrogen oxides (in the old nitric acid plant) are not carried out;
- safety valves, level indicators and pressure indicators in the ammonia, methanol, methylamine and sulphuric acid tanks are either in a corroded condition or are not functioning properly;
- the venting system in the ammonia and nitric acid storage tanks release straight into the atmosphere;
- there are no stand-by storage tanks for methylamine;
- the control panel for the old nitric acid plant shows faulty alarms, and the feed flow rate is not indicated at all;
- the scrubbing system for nitrogen oxides is inadequate in case of heavy and sudden release;
- the ammonia storage tank is corroded and the gypsum from the phosphoric acid plant which contains phosphoric acid is dumped in the premises.

THE COMMITTEE has made a host of recommendations including a revamp of all safety and warning equipment and more fire-fighting equipment. It also suggested the setting up of a safety committee for each plant which would report to a safety committee for the whole complex. Finally, it asked that an "open house" be held from time to time with the community where emergency evacuation measures are discussed.

It will clearly be some time before all this gets under way. Meanwhile, the committee gave an account of its dealings with RCF which makes interesting reading. From this it is clear that the company had no contingency plan, the licences for the storage of hazardous chemicals had expired and that the company had not bothered to do anything about the dilapidated state of the safety systems until told to do so. For instance the nitric acid plant which was in an awful condition, with emission levels of nitrogen oxides several times the permissible levels, was overhauled only after the committee's visit. Despite this,



Burroughs Wellcome and Co (India) Ltd, *Mulund.*

THE chemical division produces hephenium and diethyl carbamazine citrate by using 10 hazardous chemicals, including phosgene and chlorosulphonic acid. The main pollutants are hydrogen chloride gas and sulphur dioxide and the emission of suspended solids, Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) and COD. There is no effluent treatment plant and "it is recommended that effluent treatment plant be commissioned immediately".

The committee lists 12 "deficiencies" including: many chemicals and solvents are stored in the open with no adequate water spraying arrangement; phosgene cylinders are kept on the naked floor with inadequate ventilation of the storeroom; phosgene concentration is not being properly monitored in the working area; the pipe that connects the phosgene reactor to the scrubber is made of glass, "which is fragile and constitutes a potential hazard"; the cubicle where phosgene is charged houses the plant's main switch, and the canister gas masks are not checked regularly.

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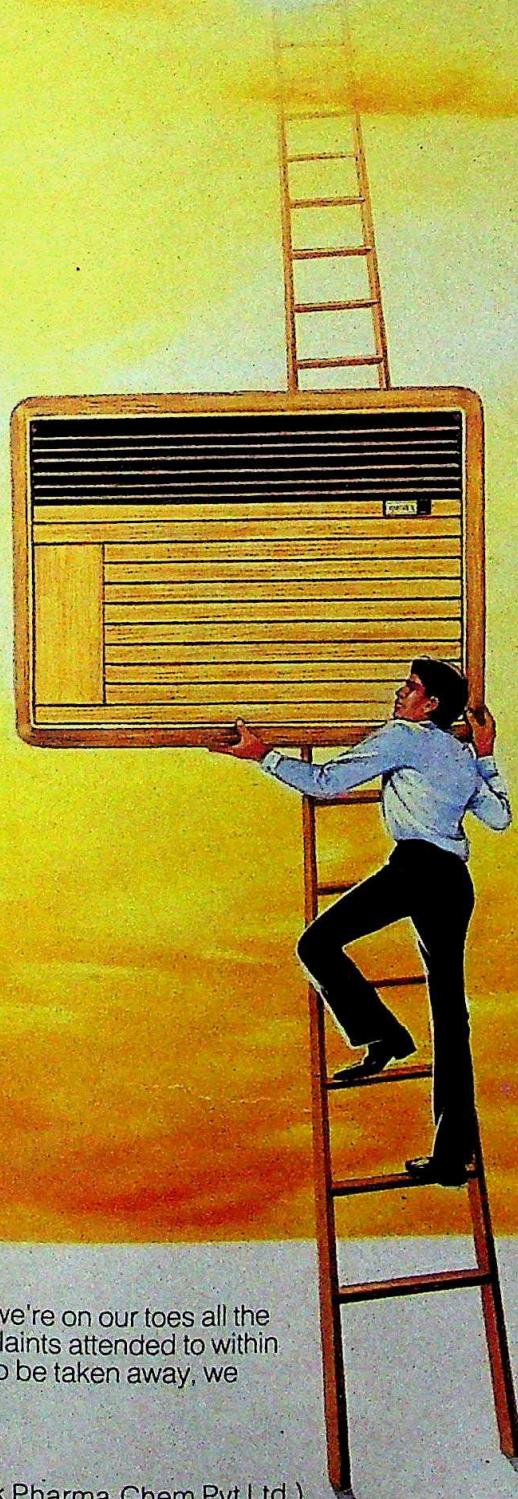

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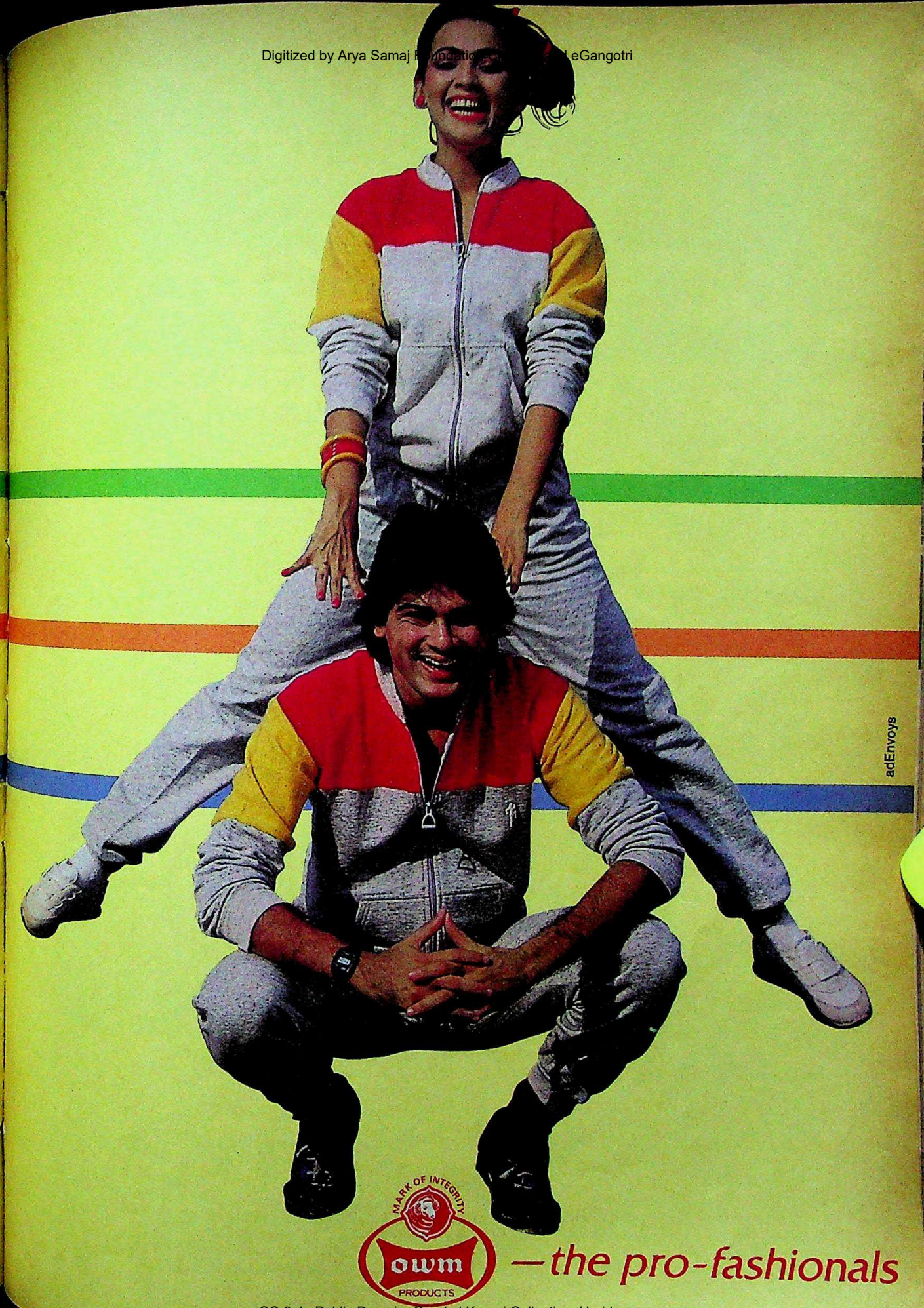

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Ahmed Oil Mill, Two Tanks, *Bombay.*

THE plant is situated in the heart of Bombay city in a highly congested area and manufactures 100 tonnes of edible oil a day. It stores caustic soda lye, hydrogen, ammonia. There are quite a lot of things wrong—the BOD in the effluent is high, sulphur dioxide emission is above the 500 particles per million (PPM) limit. In fact, effluent and emission are not monitored. Hydrogen is stored in a partially open place; the electrical wiring and connections in the deodorising and bleaching section "are in a loose condition", and any ammonia leak could not be controlled. What is more, there is no separate fire-fighting group and no safety training for the workers.

The recommendations are sweeping: formations of a fire-fighting group; immediate replacement of all electrical connections and wires; checks of the thicknesses of caustic soda and hydrogen storage tanks, construction of an effluent treatment plant; the terrace slab to be structurally checked for its ability certificate to be obtained as required, and approval obtained for the storage of hydrogen in tanks.

it is incredible that even with such a black record in safety RCF can still blow its own trumpet. One of the publicity pamphlets it brings out is titled, "Is RCF fighting pollution? Let the facts speak for themselves." It says at one point, "Our efforts do not stop at providing the pollution control measures outlined earlier but go further to monitor round the clock, the emissions and discharges at source as well as the ambient air quality. This has been done to keep pollution control installations under continuous surveillance so as to ensure they give a correct and optimum performance at all times." This is corporate double speak: not a word about the corroded tanks, malfunctioning safety valves, or untrained operators.

The committee has made certain general recommendations besides the specific ones for each company:

- ► operators should be adequately trained to handle abnormal situations with regular refresher courses;
- ► toxic gases in the factory environment should be continuously monitored;
- ► safety devices and instruments should be frequently inspected, tested and a record kept;
- ► storage of hazardous intermediate products should be restricted to eight hours and before any plant shut-down all such products should be consumed;
- ► risk analysis should be carried out and measures for containing such a risk identified;
- ► all containers, plant equipment and pipelines should be made unserviceable when disposed of as scrap;
- ► the neighbouring population be educated on emergency measures;
- ► new buildings and hutments should not be allowed to come up near factories, and
- ► for transportation, a safety code should be evolved by the competent authority.

The committee report is scheduled to be placed in the Maharashtra Assembly sometime in June. The committee is moving with unusual speed because 25 other plants have also to be inspected. Oommachen says firmly: "Once the report is accepted by the House, we will see that its recommendations are implemented to the last word." Is that only one of the many promises made and forgotten or in the new pollution and safety conscious atmosphere, will the report be the first of many designed to set India's wayward industries on the safety track?

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

Excel Industries Ltd, *Jogeshwari.*

THE factory is situated in the heart of one of Bombay's most congested areas—opposite a buffalo diary in fact. It manufactures oxalic acid, mercuric chloride and glyphosphate—all of which are highly toxic. There is no separate safety and fire officer although from time to time the company arranges refresher courses in fire-fighting, safety and first aid.

The amount of mercury in the effluent is slightly higher than the standard and this is only the beginning of a long list of deficiencies and recommendations. The levels of nitrogen oxides, mercury and phenol are not monitored, the flooring of the mercuric chloride plant is not proper, chlorine leaks from the absorption tower of the plant, the floor of the oxalic acid plant is wooden and benzene is not stored as stipulated in the licence. The committee suggests that mercury be monitored in workers' urine, the mercuric chloride plant have a "impervious, smooth, sloping flooring", to collect mercury spillage, and that the oxalic acid plant's wooden floor be replaced with acid-resistant flooring.

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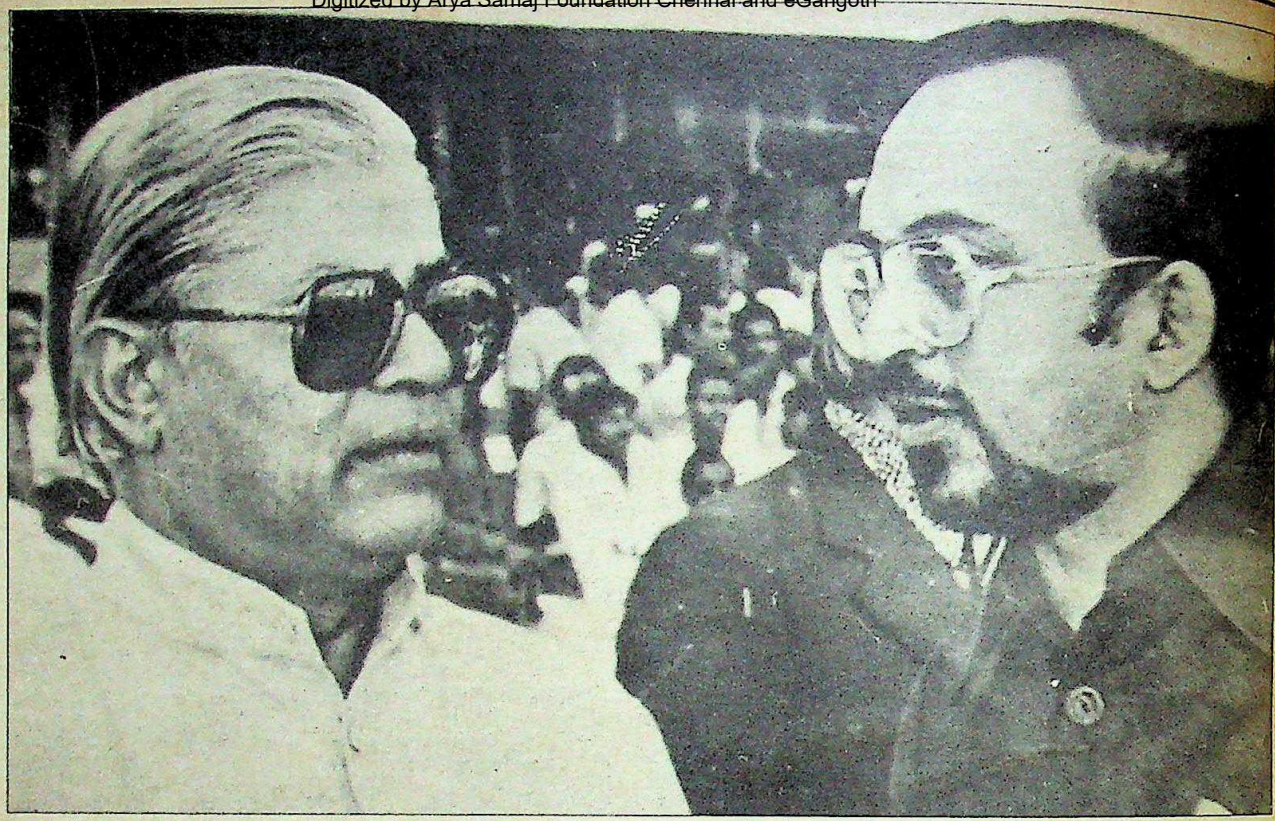

Solanki with Mrugesh: controversial friendship

MRUGESH JAIKRISHNA

Out of Currency

IT WAS once a rendezvous for the city's social and political elite. Today, with owner Mrugesh Jaikrishna arrested on charges of attempting to smuggle foreign currency out of the country through his employees, 'Gokul', his six-bedroom house in Ahmedabad, is now off-limits for visitors. Its most visible inhabitants are intelligence sleuths and the police. Ahmedabad's leading politicians, including the chief minister, bureaucrats and industrialists by the dozen who once made a bee-line for Gokul to enjoy Mrugesh's lavish hospitality, now patently refuse to talk about their visits and friendship with their generous hosts, Mrugesh and his wife Parul. Said a senior customs officer in Ahmedabad: "We were aware of his top connections, but when we began to interrogate people, no one owned up to knowing him, and they all denied having any links with him."

The sudden fall in Mrugesh's popularity ratings was perhaps understandable. Last month he was the first top industrialist in the country to be detained since the Emergency under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act (COFEPOSA), a legislation which is normally used against smugglers. His detention followed the seizure of foreign currency worth Rs 46.63 lakh from two of his employees at Bombay's Sahar International airport (INDIA TODAY, April 15). If the case goes against him, Mrugesh is liable to pay a penalty of three times the amount seized which, in any case, will also be confiscated. In addition, he can be sentenced to a minimum of two years imprisonment.

Not only were there allegations that Solanki had shown Mrugesh undue favours in business and other interests, the couple were appointed to the boards of three prestigious state government undertakings.

But before his detention, Mrugesh was a name to reckon with in Gujarat. Not only was Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki a close personal friend, his visitor's book could have been filled with the names of the high and mighty, industrialists, politicians and bureaucrats. Among his visitors were former ministers as well as senior state and Central officials. Many of his visitors now claim that they called on him at home primarily in connection with their association with the public corporations and social and sports organisations with which Mrugesh was actively involved.

But the fact is that Mrugesh was first and foremost a fast rising industrialist. Besides being the managing director of Shri Ambica Mills, a Rs 40 crore turnover textile unit in Ahmedabad, Mrugesh was chairman of five other companies including Skyjet Aviation Pvt Ltd and H.K. (International) Co. Pvt Ltd, and director of 13 others. His other positions included vice presidencies of three sports bodies including the Board of Control for Cricket in India and the Gujarat Cricket Association—an impressive list indeed.

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Mrugesh shot into the public light—and no mean measure of notoriety—after the 1980 elections which returned Solanki's Congress(I) regime to power. Not only were there allegations that Solanki had shown Mrugesh undue favours in their business and other interests, the couple were appointed to the boards of three prestigious state government undertakings.

The first sign that Mrugesh was destined to be more equal than others was the construction of a stadium in Ahmedabad for the Gujarat Cricket Association in the face of opposition from within the state government. In fact, soon after the Solanki ministry came to power the then sports minister, Manoharsinh Jadeja had revived the long abandoned construction of the Sardar Patel Cricket Stadium which had lain incomplete for years for want of adequate funds. Jadeja, no friend of Solanki had sanctioned Rs 50 lakh towards its completion.

Since this stadium would be under the control of the municipal authorities and the association wanted its own, Mrugesh hatched a different project and was swiftly allotted 50 acres on the outskirts of the city at a throwaway price of Rs 8 per square metre. The Patel stadium remains incomplete—again for want of money—but Mrugesh's project went full speed ahead and was completed in a record time of one year in 1983. One obvious reason: it was named after the then prime minister Mrs Indira Gandhi.

What is more, it was built using bank loans, and state government undertakings, including the Slum Clearance Board, were asked to pay Rs 10,000 each to sign up as members of the stadium and the club attached to it. Money was raised through donations as well—and sure enough the stadium became a centre of controversy.

In mid-1982, four MP's, seven MLA's and ten district Congress(I) committee chiefs wrote a strongly worded letter to Mrs Gandhi alleging irregularities. They warned that if immediate action was not taken then the "Indira Gandhi stadium will prove another Antulay type Indira Gandhi Pratishthan." Mrs Gandhi subsequently obliged the association to drop her name from it.

The Solanki-Mrugesh connection was also responsible for growing dissidence in the party. When over a dozen Congressmen including former Union deputy finance minister Maganbhai Barot left the party, they cited Mrugesh's growing influence over Solanki as one of the factors for their action. Solanki's detractors maintain that Solanki would accept Mrugesh's advice even in political matters and ignore Congressmen. Said Barot: "In fact Gokul had become an extension of both, the chief minister's office and the PCC(I) where important decisions were taken." Added another Congressman: "The state Government twisted all the rules and regulations in order to favour one of its favourite industrialists whose track record itself was clearly controversial."

Parul: immense clout

Mrugesh's clout on state politics was noticed even during the recent Assembly elections. When scores of Congressmen descended at Gokul and openly sought the couple's support in getting Congress(I) tickets, according to a Congress(I) leader from Gujarat, over 20 of them actually did get tickets—ostensibly because their names were recommended either by Mrugesh or by Parul.

Later the same year, the state Government appointed Mrugesh director of the state-owned Gujarat Industrial Investment Corporation Ltd and Gujarat Tyres Ltd. His wife, Parul, was made director of the Gujarat State Tourism Development Corporation.

Mrugesh demonstrated his clout with the state Government when the textile industry was facing problems in 1984. While nearly two dozen mills downed shutters due to the recession, and some were prosecuted for having shut down without permission, the Government looked the other way in the case of Mrugesh's Sarangpur Mills. Then, the mill was allowed to reopen and was singled out as the only one declared a relief undertaking and thereby exempted from paying labour and other dues—in spite of reports by financial institutions and banks that it was not viable. A year later, this exemption was withdrawn when an advocate filed a writ petition in the high court challenging it as a special favour done to Mrugesh by Solanki.

The Government has had other dealings with the couple which has raised eyebrows. Parul's travel agency, Skyjet Aviation Ltd., which she owned together with A.C. Amin, one of those arrested in Bombay last month, was the only one in the state capital Gandhinagar. Skyjet has no office in Ahmedabad, where it would attract a larger volume of business; in Gandhinagar most of its business comes from the state government and its undertakings who patronise it.

On his part, Solanki stoutly denies having extended any favours or concession to Mrugesh and Parul and their interests. Says Solanki: "It is a vicious campaign to malign me personally." But he declines to comment on their appointment to the boards of state-owned companies. Congress(I) sources say that Solanki is keeping a low profile because he knows that the Congress(I) high command is looking into the alleged Solanki-Mrugesh connection.

Meanwhile, Mrugesh is not taking his detention lying down—far from it. Last fortnight, he hired a battery of senior advocates to defend his case and has since retracted his earlier confessional statement in which he admitted that it was indeed his money that was being smuggled out of India. Said Mrugesh: "I say that I did not have that much cash to procure foreign exchange. I had no means or capacity to own or possess Indian currency worth Rs 46 lakh."

This, in spite of the statement of the other two arrested. Prashant Naik, one of Mrugesh's employees, has told the police that it was Mrugesh who gave him money to buy the foreign exchange in the Bombay market.

Naik and Pankaj Shah, another alleged accomplice, stayed in the city's Ambassador Hotel under fictitious names and say they bought the exchange from three brokers. Naik, who was arrested on

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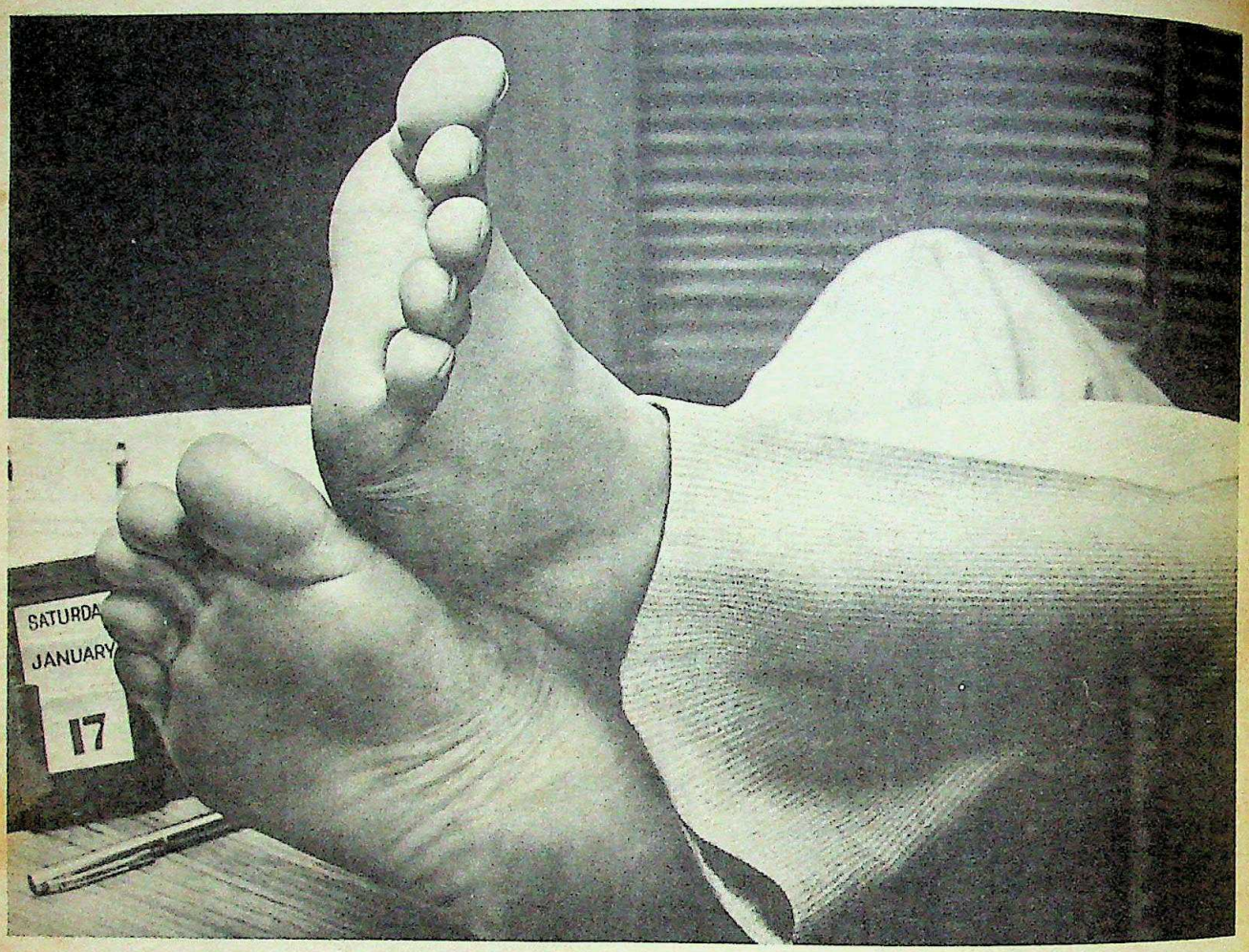

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April 1, confessed that he and Prashant Shah were summoned to Gokul on February 25. They were escorted to Parul's bedroom and were given two suitcases, one of which contained Rs 11 lakh and the other, Rs nine lakh. Shah alleged that Parul opened both the bags and showed them the money and then proceeded to reveal to them the combination numbers of the locks on the suitcases.

The same morning, they flew to Bombay where Rajani Patel of Skyjet's Bombay office took charge of the money. Naik also stated that he and Shah bought the foreign exchange at Rs 15.90 per dollar from three separate persons, Noor Mohammed, Mahesh Marmadi and Mulanbhai Shah. Prashant Shah claims that he returned from Bombay on the evening of February 26 and handed over the entire foreign exchange to Mrugesh in Parul's presence. Naik says he later made another trip to Bombay and bought additional foreign currency worth Rs five lakh from one of the three dealers. Enforcement Department sleuths have arrested two of them and expect that it will lead to the unearthing of one of the biggest foreign exchange rackets in the country.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with RAMESH MENON in Ahmedabad

CUSTOMS

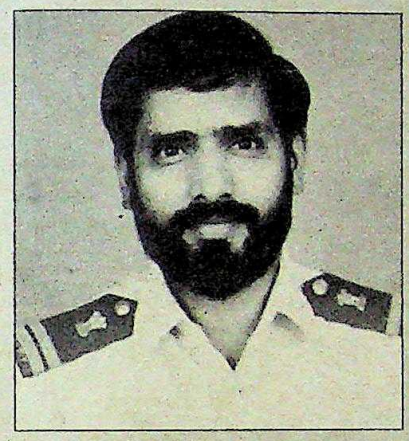
Net Gains

SOMETIMES, honesty really is the best policy, or so V.N. Anantraman, 32, a junior customs official at Bombay's Sahar International Airport found out much to his surprise. Last fortnight, the bespectacled, bearded Anantraman was given a cash award of Rs one lakh by Bombay's Customs Collector (Preventive) P.K. Kapoor, for nabbing C.S. Amin and A.P. Nanawati for allegedly smuggling foreign currency worth over Rs 46 lakh out of the country, along with a noted Ahmedabad industrialist Mrugesh Jaikrishna.

Said a beaming Anantraman, "I always believed that sincerity, honesty and hardwork finally pay. We are now working without any fear and pressure. I am happy to learn that the finance minister has approved the award." There was also a significant message behind this reward to Anantraman: from now on officials sticking their necks out for booking even well-connected and politically influential people will not be penalised by transfers but encouraged.

This, incidentally, was not Anantraman's first catch. During his 10-year tenure in the customs he has detected over 50 major and minor cases of smuggling worth over Rs 10 crore. But success came his way only after he was transferred to the Customs Intelligence unit in 1982. During the last three years he has seized contraband goods worth over Rs 1.57 crore, but owing to bureaucratic hassles and the very small amounts involved in these operations, he was never rewarded.

However, this did not deter him in the least bit. Narrating his encounter with Mrugesh and others, he disclosed that he suspected that all was not quite well when he saw that Mrugesh was not accompanied by any influential government official. And when Anantraman saw Mrugesh checking in two suitcases and handing over the boarding passes to two other people, he promptly ordered the Air-India staff to withhold the luggage for an extensive and thorough search. His gamble paid off, when a briefcase crammed with foreign currency was recovered from the suitcases.



Anantraman (top) and Bains: honesty rewarded

But what Anantraman didn't reckon on at that time was that he would receive a share of the booty so soon. Finance Ministry officials for once did a quick follow-up on its earlier decision to give 20 per cent of the value of goods seized as reward to the customs employees. Pending the final settlement, the ministry directed the customs collectors to give an on-the-spot award up to Rs 1 lakh or 50 per cent of the total entitlement to the employees immediately. Said Solanki, collector customs, (Bombay airport), "The idea behind this encouragement is to make smuggling uneconomical. Now officers will take more risk in ending this menace."

This policy seems to have paid off elsewhere in the country too. On March 6 in New Delhi, Assistant Collector of Palam Airport, R.S. Bains displayed considerable resourcefulness in arresting a Swedish national, Robert Landy, who was breezing through the green channel. When junior officials could not find anything in Landy's briefcase, Bains himself searched Landy and found an unusually thick waist-belt in which was hidden over 10 kg of gold worth Rs 26 lakh, obviously meant for peddling on the Bombay bullion market. Bains received a cash award of Rs 40,000 within a week of this seizure.

These were, however, the immediate gains of the policy. The Finance Ministry is convinced that over 5,000 customs officials will now concentrate on preventive measures with added vim and vigour. Seizures have already crossed the Rs 40 crore mark in three months as against Rs 100 crore during the whole of 1984. Commented a senior business executive of New Delhi, "It is a wonderful economics. By paying one-fifth extra to its employees, the Government will still be left with 80 per cent additional income which it was losing in any case." And apart from, probably, the smugglers, no one's complaining.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Bombay

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BHADRACHALAM PAPERBOARDS LIMITED

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Organising People for Productivity

Speech of Shri S. Ghosh, Chairman, at the 9th Annual General Meeting held on 20.3.85.

Shri S.Ghosh

You would have observed that profits have staged a healthy recovery compared to 1982/83 and cash earnings have improved on account of market buoyancy and productiviy improvements. The inflationary impact has been the greatest in raw materials and energy rates, but has been contained through conversion efficiencies and conservation measures. I am happy to report that our sales in the first five months of the present year are 9% ahead of the comparable five month period of the year under review, and unforeseen circumstances apart, the expected surplus from the year's operations will well cover the small deficit now carried over.

I am pleased to report that your Company has once again won major awards for performance from two sources — the National Productivity Council award for Best Productivity and two awards from the Indian Paper Makers Association for the highest capacity utilisation and for energy conservation.

Three years ago, at the Annual General Meeting, following the official designation of that year as the Year of Productivity, I had expanded on the concept of Productivity in relation to your Company's efforts. Since that time, your Company has been twice conferred the National award for the best productivity performance in the paper industry. The latest award is significant in the sense that in addition to quantitative parameters, considerable weightage has been given to qualitative factors across a broad spectrum in the final evaluation.

PLANNING FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Today, I would like to share with you how **your Company set about developing an in-built drive towards productivity and the role that people and organisation have played in its attainment. This movement from its conviction that it is people, individually and collectively, who are the mainspring of productive performance** in any sphere of purposeful activity, and industry is no exception. The acid test of productivity is the quality, the values, the power of full production at the smallest unit of efforts, fueled by human energy but with maximum ingenuity. This yields a string of worthwhile results for legitimate and beneficial distribution to the widest body of associated publics.

Your Company believes that its pursuit of productivity must begin by looking within,and to coin a phrase, it must seek 'internal productivity:' an organisation must create and maintain conditions at all times which stimulate decision making and action taking: in order to be a vibrant organisation, it must have the highest respect for time, as time-efficiency is crucial to internal productivity. It is no secret that its productive impact is highest when strategic actions are correctly timed, the least time is expended to reach the best decisions, there is no delay in commencing approved actions and minimum time is spent in executing them.

Matching skills with technology

BPL's commitment to the creation of time-efficient and productivity-biased conditions started at the very early design stage of the mill, in terms of layout and location of facilities, energy systems, instrumentation and machine sophistication features. A great deal of attention has been paid and continues to be paid to match human potential with technological sophistication through training and supervision for a workforce predominantly from an agrarian background in a backward area. Due emphasis is placed on disciplined work practices, and achievable work standards for good housekeeping and industrial safety with infusion of skills, dexterity and attitudes to foster an efficient interactive relationship between man and machine. Technological updating, mechanisation, plant capability enhancement continue and side by side, re-training and reinforced supervision for higher proficiency will continue to remain an important constituent of BPL s drive for sustained productivity.

A large proportion of BPL employees at the mill come from neighbouring districts and from other States.The basic infrastructure in close proximity to the mill did not exist for them. Your Company has provided a housing colony in the nature of a mini-township complete with reasonable living amenities including proper facilities for schooling, recreation, medical assistance, transportation and security for them and their families. Your Company exhibits great care and concern to aspects of employee welfare and takes a genuine interest in promoting goodwill and a sense of well being. Your Company has thus been successful in creating an anxiety-free atmosphere at work encouraging much needed attention to work output and efficiency.

Shaping systems for decentralization

BPL's manpower complement of technically qualified persons and managers is lean, functioning within a structured, inter locking systems model for effective information based control and decision making. A great deal of information processing is done on computers, and more is proposed together with refinements in existing systems.

Your Company has taken steps to stimulate productivity through decentralised decision making and equipping people to make correct and timely decisions for initiation and follow up. Roles of individuals have been defined and clarified within areas of work so as to create a wide understanding of the value of each job, the potential scope of contribution each person can make and the other of influence he can exert through his actions. He is trained and encouraged to use processed data, seek knowledge from all sources, assisted in enlarging business skills and generally encouraged to equip himself better through self development for which opportunities are available. From time to time, individuals are entrusted with time bound projects with defined goals where facilities and administrative arrangements are provided. Limits of authority are prescribed as a means of exercising judgement between actions he may take independantly and those after consultation within a broad framework of corporate policy and specified guidelines. Through these measures and many others, your Company provides managers the opportunity to plan and perform with confidence and enthusiasm. However counter-checks and balancing systems have been concurrently devised so that initiative and enterprise flourish without dilution of effective control.

Widening horizons for enterprise

Quality orientation, concern for customers, and application of contemporary scientific methodology and technological knowledge are consciously demanded and form an integral part of the value systems of the organisation. Systems have developed and are used to gather knowledge and information from as many sources as possible. Arrangments exist for wide dissemination through group meetings, practices, experiments, projects etc.

To sum up, the leadership in BPL has fashioned its drive for productivity into a multi-faceted

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...not only to measure output-input ratios ...but to embrace other dimensions of excel ...associated with quality outputs from each ...dual or group, adopting modern practices. ...Company recognises that it is not enough to ...potential retardants to productivity, but ...important to stimulate and foster condi ...which advance it through deliberate and ...impetus. **The ultimate objective is to ...ate in a wide cross-section of people ...the organisation, a sense of signi... ...ce and pride associated with achieve... ...affinity and trust, a sense of personal ...ment, and above all, a heightened ...of enterprise.** In such inculcation are the ...assured foundations for sustained productivity

...DUCTIVITY STIMULANTS ...M GOVERNMENT

...earlier occasion, I had mentioned that in ...ed economy system, the government exerts ...ful and pervasive influence on the fortunes ...corporate sector. This is particularly true of ...intensive core sector, where private ...is hesitant to venture in the absence of ...ial support from the government. Your ...pany's new mill at Bhadrachalam falls in this ...gory.

...ll stature of enduring productivity can ...be attained on a collaborative basis ...ween government and private industry, ...re the government creates the climate ...private industry creates the conditions ...which productivity may flourish.

...intensive new industry has certain very ...compulsions, which can be tackled only by ...government. To quote the relevant extract ...Report of the Indirect Taxation Enquiry ...ittee headed by Dr.L K Jha, "The question ...concessions to newly set up manufacturing ...either to sustain them during the initial period ...existence or to encourage investment in ...industries has to be viewed in its own ...ective.... The first question to consider would ...what kind of industries should be eligible for ...concession that might be proposed. We have ...that the problem relates to capital intensive ...ries and the question might well be asked ...in a country with scarcity of capital and such ...unemployment any fiscal incentives should ...given to capital intensive industries. The point ...is missed by those who argue on these lines ...that while there is every reason to discourage ...through fiscal devices and other means, the use of ...intensive technologies, the argument does ...have validity in respect of industries which, if ...are to be set up at all, have to be capital ...intensive." There are many other learned obser... ...in this Report which I cannot cite now for ...of time.

...tending with shortfalls

...when the decision to set up your new mill was ...made on a backward area, a package of fiscal ...ives and concessions was granted by the ...State Government and an assurance of relief ...from Central Government taxes was obtained for ...capital intensive unit of priority industry. ...monetary value of these concessions and ...was assessed by the financial institutions, ...at their insistence, the tenure of two items of ...concessions was extended, before they were ...based on project viability and agreed to extend. loan finance to the project.

You are aware that the power concession has been terminated after three of the five years and the royalty concession on fibrous materials after five of the ten years contracted. The sales tax loan by the State, due between 1980 and 1983 remains undisbursed. The State general sales tax relief scheme for industries located in a notified, scheduled area was suddenly amended to exclude us. The only silver lining in this depressing episode is the belated extension this year of excise concessions to two of your Company's major products by the Central Government.

If an assessment is made of the combined negation of profits during BPL's operating existence of five years on account of the above early terminations, non-fulfilments and delayed implementation of commitments, the quantam on a conservative calculation, would be no less than Rs. 10 crores. On the other hand, the value of productivity gains achieved so far have been substantial. An assessment of incremental profits arising out of sales in excess of industry norm-based estimates accepted for project appraisal is conservatively placed at over Rs. 11 crores. Consider who the beneficiaries of BPL's internal productivity have been — the State would have claimed its power revenues, sales tax and royalty dues, the Centre its customs and excise duties, the financial institutions and banks their interest charge and loan instalments, the employees their salaries and wages and all suppliers and creditors their dues and charges. The entire brunt of profits denied is being borne by the shareholder, who is forced to surrender legitimate dividend returns on his investment, merely because he comes at the end of the line.

I feel I owe an explanation to you for this development. Your Company's top management have left no stone unturned in representations, time and again before every concerned authority in the government. Facts, figures, historical information, future projections, income and cost profiles, documents, agreements, have all been submitted readily to substantiate your Company's case which have been examined threadbare departmentally, by special agencies like Government approved cost auditors and Bureau of Industrial Costs and Pnces, but to no satisfactory conclusion so far. Very regrettably, I am of the view that the Government machinery works too slowly to inspire confidence and the processes of decision making are avoidably dilatory. I am impelled to offer the view that there is deep rooted suspicion of industry submissions being exaggerated, and there is a propensity to be ultra-conservative, to decide on notions rather than fact and reason, to reject or at best, be overly tight-fisted. Your Company is determined to continue to fight for its legitimate rights on behalf of all its 5500 shareholders most of whom are ordinary individuals, and whose aspirations are being lost sight of in a totally unbefitting manner.

Steering for Success

We are aware that the present government is considering liberalisation of regulations and controls and streamlining procedures to spur the pace of industrialisation. At this point, I would venture to suggest that the burden of administering a plethora of laws, regulations and controls by the administrative machinery be lightened to enable greater attention to the health and problems of various industry sectors. Scrutiny needs to be extended from the macro level to the micro level. At any time in an industry, there will be healthy and weak sectors, well managed and poorly managed organisations for their own reasons. The administration must be encouraged to distinguish clearly, after detailed examinations where necessary, and urged to prescribe deserved remedies that attack the heart of the problem, even if these suffer the risk of being labelled discriminatory. Today, it would appear that the inefficient are receiving all the attention, and the efficient are forgotten and as in our case, being unfairly penalised. **Newer units where set up for accelerated dispersal of industry, will require special nurturing, to compensate for locational disadvantages. Unless promises and commitments are fulfilled and stability of basic policy maintained, there is no hope of a thriving industrial sector.**

BPL's spirit of enterprise has not been dampened by the unfortunate developments that have taken place. Notwithstanding these impediments, it has pursued the cause of productivity vigorously and been honoured with two national awards consecutively. The same spirit of enterprise gives it the courage and determination to forge ahead in an unyielding quest for self-reliance, excellence, and productivity.

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the 9th Annual General Meeting.

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SURPRISE PACKAGE

THE COMMITTEE on stock exchange reforms headed by former Unit Trust of India chairman G.S. Patel may spring a surprise or two in its report, the second part of which deals with steps to reduce the cost of public share issues by companies. While it may suggest the scrapping of tax deductions for advertisements in the media to promote share issues, the report may also recommend that banks get tough in accepting share application forms in different names to increase share allotment prospects—it costs companies Rs 3 to Rs 4 to process and reject each application. To cut procedural hassles the committee is also expected to recommend that firms enlist on one stock exchange instead of on all exchanges as they now have to do.

Only the first part of the report has been handed in to the Government so far. The second is expected to be submitted by the end of April and the other seven or eight parts by the end of May. The committee's brief also includes spelling out a code of conduct for stock exchange members and measures to tap the money in semi-urban areas.

STALLED PROJECT

WHILE the first 115 megawatt unit of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation's Salal power project in Jammu is likely to be commissioned next year, over a decade after the project was taken up, its hydel project at Koel Karo in Bihar has run into squally weather. Work on the seven-year project to set up five units with a total capacity of 714 mw was supposed to begin last year. But problems in acquiring land for the project have cropped up with local residents, most of them Adivasis, refusing to move out. This has delayed the Rs 400-crore project—pushing up costs by an estimated Rs 20 crore a year.

UNDER ONE ROOF

WITH competition hotting up in the hotel industry, the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) is seeking to drum up more business abroad by tying up with foreign hotel chains. Room occupancy rates at ITDC hotels in the capital are high, but its hotels in other cities are not so well off and hotels in small cities are in the pipeline. So it is readying to tie up with Trust House Forte. Under the terms of the deal which is now awaiting government approval, the hotel chain will market ITDC hotel rooms in the West for a commission of 10 to 20 per cent, and train ITDC staff in the UK. In January ITDC arrived at a three-year agreement with Odner Hotel Representative (OHR) Ltd, part of the Pacific Leisure group of companies. This Hong Kong-based firm will market ITDC hotel rooms in the Far East in exchange for quarterly fee and a commission on business that materialises.

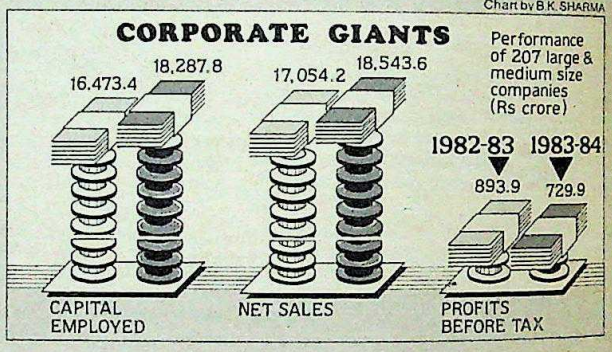
PURCHASING POWER

THE FARIDABAD Industries Association effort to promote a Rs 50 crore company to set up a 100 megawatt power plant for distribution to shareholders has had a mixed reception. Under the scheme, a company that wants 1,000 units a day will have to buy 1,000 shares of Rs 60 each. But the power will be more expensive than Haryana State Electricity Board (HSEB) power (Rs 1.04 to 1.20 per unit compared with Rs 0.95) though cheaper than obtained from generators (Rs 3). The scheme promises uninterrupted power but some companies have reservations about the plan to distribute it through the HSEB.

POOR SHOW

PRIVATE sector companies fared poorly in 1983-84 compared with the year before. While the total capital employed, net worth and net sales of 207 giant and mini giant firms studied by *The Economic Times* did grow in 1983-84,

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



growth was less than during the year before. Gross profits dipped (they had risen the year before), while profits before tax and after tax fell even more sharply than in 1982-83. The overall performance was affected to some extent by the steeper fall in the growth rates and profitability ratios of mini giant firms, but the study fails to explain why such firms fared badly.

HIGHWAY LOANS

THE WORLD Bank is being approached for soft loans to build the nation's first expressways in Gujarat and West Bengal. Meant to encourage high speed motoring, the expressways will have fewer entry points and crossings than the national highways have. Plans for the 93-km-long Ahmedabad-Baroda expressway are at an advanced stage. The Gujarat Government will build the four-lane expressway at a total cost of Rs 130 crore. Tolls are expected to net the Centre a 10 to 15 per cent annual return on outlay. The Calcutta-Palsit project is still in its initial stages and no decision has been taken on whether it will be a two or four-lane expressway.

The two expressways are part of a package of eight projects. The other projects involve widening portions of the national highways in six states. The total bill for the eight projects will be Rs 560 crore, and the World Bank may fund almost half this amount.

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Habitual indifference, maddening lethargy

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GROWTH RATE

India 2000 AD

ONLY one member of Parliament described Vishwanath Pratap Singh's maiden budget as one that would take us into the 21st century. Singh himself and his colleagues have their feet planted firmly in the 20th century and are apparently far more worried about what's going to happen in 1985 than 15 long years from now.

What will India be like in the year of the Lord 2000? No definitive studies are available, and they would not be much good even if they were, as such studies invariably tend to be off the beam, but some figures crop up now and then. They tend to be figures about output, so much more of steel and so many million tonnes more of crude oil, as if the only difference between today's India and the India of 2000 will be in the volume of goods and services it is expected to produce. About changes in the quality of life there is next to nothing.

According to Dr S. Varadarajan of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the country will produce about one-and-a-half times the food we produce today without any significant increase in the area under cultivation. The consumption of oil and gas will rise to about 138 million tonnes (from the current level of around 50) and annual coal consumption to 400 million tonnes. The technology for the use of renewable energy sources (like forests) would still not become commercially viable in another 15 years though it might be so by 2015.

Professor M.G.K. Menon has tried to fill in the gaps but the overall scenario is still rather vague. A point he has made is that "if we do not take correct decisions about robotics and automation, the country would be in serious economic trouble in 2000. Primary industries must go in for automation to remain competitive in the world market, while employment would be the responsibility of secondary and service sectors."

For a country that is supposed to be trying to catch up with the West, the figures our officialdom is aiming at are anything but encouraging. A rise of 50 per cent in foodgrain production, that is, from the current level of 150 million tonnes to around 225 million tonnes, amounts to no more than a rate of growth of 3 per cent per year, more or less on par with what we have done in the last 10 years or so. Other estimates are also on par with this minuscule rate of growth. At this rate, we shall not only *not* catch up with the West but fail to catch up even with our next door neighbour, China.

According to reliable estimates, China achieved a record harvest of 400 million tonnes of grain in 1984, an improvement of 13 million tonnes on the previous year. Indications are that the target of 425 million tonnes set for 1990 will be over-reached earlier than expected. In industry, the reforms in economic structure and access to modern technologies have led to impressive results. Oil output was 115 million tonne last year, an increase of 15 million tonnes over 1983. Steel production has shot up by nearly 10 million tonnes in six years. Coal output was 770 million tonnes last year, a rise of 135 million tonnes since 1979, and electricity generation touched 375 billion kwh in 1984, an impressive increase of nearly 100 billion kwh since 1979.

> **The question is not whether we shall ever catch up with China or America or Japan, but whether we shall catch up with ourselves, and our potential for growth and greatness.**

These figures are between two and five times our figures for the corresponding products and there is no way we can match them in the near future. The surprising part is that all this has been achieved at the cost of a very small trade deficit (about Rs 1,200 crore) last year. China is going in for joint ventures with foreign firms in a big way. There are at present 75 wholly-owned foreign-owned enterprises in the country, of which more than a third were established in 1984. Experts say that this is only a beginning and industrial growth rate should stabilise around 10 per cent a year by 1990.

The trouble is, India may have missed the bus, or, what is probably worse, is on the wrong track. There is absolutely no reason why India should not aim at a harvest of 400 million tonnes of foodgrains by 2000—which would still be less than what China is producing now for a population that is only a third as much again as ours—and steel output nearer 100 million tonnes. This is actually what had been planned for when the first steel plants went up 25 years ago but somewhere along the road we seem to have faltered and given up the ghost. Since then, it has been essentially a case of decimal points, with grown men squabbling over percentage points as if their lives depended on it.

Consider a recent example. All that Singh has done is to cut down personal and corporate income tax by 5 to 10 per cent and abolished a couple of duties. We are so grateful for such small mercies that no one has questioned why he has not slashed them by 25 per cent and done away with scores of other imposts. The poor man has been snowed under brickbats and flowers, roughly in the same proportion, and the whole spectacle has so scared him that he had to get up in Parliament to assure everyone that his budget did not signify any change from the past budgets, and the Government's economic philosophy, whatever it is, had not changed a bit. Not a single member of Parliament asked him why it had not changed, why a policy that has stopped this country in its tracks for 15 long years has remained unchanged even after the massive mandate the Government has received. What was the recent mandate for if it was not a mandate for change? And why is the Planning Commission still engaged in its futile exercise of dotting the i's and crossing the t's of old plans and presenting them in a new format with a few minor alterations?

The question is not whether we shall ever catch up with China or America or Japan, but whether we shall catch up with ourselves, and our potential for growth and greatness. We know we have it in us, if only we thought big and gave up thinking in terms of what Churchill called those damn dots. But all we hear us in this year of the Lord 1985 is whether the percentage of the people below the poverty line is 44.5 or 44.4 per cent. Those who think poor, die poor.

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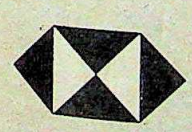

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"The utmost economy has to be exercised in the use of petrol, petroleum and diesel products.

Energy Audit should become an annual feature of the activities of all major industrial enterprises."

Conservation. Is it time to legislate?

ULKA-D-PCRA-058/1

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We were warned that several species of wildlife would soon become extinct. But civilization did not listen. We were warned about deforestation but we still cut trees. We were warned of the dangers of air and water pollution. But civilization didn't listen.

The Panda and a drop of oil

The illustration in this advertisement presents a Giant Panda cupping a drop of oil. An animal almost extinct, saved because mankind came to its senses almost too late, reminding us about something else that is on its way to extinction.

Legislation was the only way mankind could safeguard wildlife and prevent deforestation and pollution.

Is the same necessary for petroleum? Is it too early? Or is it already too late?

A champion for conservation

You're probably wondering who made the statement in inverted commas, on the left. It was made by our late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi on October 11th, 1980 when she handed over India's first two indigenous offshore oil platforms. She was a great believer in conservation and she never lost a moment to remind us that it is a cornerstone in any energy programme.

What is "Energy Audit"

Energy Audit is sane and necessary. It is not a step back but a logical step forward. What it implies is that we should use fuel efficiently. And to make sure we do this we have to inform our consumer, our country and the world how much energy was used to make something or to carry out a process.

In Japan, for instance, Energy Audit has been in practise for years. You can turn over a cup and saucer in Japan and find out how many units of energy were used to produce them.

Time is running out for petroleum

Every year Rs. 800 crores are lost because of carelessness or "taken-for-granted" wastage in the use of petroleum ... petrol, diesel, kerosene, cooking gas and fuel oils.

Is it time to legislate against this wastage? Or should we wait? Just like we waited with the Giant Panda or our lush green forests. Give it a thought.

Let's give our scientists a fighting chance

All over the world work is on to find new sources of energy and to make renewable sources of energy viable on a mass scale. This kind of effort, however, takes time. If we work at conservation and allow petroleum to last 30 years longer the transition to a new source could be smooth. If we don't we may not have an energy source in between.

"Thank You"

PCRA wants to thank you for the efforts you have made to help petroleum last longer. Today we are proud of the fact that together we are saving Rs. 100 crores per annum for India by following a few simple "tips" and guidelines for the efficient utilisation of petroleum. It was only possible through team work.

If you are not part of the team get in touch with us today.

Petroleum Conservation Research Association

306, Sethi Bhawan, 7 Rajendra Place,
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PCRA is a Government sponsored organisation and a representative of India's petroleum companies in areas related to conservation.

PCRA's four major conservation targets are the Industrial, Agricultural, Domestic and Transport sectors.

PCRA's services are free. Savings achieved by PCRA through conservation exceed Rs. 100 crores per annum.

Oil isn't going to last much longer. Use it with wisdom.

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POWER SUPPLY

The Generation Gap

FOR THOSE living in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, the summer may not prove so sticky—electricity should be available almost at the flick of a switch through most of every day. But for those in Orissa, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka or Tamil Nadu, the coming days may not be half as pleasant.

Indeed, most of the country will be faced with crippling power shortages this summer as well. Although more power is being generated now than ever before, it continues to be a scarce item because demand far outpaces supply. Power plants are working on a rising efficiency curve—but coal stocks at some thermal stations situated far away from mines are dangerously low. And water levels in at least two important reservoirs are lower than they were last year, a sure indication that power generation at hydel plants will be affected. Minister of State for Power Arun Nehru said optimistically: "You are always going to be a little short in summer, there's no doubt about that. But the position will be better than last year." *(see interview)*

Nehru's optimism springs from a number of factors. For one, thermal plants are crossing generation targets set for them by the Government. On April 4, they produced 25 million units (kilowatts an hour) more than the official target of 292 million units. Hydel plants too have so far exceeded their power targets. As M.K. Sambamoorthy, acting chairman, Central Electricity Authority, points out: "Even nuclear plants are doing very well. The first unit of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Plant (RAPP) has been put back into operation. That is a technical feat." Also, around the end of March, the plant load factor (PLF: the rate of efficiency at which a power plants function) rose to over 55 per cent, up by over 7 per cent from the figure a year ago.

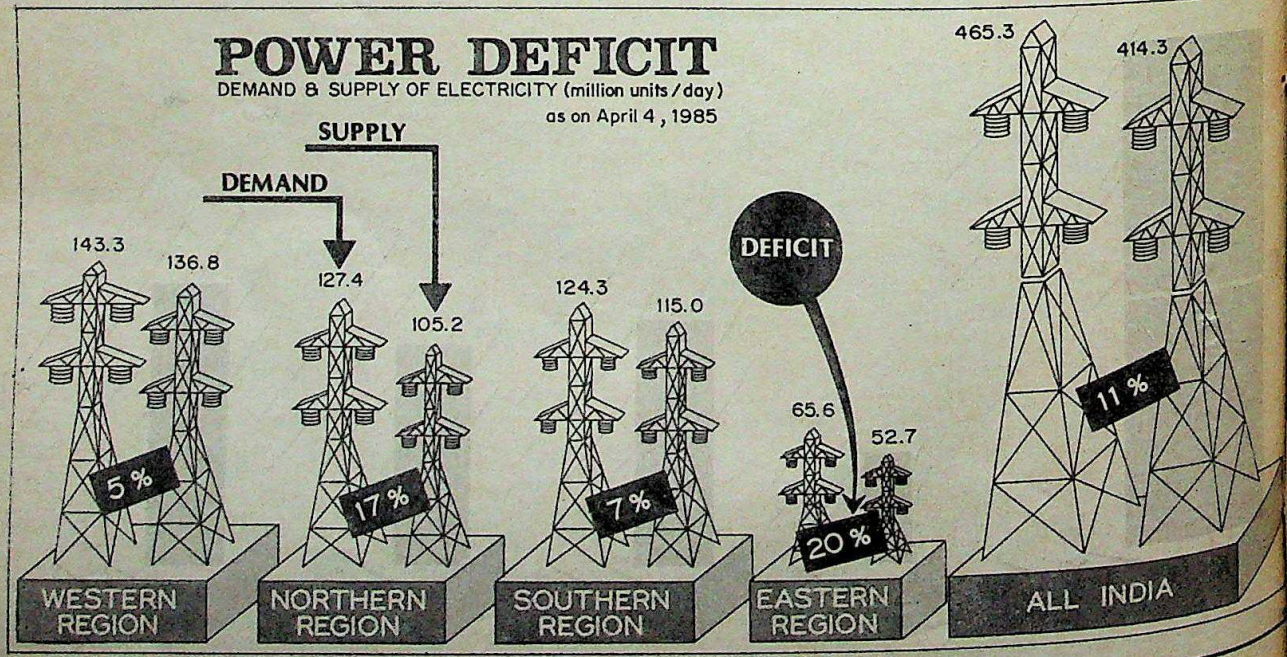
Behind the upbeat statistics lies a tale. Nearly 6 per cent of the nation's total installed power capacity of around 43,000 mw was added on last year, and a hefty chunk of it was thermal capacity. If thermal power plants are performing better, it is because the teething troubles of the 35-odd 200 mw units commissioned in the country till now have been overcome. These represent nearly 41 per cent of thermal capacity. As one power company executive puts it: "We have debugged the most major of the problems and the learning process is over ." A major snafu—hydrogen leakage from 200 mw generators—has largely been crossed. Grid capacity has improved, current fluctuations can therefore be absorbed more easily, and control systems are now automated so that power "trippings" can be minimised. Finally, there is a greater all-round consciousness of the need to improve the quality of coal.

But there are dark clouds looming on the power horizon. Water levels at Punjab's Bhakra complex (installed generating capacity: 2,687 mw) are three metres lower than last year. At the Sharavathi in Karnataka, a state which depends almost entirely on hydel power, the water level is four metres lower than last year. The position at other reservoirs in the country is comfortable, but if the snows upstream of Bhakra do not melt in time, parts of the north could be in trouble.

Breakdowns at plants are more frequent in summer with cables getting damaged owing to the heat, and supervision is often lax. Finally, the coal stocks at six or seven important power complexes, mainly in the north, had, on April 4, fallen to less than a fortnight's supply, the minimum level that is regarded as safe for plants sited far from coal mines. This could be due to the more rapid use of coal that results from higher thermal generation, and government officials last fortnight were quick to point out that the coal position is being monitored. But others complain of oversized coal being delivered, notably at the Badarpur plant in the capital region, and of railway wagons being diverted for other purposes.

Sambamoorthy scoffs at all the dark projections. The Bhakra reservoir, he says, will start filling up in another month or so, more water will start flowing into Dehar (which is upstream from Bhakra).

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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thermal stations in the north such as the one at Ropar and Bhatinda in Punjab are going great guns and the additional power that thermal stations generate will largely offset any lower generation by hydel plants. He adds: "Power shortages may exist in the north, but there is no cause for alarm."

That may be true, but last May, as many as six states and a Union territory reeled under power cuts of 50 per cent and above. With more power being produced now the position may be that much better this time round. But no one in the Government or outside is predicting power cut-free days for the next few months.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

ARUN NEHRU

"Power will get priority"

A PORTLY figure who looms over his desk in Shram Shakti Bhawan, Arun Nehru, 40, reflects an easy familiarity with a topic he has handled just three months. Cautious in his replies—he thinks it would be wrong to comment on matters which have yet to be okayed by the Planning Commission—he nevertheless exudes a quiet confidence about the one topic to which everyone turns in the summer months: power shortages. Last fortnight he spoke to Assistant Editor AJAY KUMAR *and Principal Correspondent* PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI. *Excerpts from the interview:*

"The objective is to increase power generation. We will examine every possible way of doing that, the job has to be done and I have no doubt we will do it."

Q. *The winter rains have been poor. How bad will the power position in summer be?*

A. We are always going to be a little short in the summer, there is no doubt about that but the position will be better than last year. The plant load factor (PLF: utilisation of capacity) this year has gone up by 5 per cent, which is a very large chunk. And I think we can improve it further. True, hydro levels are not all that satisfactory, but there has been a big improvement in thermal generation.

Q. *To what do you attribute this improvement?*

A. Many factors. A lot of pressure is being put on the state electricity boards (SEB's). We find that by constant prodding, by giving them new ideas, by taking fresh ideas from them we are making some headway. We've a lot of talent in the states, the question is of allowing that talent to operate. Then there has been a big improvement in the quality of coal we have been getting.

Q. *The Centre's power companies have been doing very well while the SEB's have been floundering. Would you advocate a greater role for the Centre in the power sector?*

A. No. The way you look at it is to see what is wrong with the existing set up. First of all, the existing capacities have to be utilised to the best of our ability. You just can't say that the coal supply is bad or BHEL *ne ye kar diya or wo kar diya* (BHEL has done this or that). Our intentions are very clear: we are not going to waste money. Money meant for projects will be made available but if a state is not going to fulfil its commitments, there is nothing we can do about it. The states need pulling up.

Q. *The SEB's face a lot of political pressure. Is this a major problem?*

A. It shouldn't be a major problem. We have told all the chief ministers that unless the SEB's rationalise their method of working and produce a profit all their projects are going to be delayed and we are not going to bale out any of them.

Q. *What about the proposal to set up gas-based power plants?*

A. We are going in for three gas-based plants with a total capacity of 1,500 mw on the Hazira -Bijaipur -Jagdishpur pipeline route. We have enormous gas reserves and the gestation period of a gas-based plant is only three-and-a-half years as against six to seven years for a thermal plant and even more for a hydel plant. Overall, our demand for power is something like 470 million units a day. We generate about 440 million units. Assuming a 20 per cent loss in transmission, we are short of about 70 million units—about 7,000 mw.

Q. *Will the gas-based plants solve this?*

A. They are not a total solution but a partial one.

Q. *Do you see an end to the power shortages?*

A. That will take a little time. If we can double the capacity in the next 10 years we will be all right.

Q. *Isn't finance a problem?*

A. We will have to find ways of getting it. Power will get priority.

Q. *Is the private sector to be given a bigger role?*

A. No, there is no shift in policy. What is wrong with the public sector?

Q. *What do you think of the Faridabad Industries Association's plan to set up a power plant?*

A. We will communicate our views when they come to us. If their plan falls into the captive plants category, there is no problem; if not, there is.

Q. *Did you have any preconceived notions when you took this job?*

A. No, I came with an open mind. Basically, the objective is to increase power generation. We will examine every possible way of doing that. We may not be conventional all the time. The point is, the job has to be done and I have no doubt we will do it.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Positive Signals

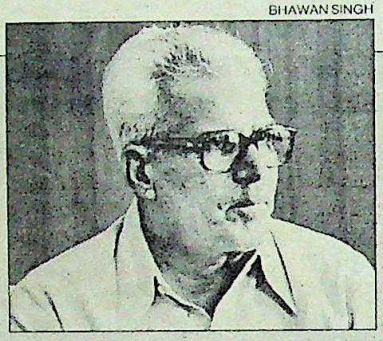
IF THE Government's latest decisions are to be taken seriously then the nation's obsolete telecommunications network is in for a revolutionary change. In a major policy announcement last fortnight Union Minister of State for Communications, Ram Niwas Mirdha, disclosed the Central Government decisions to permit foreign collaboration with the private sector for manufacturing indigenously telecommunications equipment, bifurcation of the Communications Department—one for telecommunications and the postal services, and the other for the creation of autonomous corporations for Delhi and Bombay telephones. Said, Mirdha: "We are going to adopt a new, bold and forward-looking approach for the development of telecommunications in the country."

The Centre's new telecommunications policy—which came in a record time of barely three months after Rajiv's Government took over—aims at overhauling this vital sector by introducing an element of competition in an area so far reserved exclusively for the public sector, giving in more financial support and administrative autonomy. Asserts Mirdha: "A dependable, efficient and modern communications system has become absolutely essential for economic growth. We must catch up with the rest of the world in this field."

It was because of the top priority accorded to the Communications Ministry that the Central Government raised its seventh plan allocation to Rs 13,000 crore from Rs 2,300 crore during the sixth plan—a whopping increase of over 300 per cent. Earlier the Central Government amended its policy of not allowing foreign equity participation and collaboration for manufacturing telecommunications equipment in India. Early last month the Department of Electronics retracted its earlier opinion and cleared the desks for foreign collaboration in this field too. Mirdha disclosed that new private units have already signed collaboration agreements with FACE of Italy for the production of telephone instruments in India.

FACE was not the only one to offer their services. Over a dozen leading industrial groups including Birlas, Tatas and Modis have signed collaboration agreements with various multinational corporations for manufacturing telecommunications equipment in India. The Industry Ministry is now flooded with over 50 more applications for licensing. Said a Communications Ministry official: "If all the proposals come through, we will be able to give a perfect and faultless telephone across the table within the next five years. But the Government must give lot more freedom to the department."

BHAWAN SINGH



"We are going to adopt a forward-looking approach for the development of telecommunications."

—RAM NIWAS MIRDHA
Union minister of state for communications

The Central Government did not confine itself to giving a financial boost to the ailing department. In order to make it accountable and autonomous, the Cabinet approved the creation of an additional board in the ministry. Earlier a five-member Posts and Telegraphs Board headed by a secretary used to look after both the telecommunications and the postal services. Now there will be a separate five-member board each for postal and telecommunications services. And for the first time there will be a separate member to look after technology in the Telecommunications Board. The idea behind the bifurcation is to provide promotional avenues to the Indian Telecommunication Services personnel who were stranded at the joint secretary level earlier.

In addition, the board will be entrusted with the exclusive task of formulation of the policies and their time-bound implementation. Admitted a senior official: "Earlier one could lay blame for inefficiency on the confusion here in the board, but now no one will be able to pass on the buck." The Telecommunications Department will now get its revenue surplus of over Rs 400 crore directly and postal losses will not be reflected in their annual balance sheets.

But the bifurcation of the department fell short of the general expectation that the new Government would announce the creation of a Telecommunications Commission on the pattern of commissions on space and electronics. In fact, soon after taking over Rajiv and his aides summoned files from the Space and Electronics Commission to study their structure. A note was sent to the Communications Ministry to study the possibility and recommend suitable measures to be taken by the Cabinet. But for over two months the top-notches of the ministry slept over it till a stiff reminder came from the Cabinet Secretariat.

Instead of pushing the idea of a corporation for the whole country the mandarins at Sanchar Bhawan pressed for the creation of a separate board and reluctantly processed the possibility of corporations in Delhi and Bombay. Surprisingly the opposition to the corporations came from within the Communications Ministry because it would lead to recruitment of the chairman from outside the department's own employees and make them more duty-bound than earlier. Said a senior official of Bombay Telephones: "In a corporation, officials can't exist as train passengers who can board it and leave it without any responsibility. We will have to show results otherwise all of us will be thrown out."

By launching new corporations, the Government intends to remove bureaucratic control over this sector. Once the corporations begin to work, they are likely to work purely on a commercial basis. Since the communication network has become one of the essential inputs in business activity, it is not available on demand at present. However, industry, trade and commerce suffer heavy losses due to the inefficient telecommunications system. Numerous new ventures could not take off due to the non-availability of a trusted communication facility and the red tapism involved in giving new connections. Recently a non-resident Indian had to approach the prime minister for getting a hot-line connection between his factory

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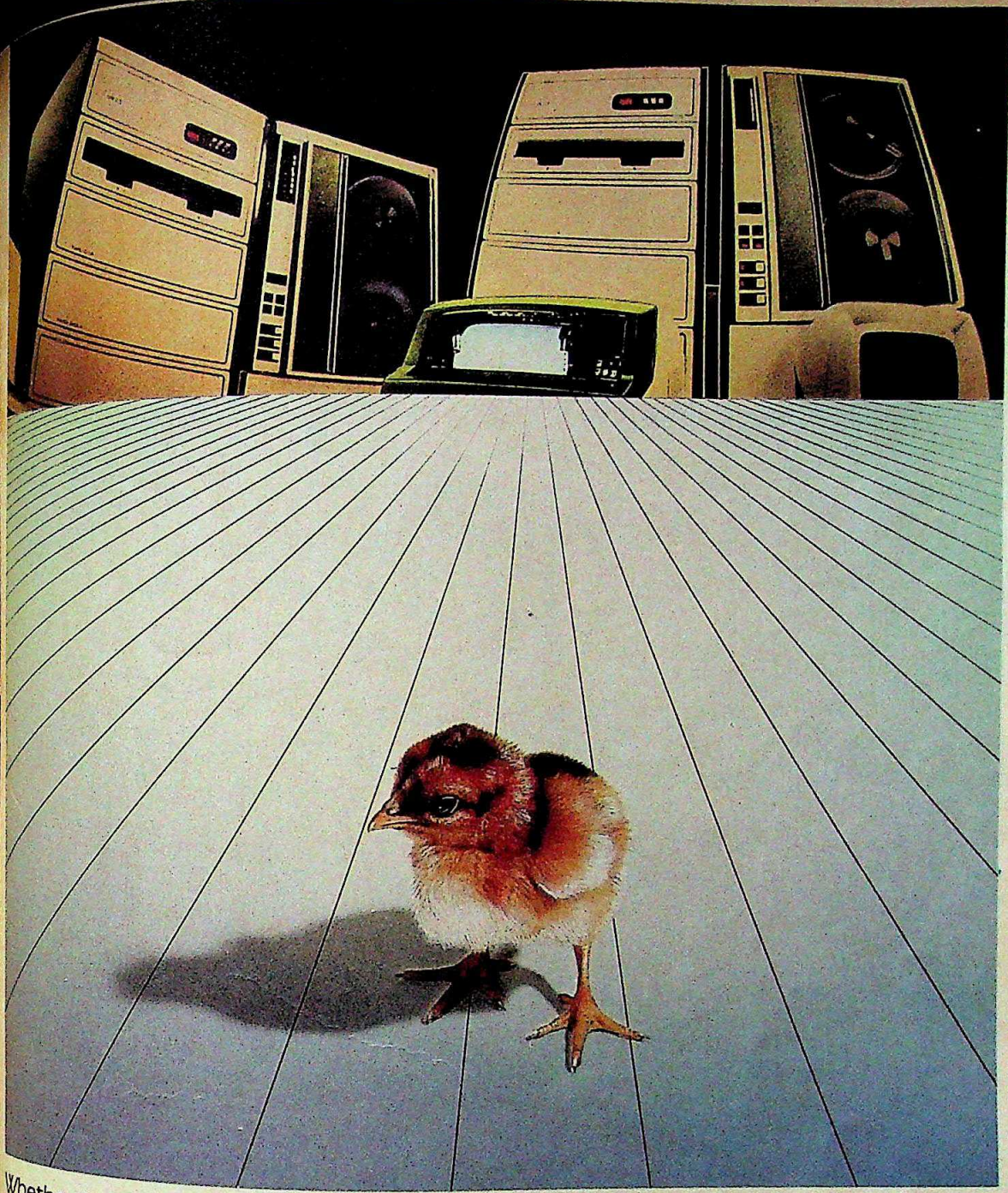

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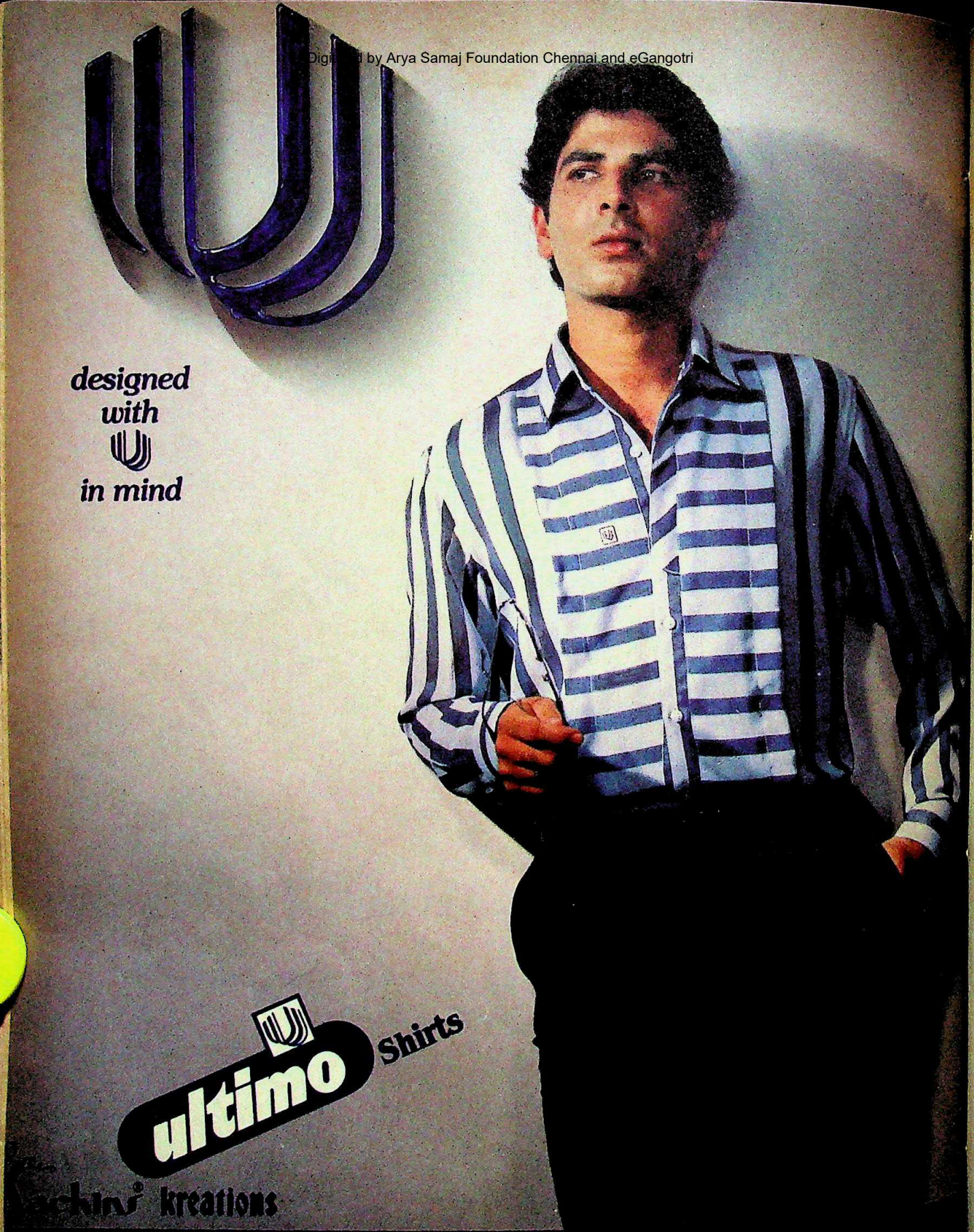

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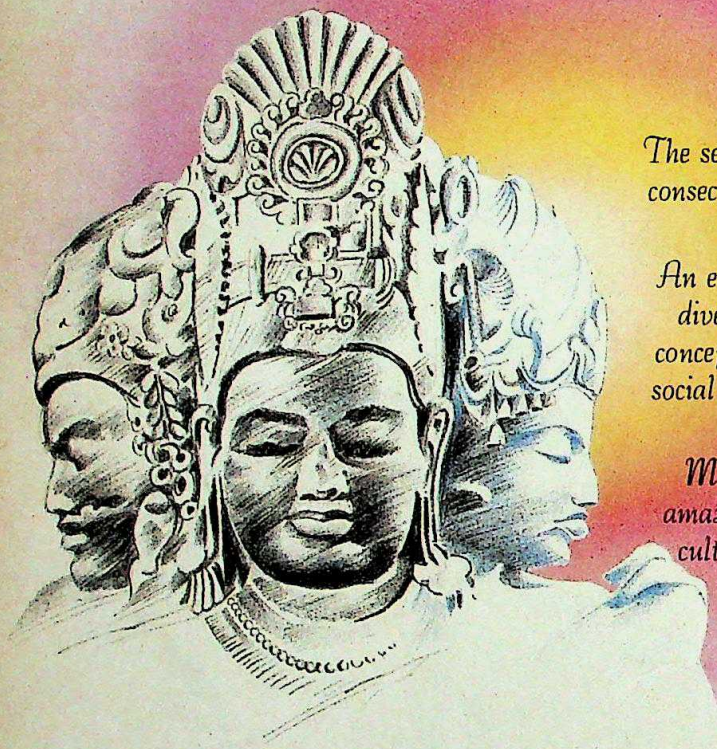
The Vedas enshrine quality of life

Yajur Veda



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in the south and New York because the ministry officials were unable to take a quick decision. By giving autonomy, the Government expects the corporations to take these decisions at their level purely on commercial and professional considerations.

The decision to float corporations—to begin with in Delhi and Bombay—followed the realisation that over 25 per cent of the phones are working in the metros and they yielded over 40 per cent of the telephone revenue. Since the demand in the cities is growing faster than the rest of country, the Government can't find sufficient funds to create facilities in other areas. Once the corporations are created and are allowed to raise their own resources, the Government will have surplus funds for investing in rural areas and spend it on research facilities. These corporations will not only have financial and administrative autonomy but will be given specific time-bound expansion programmes.

But the nagging question still persists as to whether they will be free from political and government control. If these also go the way of the other 200-odd public sector companies, then the dream of providing an efficient telecommunications service will collapse even before the idea fructifies.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

KERALA PORTS

Stormy Seas

ANY PORT in a storm is a phrase that can quite literally be applied to the current controversy brewing in Kerala over the future of its existing minor ports. The state's 580-km coastline boasts a total of 14 minor ports but that figure is misleading since most of them are inoperative. But only in the physical sense. In the political sense, however, they are hyper-active, specially Alleppey, 60 km from Cochin.

Originally the main port for the erstwhile state of Travancore, Alleppey is now a relic; the last sailing vessels to visit the port did so in 1978-79. Under pressure from local politicians, however, the state Government has been keeping Alleppey afloat at considerable expense with zero returns and at the cost of more viable ports like Beypore near Calicut and Neendakara near Quilon.

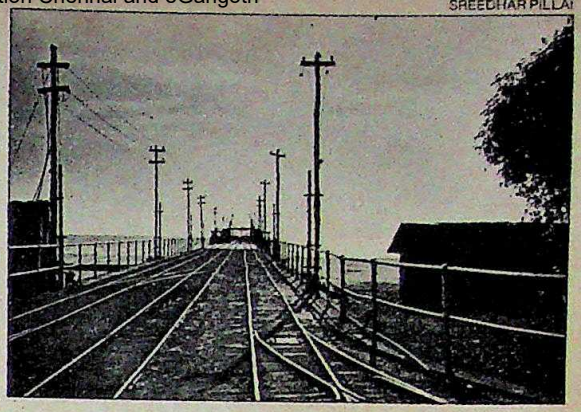
At Beypore, an agitation spearheaded by local CPI(M) MLA K. Moosankutty has been set in motion against the state Government's neglect of the port and the stepmotherly treatment given to Alleppey. Beypore exports timber (which has now been banned) and tiles and offers safe anchorage since it is a riverine port. But neglect over the years has led to accumulation of sandbanks at the mouth of the river, making it unsafe for navigation. The neglect has led to 600 port workers being laid off and an equal number losing their jobs in the state-owned Steel Industrial Limited, Kerala (SILK), which had a ship-breaking yard in the port. With no ships able to navigate the shallow approach, SILK has no ships left to break.

The agitation took a rather dramatic turn when Moosankutty and his supporters "captured" *Meena*, the sole dredger in the state, and insisted it remain at Beypore to dredge the river since it was pointless sending it to ports with no traffic. Meanwhile, local MLA's of other ports have demanded its "release". Minister of Ports N. Sreenivasan says the Central Government is not interested in maintaining minor ports as it does not have the money to maintain them. "All the MLA's and ministers want *Meena* to dredge their ports," he complains, "but we cannot afford to buy another dredger."

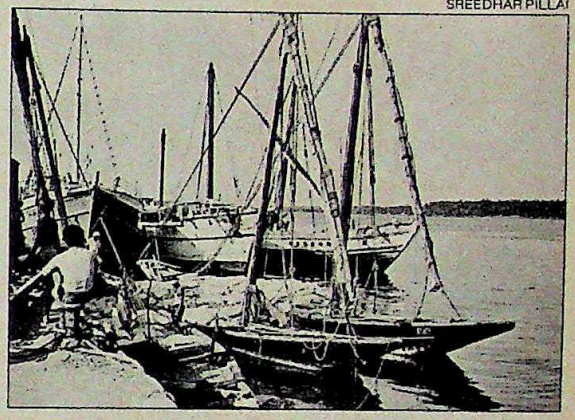
Despite the heated battle, the future of minor ports in Kerala is obviously bleak. The development of Cochin port and the completion of the broad gauge railway line between Cochin and Trivandrum sounded the death-knell and the failure of the traditional coir industry to offer sufficient tonnage for shipping lines and the start of containerised shipping were the final nail. Says P.K. Ramachandran Nair, director of ports: "The easy availability of fast dispatching systems such as goods trains and lorry transportation has contributed to the decline of coastal shipping through minor ports."

Obviously, the politicians do not agree. In Alleppey, the powerful Congress(I) MP Vakkom Purushothaman is making every effort to revive the port but his reasons are vague. Says he: "Alleppey port cannot be neglected because it has a historical background and at one time the entire foodgrains of the state came through this port." He wants Alleppey to be developed into a satellite port for Cochin with an internal depot.

SREEDHAR PILLAI



SREEDHAR PILLAI



Alleppey port (above) and Beypore harbour: political gamesmanship

The state Government, however, has continued to prop up Alleppey by maintaining a skeleton staff at the port and carrying out periodic inspections of the pier and the electric cranes which have not been in use for the last six years. Declares P. Viswalekshmi, veteran head of the Allepey Port Trade Union: "There is no point in opening the port because it would require crores and today most of the workers are dead. The state should therefore declare the port as antique."

There is little likelihood of that happening. Admits Ramachandran Nair: "I am personally of the opinion that Beypore and Neendakara should be given priority over other dead ports but the closure of other minor ports which are a drain on the state finances is a sensitive issue for local politicians." Operable or not, as long as there are politicians around, it looks like the more privileged of Kerala's minor ports will continue to cater to non-existent customers.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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HOTELS

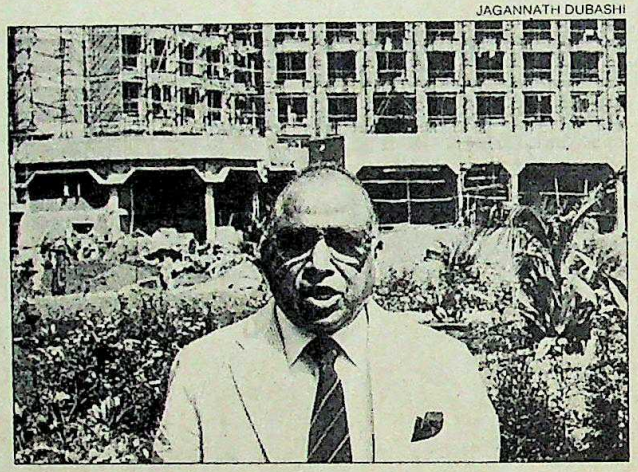
The Five Star Flap

CROWDED Bombay has no dearth of land scandals. From claustrophobic Colaba to aggravating Andheri, somebody is always either fiddling the floor space ratio or passing off residential land as industrial land or simply using muscle to build on areas originally designated green. Last fortnight, a particularly spectacular scandal sent delighted shivers through a city perpetually looking for excitement. Noted environmentalist Dr Rashmi Mayur of the Urban Development Institute accused the promoters of Hotel Leela Penta, an eight-floor 282-room five-star hotel coming up half-a-kilometre from the international airport at Sahar, of manipulating officials to get their baby off the ground.

Hotel Leela Venture Ltd, the company which is building the hotel at a cost of Rs 22.2 crore, was accused of using influence to rush plans and approvals past a number of procedural and legal hurdles with the help of people placed in powerful positions. Among other things the hotel is alleged to have violated the height restriction law in force around airports, is said to have somehow managed the lease of a large chunk of land from the International Airport Authority of India (IAAI) in an irregular fashion, is reported to have been helped by a Central minister and some bureaucrats to get the lucrative collaboration with Penta Hotels Ltd of UK—owned by the Lufthansa, Swissair and British Airways and to cap it all is charged with fiddling project reports so as to build on licensed government land whereas the old project report provided for a building on private land.

This is an unpretty kettle of charges and C.P. Krishnan Nair, chairman, and his son Vivek Nair, managing director, Hotel Leela Venture Ltd, admit to being considerably shaken especially after the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) came down with a stay order on construction. Krishnan Nair, an affable former army captain who took to the handloom industry and made a considerable success of it—"Bleeding Madras and I are synonymous"—says that shock turned to anger when he realised the damage it might do to the project. "We have not flouted any law let alone the 20 mentioned in the newspaper report. Each and every procedure has been gone through. Nothing is irregular," expostulated Nair, brandishing a host of no-objection certificates (NOC's) approvals and lease and licence agreements to prove his point.

JAGANNATH DUBASHI



Nair in front of his hotel: grounded

The affair is an intricate maze of leases and licences, with a few NOC's thrown in here and there to make things difficult for any judge in case either Nair or Mayur decides to sue, one to defend a tarnished reputation and the other "in the public interest". The amount of land itself is disputed. Newspaper reports said that the hotel had taken over 50,000 sq m of area. Nair says that they are using only 29,000 sq m—18,000 sq m of lease and 11,000 on licence from the IAAI.

However, it is possible that both figures are off the mark, because the project report prepared by the State Bank of India (SBI) before Hotel Leela Venture Ltd went to the financial institutions for loans which were granted mentions a total of 36,000 sq m—9,000 sq m leased from IAAI, 20,000 sq m licenced from the same authority and 7,500 sq m either "acquired" or leased from Leela Scottish Lace Pvt Ltd, the promoter company. Nair says that in the end they decided not to use the last chunk of land, but the confusion over how much was actually leased and how much licensed from the IAAI still exists.

Another interesting piece of information can be got from a comparison of the SBI evaluation study and the Hotel Leela Venture Ltd prospectus issued when Rs 19 lakh worth of shares were offered to the public earlier this year. The first study mentions the name of Salman Khurshid, advocate, Supreme Court, as one of the directors. Khurshid's father is none other than Khurshid Alam Khan, former minister of state for tourism and civil aviation. The prospectus on the other hand does not have Khurshid's name and Nair explains, "He did not want to be on our board because of the problems it would create for his father."

Mayur brushes aside the certificates and everything else that Nair flourishes. He says that Nair is telling "lies all the way" and points to the letter Hotel Leela Venture Ltd wrote to the newspaper signed by Commercial Director R.S. Nair, which mentions the BMC stay order and adds, "the company has received commencement certificate for construction of the hotel up to the third floor and plans are approved up to the fourth floor. Our application for approval of building plans up to the eighth floor was submitted on December 22, 1984". Mayur says angrily: "Their way of working is to first build and then get it approved."

Nair doesn't pull any punches either. He wonders why nobody is raising a stink about the sulphuric acid manufacturing concern Star Chemicals Pvt Ltd adjacent to his hotel. Why false allegations are being made about construction on land meant for environmental development when he is doing precisely that by landscaping wide swathes of land into tastefully cultured gardens. "Mayur should actually be on my side," Nair complains.

It will be sometime before the tangle is sorted out. Hotel Leela Venture Ltd is busy clearing papers with the BMC and Nair thinks that work should start again this fortnight. Much is at stake, for with the backing of Penta Hotels, Hotel Leela Penta can be assured that at least 200 of its 282 rooms will be full on any given day because of the needs of the flight crews and the transit passengers. So Krishnan Nair, handloom doyen and hotelier, has a good thing going if he can soothe the ruffled passions of the city.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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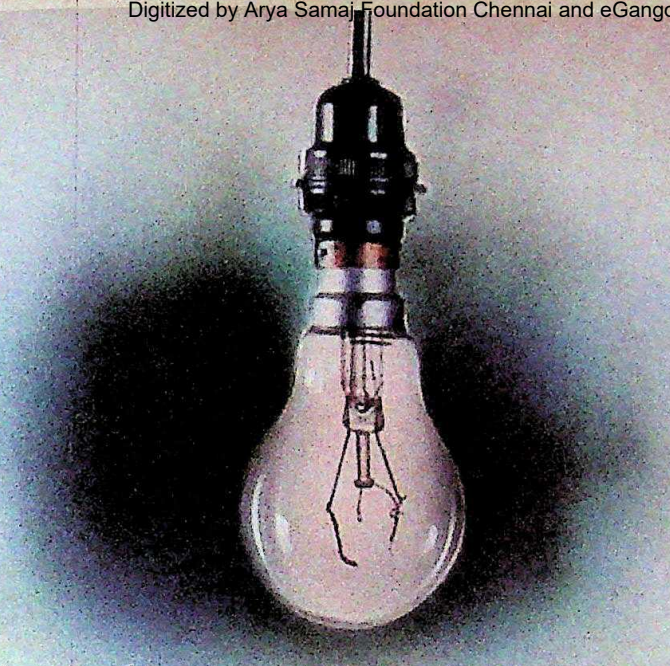

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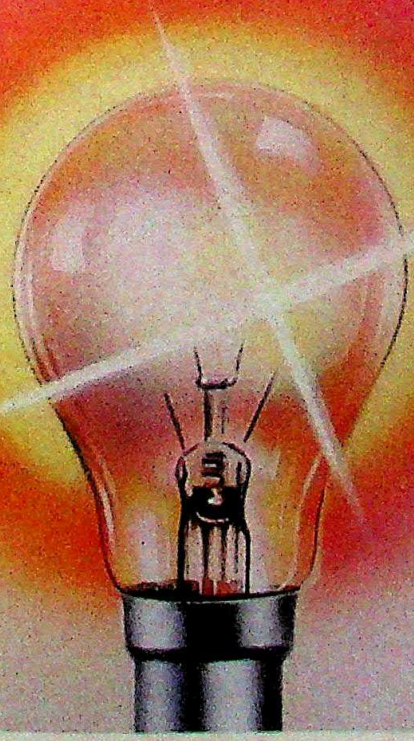

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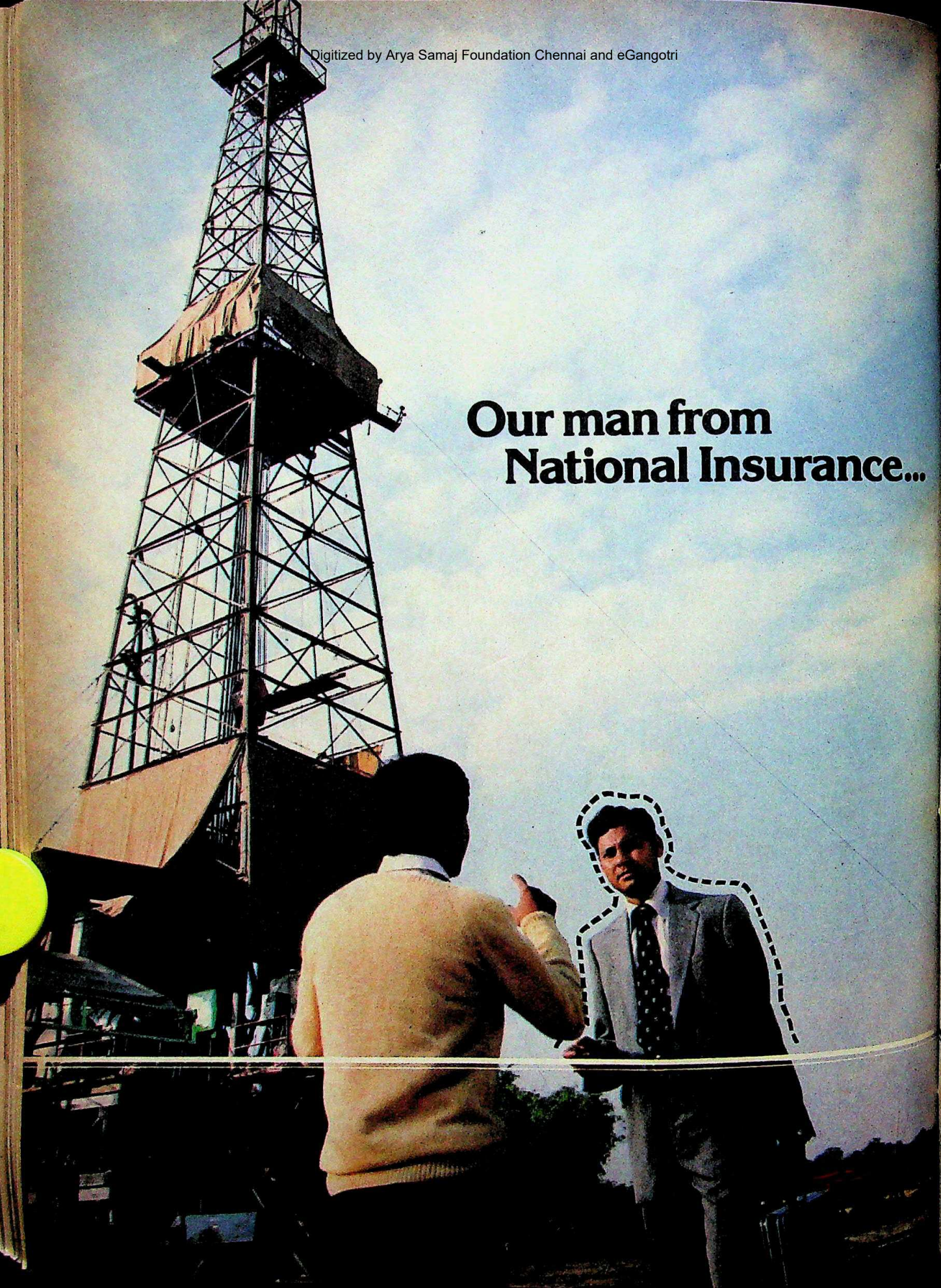

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DCM

A Troubled Transition

LESS than a year after it began, the tussle for succession at DCM is finally over. The second generation of the Shriram family has made way for the third, and a new duo is in command at the Rs 550-crore turnover company. But the issue of who is actually number one, which prolonged the battle over at least three formal board meetings and many informal discussions, seems still to be unresolved. Not that the protagonists admit it. As far as they are concerned, it has been resolved and the board will work in absolute harmony, and perhaps a corporate giant which has slumbered all these years will once again get moving.

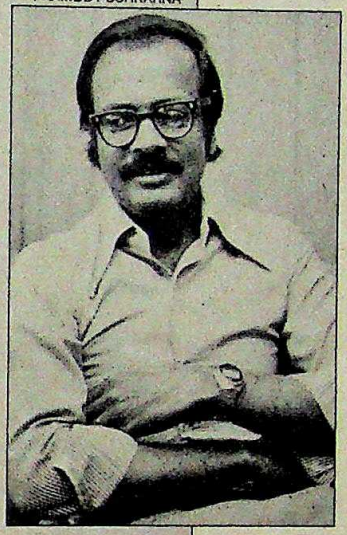
Last fortnight, Bansi Dhar, 55, nephew of former managing directors Bharat Ram and Charat Ram and till recently joint managing director, took over as chairman and senior managing director of DCM. Bharat Ram's eldest son Vinay Bharat Ram, 49, who was deputy managing director, is now managing director and continues as vice-chairman of DCM Toyota. Bharat Ram, 70, who was also chairman of the company and his brother Charat Ram, 67, stay on the board as non-executive directors. The new deputy managing director could be Siddharth Shriram, Charat Ram's second son, who heads Shriram Refrigeration Industries. Siddharth had not yet been formally approached for the job in the first half of last fortnight as he was in China with a delegation.

The transition of power at DCM, proposed by Bharat Ram last July, is the result of decisions arrived at on March 28 in New Delhi's Taj Mahal Hotel. Conflicting accounts of what went on at the board meeting are advanced, but two of those who attended it agree that it was if anything stormy. The meeting was deadlocked for almost three hours after it began at 2 p.m., principally on Vinay Bharat Ram's designation. Charat Ram reiterated his demand that Bansi Dhar should be made the sole managing director. The two sides stuck to their positions, the financial institutions with their 42 per cent stake in the company remaining neutral throughout. Finally, a non-institutional director intervened and an arrangement was worked out, but Charat Ram shot in a note dissenting with the board's decisions.

HARI OM GULATI

Bansi Dhar

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Vinay Bharat Ram

The board resolution is certainly silent on who will have the final say in the company... That could prove a contentious matter, but right now conciliation is the order of the day.

The resolution finally adopted at the meeting backs the position the board adopted when it met twice last October. In effect, it passes on Bharat Ram's mantle to his son, Vinay, and Charat Ram's to his nephew. Vinay Bharat Ram has been assigned five textile Mills (Delhi Cloth Mills, Hissar Textile Mills, DCM Silk Mills, Swatantra Bharat Mills and Hindon River Mills), DCM Engineering Products (an automotive foundry located at Ropar in Punjab), and DCM Data Products. He is also responsible for the working of Shriram Fibres and DCM Toyota, run by his brothers Arun and Vivek, respectively. Bansi Dhar will look after the head office, Shriram Rayons, and Shriram Fertilisers and Chemicals at Kota in Rajasthan, Shriram Foods and Fertiliser in the capital, the two sugar factories at Daurala and Mawana in Meerut, and will sit on the boards of DCM Toyota and Shriram Fibres.

That might look as if Bansi Dhar has got the better deal. (The company's fertiliser, chemical and sugar divisions earn profits that tot up to Rs 15 crore or more a year. The textile division on the other hand has been Rs 7 crore to Rs 10 crore in the red annually, though DCM Data Products is "on the upswing" and DCM Engineering was in the black last year.) But the present arrangement largely continues the past division of responsibilities, and family members are not claiming a victory for either side, arguing that the board has taken both viewpoints into account before arriving at any decisions.

The board resolution is certainly silent on who will have the final say in the company—leaving the question open to different interpretations. As Vinay Bharat Ram sees it, nowhere does the latest resolution state that the senior managing director will have the last word except in his areas of responsibility. But from Bansi Dhar's vantage point, the board has reaffirmed the decisions it took at its October meetings— and the October board resolution states that if there is a difference of opinion between the senior managing director and the managing director, the former would have the final word. That could prove a contentious matter, but right now conciliation is the order of the day. Says Vinay Bharat Ram: "Bansi Dhar is a very competent manager, a man of excellent human qualities. We have no background of personal differences and should make a good team." The compliment is reciprocated by Bansi Dhar.

The March 28 board resolution also says that the senior managing director's decisions on items to be sent to the board will be final, though he has to send on any major business policy decisions on his cousin's areas of responsibility if Vinay Bharat Ram so desires. Bansi Dhar points out that he cannot and will not

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block such issues going to the board.

The bonhomie apart, what is worrisome is the company's immediate outlook. DCM has fared poorly this year. According to a note submitted to the board, in the eight months ending in February the company made far less profits than it made in the same period the year before. (Profits last year finally touched Rs 15 crore or so on a turnover of Rs 502 crore.) Many of the problems are due to textiles which Vinay says, cropped up because operations were decentralised and the five mills competed with one another as separate profit centres.

However, big plans are afoot elsewhere. On the drawing-boards are a 25 per cent expansion of a fertiliser plant at Kota at an outlay of over Rs 40 crore, expansion of the sugar factory (Rs 10 crore), a biotechnology process product for which the company is talking to a Japanese firm and a foray into bulk drugs with the possibility of collaborating with Japanese or French firms. A modern new textile mill may also be launched at a cost of up to Rs. 50 crore. The bill for these and for a Rs 20-crore cement plant at Kota and other smaller projects, adds up to over Rs 125 crore.

The big question is: where will this money come from? DCM is strapped for cash, its board adopted a Rs 29-crore deficit budget last year, and servicing the Rs 30 crore in debentures it has raised will slice Rs 5 crore off annual profits. A company spokesman says that funds will be generated internally. The company can also go to the institutions for funds and the proviso that a firm has to sink in 20 per cent of project costs to be eligible for institutional finance may be waived. The management had also hoped that its rights to promote or set up a building on the valuable Delhi Cloth Mills land would net it fat sums. But that plan has fallen through, and while the closure of some textile mills may "scotch the losses permanently", the next two or three years may be rough going for DCM. —PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

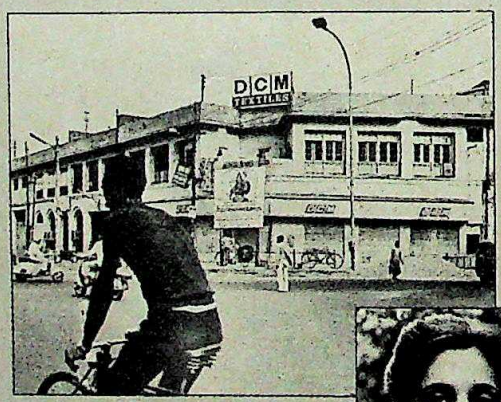
DCM

Labour Pains

THE VERDICT was clearly a blow for the company: DCM would not be allowed to close its 96-year-old textile mill in the heart of the capital's old city. But it has thrown up a host of associated issues, and may obliquely reflect on the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) which had cleared DCM's proposal to pull down the mill's tacky buildings, shift eleswhere, and put up "flatted" factories and houses on the 63-acre site.

The Delhi Administration's decision, announced a fortnight after the company had put in a formal application to shut down the mill which had a turnover of Rs 36.44 crore in 1984 on July 1. The decision supports the stand taken by Nita Bali, the administration's labour commissioner. After holding hearings on DCM's application, Bali strongly urged Delhi's Lt-Governor M.M.K. Wali to turn it down. She did not buy the company's argument that the mill was not viable, the buildings were old and unsafe and running the mill at its present site posed a danger to the health of the locality. She said that safety measures could be updated, closing the mill was not in the public interest since workers would lose jobs, and permitting the company to put the premises to commercial use would create a precedent for others. But in a statement released before the decision was announced, DCM Managing Director Vinay Bharat Ram argued that to bring the mill in line with international standards would call for an investment of almost Rs 60 crore —something impossible since the mill was in an area that does not conform to the capital's 1966 master plan and since the mill would have to shift eventually.

The two positions apart, what is evident is that the administration has thrown a lifeline to the mill's 6,109 employees who faced the axe, and defused an agitation by the mill's seven unions. The disparate unions had forged a common front and taken to the streets to protest the decision to down shutters. But for the moment, the unions are awaiting further developments. Says Brinda Karat, secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Union affiliated Kapda Mazdoor Laljanda Union: "The administration has taken a tough stand and we welcome it. But when different government departments speak in two voices, one approving of the mill's closure and shift and the other not, will the matter end here?"



DCM's textile mill in Delhi and (inset) Bali: conflicting views

The point about the Government having been divided is echoed by a DCM spokesman. He says: "The initiative to shift the mill was taken by the administration."

Though the company may not get the 200 acres it had sought and may be given an alternate site in the long run, the decision raises more immediate questions. What options are now available to DCM? It could request the administration to review the decision, arguing that its own agencies had in the first place asked it to shift. It could also go to court. The company has contended that Section 25 (O) of the Industrial Disputes Act—the clause permits the Government to reject "in the public interest" a company's application to close shop—is unconstitutional.

The decision has other ramifications too. A senior administration bureaucrat questions the DDA's having backed the company's plan to develop a commercial complex on the premises: "The DDA has not allowed private companies to develop land in Delhi. Why did it back DCM's proposal?"

The question for the moment may be academic. What is of concern for DCM is that it is stuck with a business that loses Rs 2 crore a year—unless the textile policy now on the anvil catapults it into the pink again.

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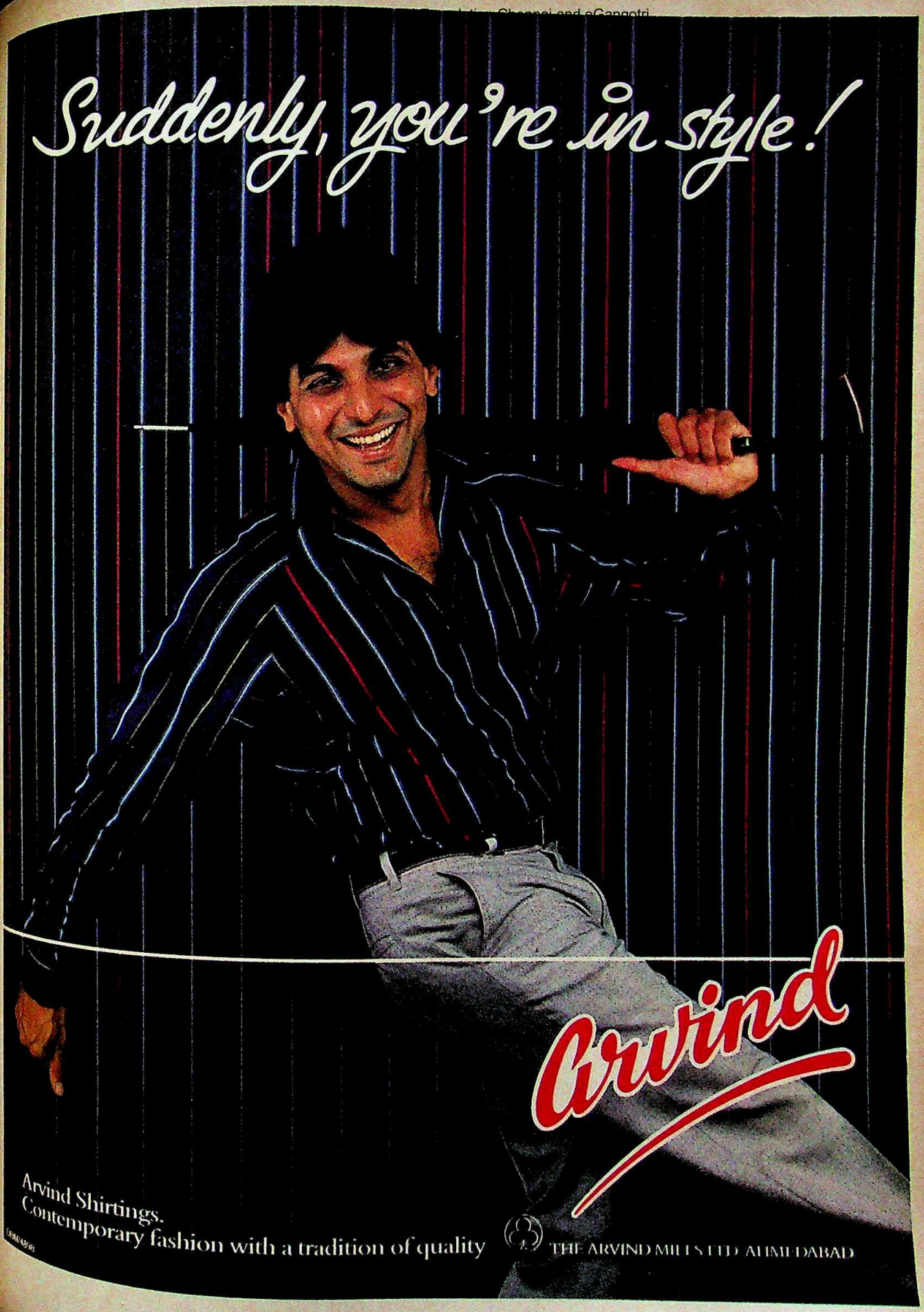

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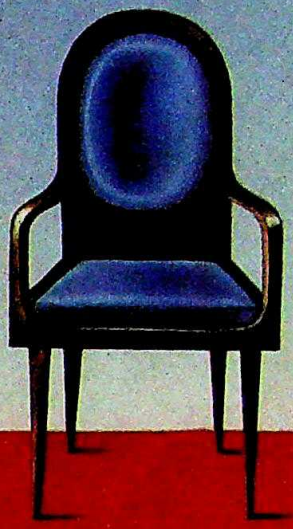

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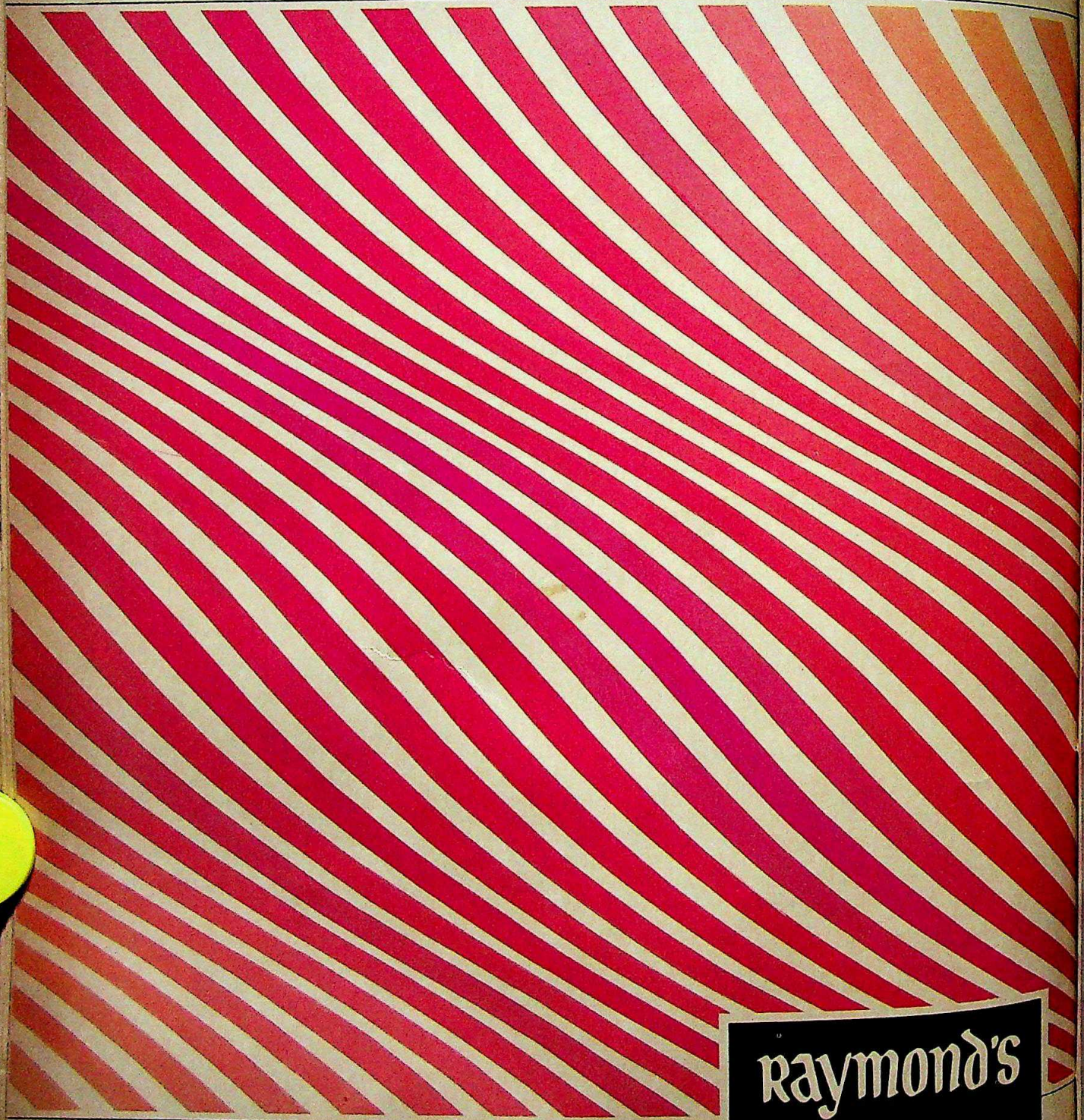

Raymond's
Shirtings.

The Best guide to the well-dressed male

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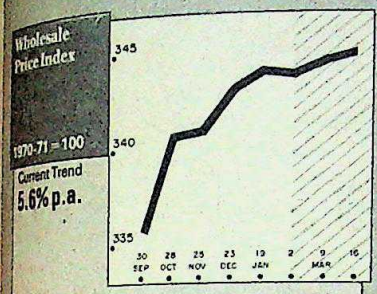
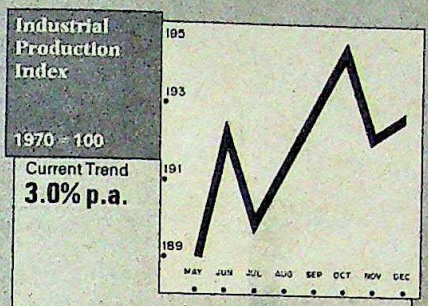
Prices were up only marginally last fortnight; industry and power generation, however, continue to languish and there is cause for concern. While commercial bank credit increased sharply, money supply as a whole has decelerated. Both the share and bullion markets are distinctly buoyant.

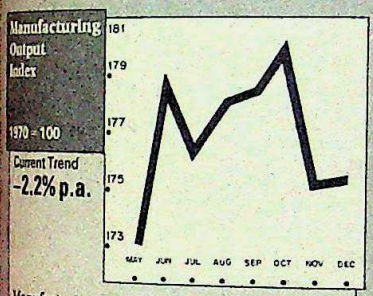
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months' data to which a regression is fitted.



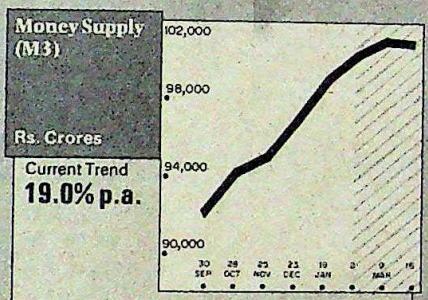
Price increases in food products and manufactured products led to a 0.3 per cent increase in wholesale prices last fortnight.



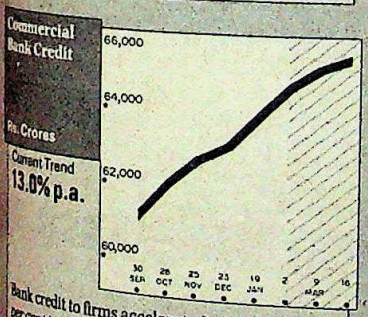
Production was up by 0.3 per cent last month reinforcing a disappointing long term trend: mining and quarrying was the chief contributor.



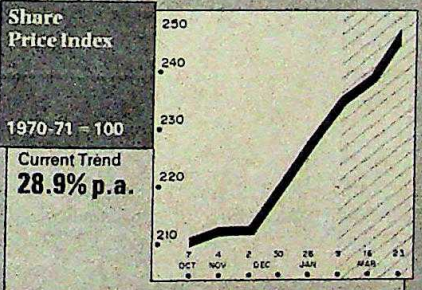
Manufacturing output crawled up a meagre 0.1 per cent last month indicating no recovery after a sharp decline in the previous month.



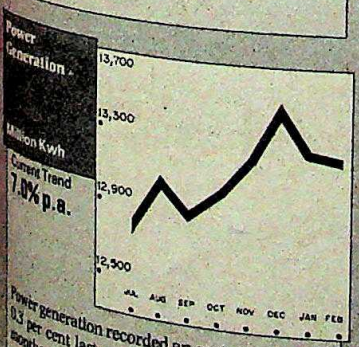
Money supply was up 0.6 per cent last fortnight but showed signs of slowing down—bank credit expansion contributed chiefly to the growth.



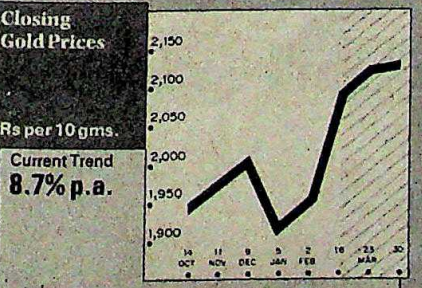
Bank credit to firms accelerated to register a 1.1 per cent increase last fortnight at over twice the trend rate of growth.



The share market soared a further 4.8 per cent due to bullish conditions in tea plantations and transport equipment securities.



Power generation recorded an ominous drop of 0.3 per cent last month, the first time in five months, due to a drop in nuclear generation.



Gold prices were up by 1.8 per cent last fortnight showing a sharp increase in the course of one month.

INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

Items with maximum growth in October 1984

	%Growth
Footwear, Other Wearing Apparels	46.33
Ferro-Alloys	42.44
Linoleum and Similar Products	29.27
Dairy Products	28.65
Transport Equipment	26.05
Synthetic Rubber	17.27
Pens and Pencils	16.79
Coffee Curing Works	15.30
Dye-Stuffs	14.63
Pwr Driven Pumps-Centrifugal Etc	14.09
Tea	13.28
Drugs and Pharmaceuticals	13.15
Int Combustion Engines	10.54
Artificial Leather and Oil Cloth	9.58
Machine Tools	9.03
Motor Cars	8.86
Rubber Footwear	8.85
Chemical, Pharmaceutical Machinery	8.56
Products of Petroleum and Coal	8.01
Photographic & Optical Goods	7.53
Cement (Hydraulic)	5.78
Insecticides Fungicides Weedicides	5.61
Laboratory Ware	4.80
Boilers Steam Generating Plants	4.38
Tobacco Manufacture	3.12
Mining and Quarrying	3.00
Cotton, Blended Mixed Fabrics—Mills	1.99
Manufacture of Jewellery etc	1.86
Bakery Products	1.61
Man-made Fibre, Cellulose Rayon Etc	1.55
Automobiles Ancillaries	1.50
Grain Mill Products	1.48
Electric Light & Power	1.37
Refractories	1.32
Insulators	1.31
Iron and Steel (Basic)	0.62
Sanitary and White Ware	0.35
Asbestos Cement	−0.11
Inorganic Chemicals	−0.13
Shipbuilding & Repairing	−0.18
Paper Board and Straw Board	−0.93
Cocoa, Chocolate & Confectionery	−1.02
Mfg Leather Prdts Except Footwear	−1.03
Soaps and Glycerine	−1.40
Perfumes Cosmetics and Tlt Preps	−1.68
Miscellaneous Ware	−1.91
Grinding Wheels and Abrasives	−1.91
Non-Ferrous Basic Metal Industries	−2.03
Paper-Writing, Printing & Wrapping	2.22

Of 119 series considered, 42 with a weight of 54.2 accelerated while 77 with a weight of 40.3 decelerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1985	1984
Crude petroleum Thousand tonnes March	2808	2358
Petroleum products Throughput Thousand tonnes March	3592	3039
Call Money Rate Per cent March	10.0	10.0
Rail Movement Tonnes originating February	20.14	20.01
Thermal Plant Load Factor Per cent February	54.8	51.6

—Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP, ICIM

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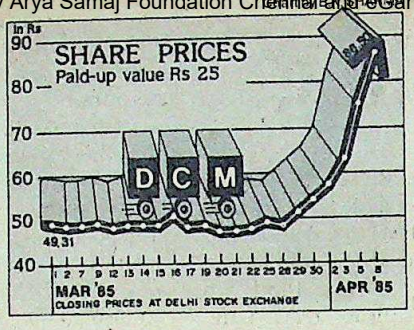
THE MARKETS

Heady Heights

BOOM is a favourite four-letter word in the stock-market and the marketmen cannot apparently have enough of it. For two weeks running since the budget—and another two weeks before it—the market has been on what the junkies call a 'trip', scaling a new high every day. It has gained more than 10 per cent since the beginning of March and almost 25 per cent since the Rajiv Government was sworn in.

Cheerful corporate reports have helped fuel the boom. Reliance Textiles stepped up the dividend from 30 to 40 per cent after a year of record achievements, both in terms of turnover and profits. The company is planning to spend over Rs 650 crore in the next few years and is expected to displace Tata Steel from its No. 1 spot in the corporate stakes. Roplas (India) has stepped up the dividend from 15 to 18 per cent and so has Anil Starch. Doom Dooma has announced a bonus of 1 for 1 and hiked dividend from 30 to 35 per cent. Baroda



Rayon, Hindustan Ciba-Geigy and Guest Keen Williams have fared better than last year.

Delhi scrips have been rather slow in catching up with noisy goings-on elsewhere but they too have joined the mad race. DCM, which had been hovering around 50 for months, has shot up to 60 on rumours that the company was jettisoning its old textile mills in Delhi and selling the land for housing. Escorts too has lurched forward and is likely to touch 70 before the month is out. In Calcutta, tea shares were in the limelight because of high auction prices as well as concessions announced in the budget. And in Bombay, Gwalior Rayon has perked up on reports that its cement plant had swung into production.

Most scrips are so high-priced one is scared to touch them. But some shares, particularly in Calcutta, continue to be in the dumps. Guest Keen Williams is still quoted below 25 and so is Indian Cable. They are far too closely associated with the public sector to take advantage of the budget.

How long will the boom last? It is anybody's guess but the picture might turn radically if the power situation, already rather serious, gets out of control. A number of states including Karnataka, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and, to a certain extent, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, are passing through something of a crisis. Then there is inflation, or the fear of inflation, whatever government spokesmen might say. Prices of most consumer items have shot up 15 to 20 per cent since the budget and further price hikes are on the cards. The only thing that will sustain the market at its current high level is higher production and, of course, higher profits. Companies like Reliance Textiles which are modernising and expanding like mad are a good bet, but what about the rest? *That* is the question.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1985 HIGH	1985 LOW	CLOSE 2.4.85	Change on Fortnight
Asian Paints	126.00	87.00	126.00	nil
Associated Cement	447.00	382.00	445.00	36.50 +
Atlas Copco	49.50	37.50	49.50	8.00 +
Avery India	66.00	56.00	66.00	3.00 +
Bajaj Auto	1,265.00	855.00	1 265.00	335.00 +
Ballarpur	49.00	44.00	48.90	1.90 +
Baroda Rayon	323.00	281.00	323.00	21.00 +
Bata India	64.25	48.00	63.50	6.90 +
Bayer	395.00	317.50	330.00	10.00 –
Best & Crompton	81.00	61.00	77.00	4.00 +
Birla Jute	57.25	51.70	57.10	1.80 +
Blow Plast	55.00	39.00	48.50	nil
Blue Star	42.50	32.50	42.50	3.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	85.00	63.00	83.50	2.50 +
Britannia Industries	60.35	46.50	59.70	2.20 +
Brooke Bond	61.50	47.50	61.00	6.00 +
Century Spinning	920.00	805.00	865.00	20.00 +
Chloride India	68.25	56.90	68.00	4.00 +
Colgate	244.00	143.50	230.00	20.50 +
Cyanamid	49.50	33.00	45.00	1.00 –
DCM	63.25	45.00	63.25	14.50 +
Dunlop	29.00	22.30	27.80	0.70 –
East India Hotels	34.00	25.50	33.00	4.00 +
Escorts	58.50	49.87	58.50	8.00 +
Food Specialities	154.00	86.00	139.00	11.00 +
Garware Nylon	49.00	24.50	49.00	14.00 +
Glaxo	41.50	24.00	41.50	8.50 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	616.00	533.00	607.50	34.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	64.00	53.75	63.00	5.75 +
Hico Products	30.50	23.00	23.00	2.00 –
Hindustan Aluminium	58.00	51.00	57.60	2.70 +
Hindustan Lever	88.50	50.75	86.00	6.50 +
Hindustan Motors	45.60	38.00	45.56	5.82 +
Indian Aluminium	29.25	25.50	28.50	0.25 +
Indian Hotels	100.00	76.00	100.00	13.00 +
Indian Oxygen	54.20	43.50	54.20	8.20 +
Indian Rayon	77.00	63.50	77.00	6.00 +
Indrol	161.00	90.50	145.00	20,00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	221.00	159.00	199.00	10.00 +
Ion Exchange	97.00	57.50	80.00	12.00 +
J K Synthetics	65.50	52.20	63.40	3.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	172.00	127.00	172.00	34.00 +
Kirloskar Oil	33.00	24.50	24.50	1.50 –
Kothari Industrial	24.00	20.00	23.75	2.50 +
Lakme	92.00	76.00	80.00	2.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	106.00	72.00	102.00	6.50 +
Lipton	39.00	26.50	37.70	5.95 +
Lohia Machines	53.75	42.00	53.75	2.75 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	63.00	47.50	55.50	2.00 +
Modi Rubber	25.00	19.50	25.00	2.00 +
Motor Industries	435.00	315.00	420.00	10.00 +
Mysore Cement	35.50	30.00	33.00	2.00 –
Nirlon	49.25	37.00	49.00	1.00 +
Otis Elevator	146.00	86.00	140.00	14.00 +
Pelco Electronics	63.00	38.40	62.90	6.40 +
Premier Automobiles	368.00	310.00	365.00	17.00 +
Ranbaxy	81.00	49.00	80.00	10.00 +
Raymond	85.00	59.00	81.00	4.00 –
Reliance Textiles	175.50	120.00	174.00	23.00 +
Shaw Wallace	88.30	72.50	88.30	6.80 +
Shriram Fibres	41.00	34.00	41.00	6.50 +
SPIC	70.00	43.50	70.00	13.00 +
Tata Steel	502.00	373.50	502.00	40.00 +
Telco	546.00	406.00	545.00	41.00 +
Voltas	390.00	360.00	363.00	3.00 +
Zuari Agro	56.30	46.00	54.60	2.10 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.2668	8.0532
Austria	Schilling	1	0.5786	0.5639
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.3540	32.7178
Bangladesh	Taka	1	0.5033	0.4906
Canada	Dollar	1	9.2561	9.0692
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1319	1.1079
Egypt	Pound	1	15.6009	15.2096
France	Franc	1	1.3289	1.3022
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.0180	0.9974
Indonesia	Rupiah	1	0.0117	0.0103
Iran	Rial	1	0.4162	0.4083
Italy	Lira	1	0.6382	0.6247
Japan	Yen	100	5.0107	4.9137
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.9620	0.9457
Kuwait	Dinar	1	41.6249	40.8310
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.8583	5.6897
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8029	0.7910
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.7706	0.7364
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.6019	3.5322
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7192	0.7071
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.4486	6.3076
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0741	0.0709
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4700	0.4564
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.4008	1.3702
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.8020	4.7037
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7146	0.7097
Thailand	Baht	1	0.4594	0.4517
UK	Pound	1	15.3929	15.1320
USA	Dollar	1	12.7475	12.4925
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5274	3.4298
USSR	Rouble	1	13.8693	13.6240
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.0697	3.9759

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RAJIV GANDHI

Image Building

WHAT kind of a man is Rajiv Gandhi? The question gnaws at the cerebral nerves of politicians, diplomats, analysts and commentators as the 40-year-old prime minister of India moves confidently towards the 175th day of his rule, and gives the impression that he may well occupy the cockpit of power for 5,000 days. Little is publicly known about his childhood, of how he grew up in a split family, of his formative years in school and as a trainee pilot. Equally little is known of his early youth. Not until Rajiv Gandhi "reluctantly" came into politics after the death of his brother, Sanjay, did he draw the limelight of public attention. In April 1981, *a Statesman* columnist, Sunanda Datta-Ray, asked the budding politician to come out of his mother's skirts. "Will the real Rajiv Gandhi please stand up and declare himself?" asked Datta-Ray. Rajiv responded promptly, resigned his pilot's job, contested and won the Amethi seat for the Lok Sabha, made himself visible to the people.

Now, four years later, has the "real" Rajiv Gandhi fully "declared himself"? In the half-a-dozen interviews he has given to Indian and foreign reporters, he has sketched out his personality, his mind and his character. In the first flush of a national euphoria, he has been enjoying the indulgence of the political and intellectual elite that his mother did not when she was chosen prime minister in January 1966. Social scientist V.A. Pai Panandikar has identified the social base of Rajiv's politics: "a coalition with the 200 million-strong Indian middle class", most of them young, possibly below 40. Editor Girilal Jain has frankly confessed to a "generation gap between the new ruler and commentators like me". Rajiv's friend and aide Arun Singh helped identify the gap: "We were of the Beatles generation", he told a reporter. What does that mean in terms of political thinking and political values? How does "Beatleism" relate to the form and content of Indian politics, India's political culture?

Students of political affairs now look for the minds of political actors, their personality and their style. Psychological study of political leaders is an infant sub-discipline. In Rajiv's case, it is a difficult task because his mother's private life was very private. A few interesting glimpses are, however, available. In the anecdotes Mrs Gandhi narrated for record of the childhood of her two sons, Rajiv was seldom mentioned; it was almost always Sanjay. Sanjay was the mother's pet; perhaps also the grandfather's. Was Rajiv, then, his father's son?

So little is known of the relationship the two sons had with their father that it is impossible to get reliable clues to the influence Feroze Gandhi might have had on the formative years of Rajiv's life. If, as Girilal Jain has suggested, Rajiv is giving the impression that he wants to distance himself from Mrs Gandhi's style of politics—the young prime minister has on more than one occasion roundly deplored the accumulated silt of the last 20 years in the Indian political process—did he entertain a grievance against his mother for being deprived of his father in the boyhood years of his life? It is known, on the evidence of published stories of their childhood and youth, that there wasn't much love lost between the two brothers. One of the reasons why the close cronies of Sanjay and his wife so strongly resisted the move in 1980-81 to induct Rajiv into politics is that they knew that, given the authority, Rajiv would undo almost everything Sanjay had done in the bizarre years of the Emergency and thereafter. He has himself partly confirmed this in his interview with M.J. Akbar of *Sunday*.

The image of the man whose pilotship of India is seen with so much affection and hope by most of his countrymen is being projected with considerable skill and care on the canvas of the Indian mind. He is unflappable. He can take a 20-hour working day lightly in his daily stride. He is unworrisome. Asked whether he was bothered about threats to his life, he said: "That sort of thing doesn't bother me." He is strong; he did not cry when he heard the news of his mother's assassination. He is unloaded with a sense of destiny: "You know I didn't particularly want this chair. And I don't care if I lose it."

> **Rajiv seems to suffer from three major weaknesses. He has been reckless in the use of political invectives. He has been somewhat too generous with promises. Above all, he has not found a new language of politics.**

He is a doer, has given "an activist lead." He is not a pusher, although he realises the impact of "doing things with a bang". He doesn't wish to push people and institutions too much, Rajiv has said, "you don't want to cross the rails the other way and go to the other side." He has spoken about the importance of "principle and ideology" in politics, without explaining what his ideology is. One student of the Gandhi family says Rajiv has been from his youth a believer in "social democracy". His father was once friendly with the communists, but later broke with them completely. His image builders project him as a modernizer, a pilot who wants to land India safely and surely on the 21st century. He is not religious. He believes in "morality, rights and wrongs"—a statement that has been confirmed by Arun Singh.

The image may or may not be the real man whom time will reveal in increasing clarity. For the present, he seems to suffer from three major weaknesses. He has been reckless in the use of political invectives, making charges against the Opposition he cannot substantiate and which undermine his image as a conciliator. He has been somewhat too generous with promises; though he has done quite a bit to clean up the top levels of the raj, and to correct its enormous sloppiness, his deliveries have inevitably fallen short of his promises. Above all, he has not found a new language of politics. His orations, mercifully short, reflect his mother's political mind rather than his own political and administrative actions. Rajiv Gandhi does not seem to have a conceptual mind; so far he has given no evidence of visualising a new architecture of Indian politics. His mind is rather problem-solving—an airline pilot's mind rather than the mind of the pilot of the world's largest democracy. That's why he has been short on ideology and quite long on pragmatism. However, the man's political mind is still in the making. It will continue to compel close and careful watching in India and abroad.

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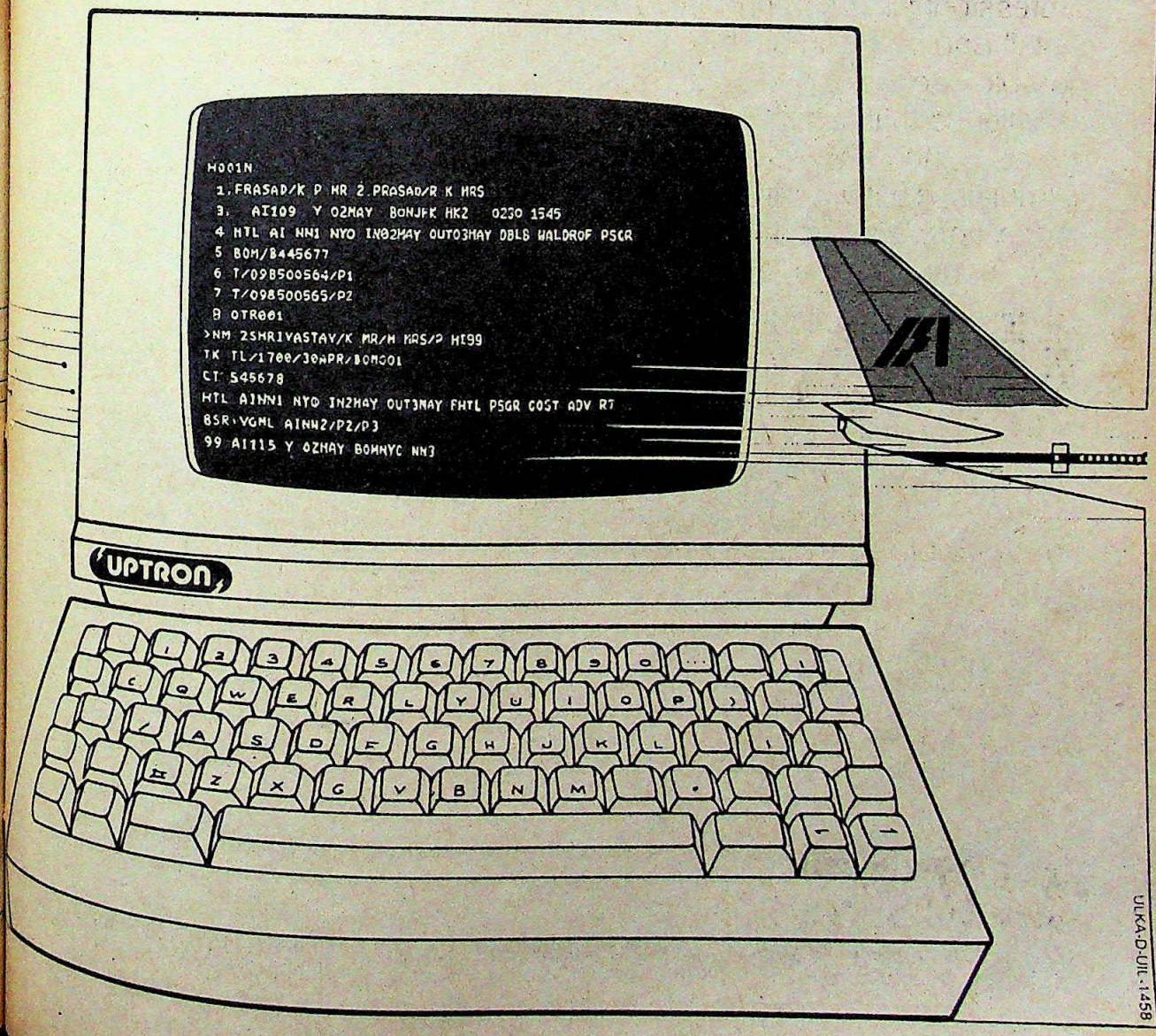
once again forms of a computerised airline reservation system.

This time it's for Indian Airlines.



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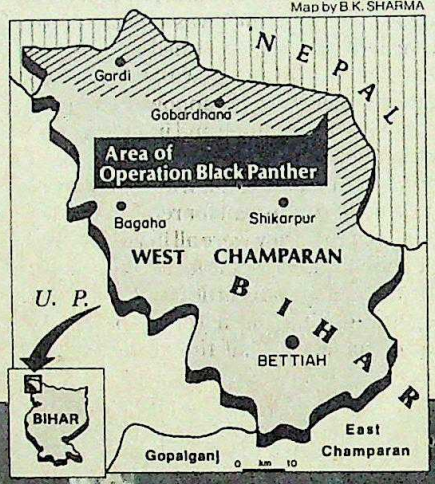
BIHAR

The Kidnap Trap

IN THE thick jungles and hillocks of west Champaran, the north-west district of Bihar nestling in the shadows of the Himalayas, a new and very lucrative industry has been developing since 1981: kidnapping for ransom. Since then, according to local estimates, over 600 people have been kidnapped and ransom amounting to a mind-boggling Rs 6 crore has changed hands. From inside the lush terrain, criss-crossed by rivers, the six gangs of kidnappers wield enormous power, levying taxes on poor farmers, lifting grain, cattle and tractors as they please and issuing notices in the name of "Bihar sarkar".

But it was only last month, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, horrified at the escalating crime graph, asked Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey to clean up the mess, that the real Bihar sarkar swung into action. Immediately the anti-kidnapper drive became priority No. 1 and the state administration launched its biggest-ever hunt impressively titled Operation Black Panther. But like all projects conceived in a hurry, the operation is pock-marked with problems and its chances of success, dubious. INDIA TODAY*'s Patna Correspondent* FARZAND AHMED, *along with freelance photographer K.M. Kishan spent a couple of days and nights inside the jungles with the Bihar Military Police* (BMP) *to assess the project. His report:*

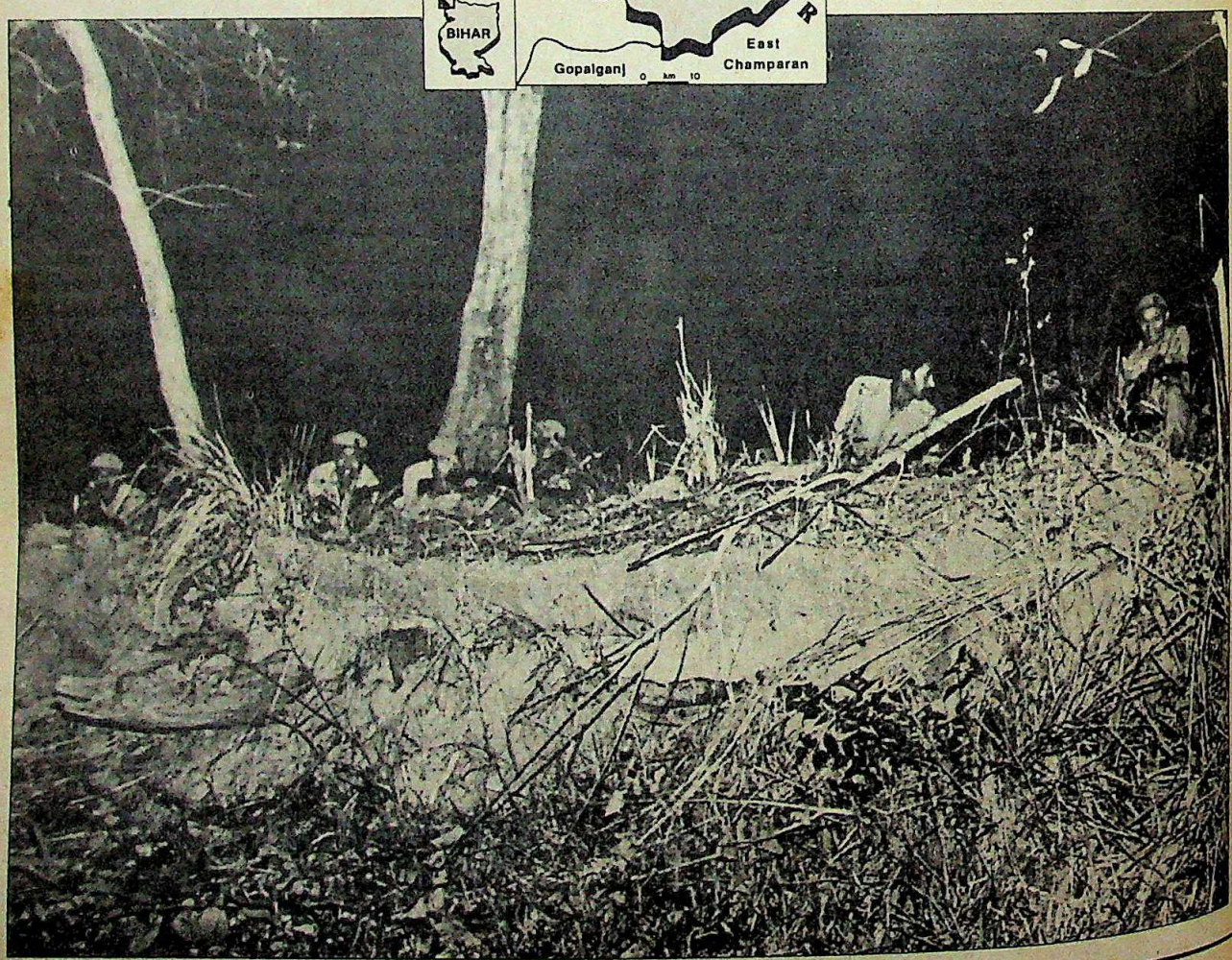
Map by B K SHARMA



THERE is defeat and demoralisation on the faces of the police officials who have been combing the deep, labyrinthine forests of west Champaran since the lofty Operation Black Panther was launched sometime ago. The 90-km range on the Indo-Nepal border is dotted with newly dug trenches and some of the BMP's finest marksmen have been waiting there, round the clock, their fingers positioned on the triggers of their semi-automatics. "It is the biggest ever operation in Bihar," said Inspector General of Police (Crime Branch) S.N. Roy. Added Arun Narain Singh, DIG (Anti-dacoity): "It is the final assault on the gangs and everybody in the police department has a stake in its success."

Everything about the operation, however, seems to be spelling failure, not

BMP jawans waiting in trenches: elusive quarry



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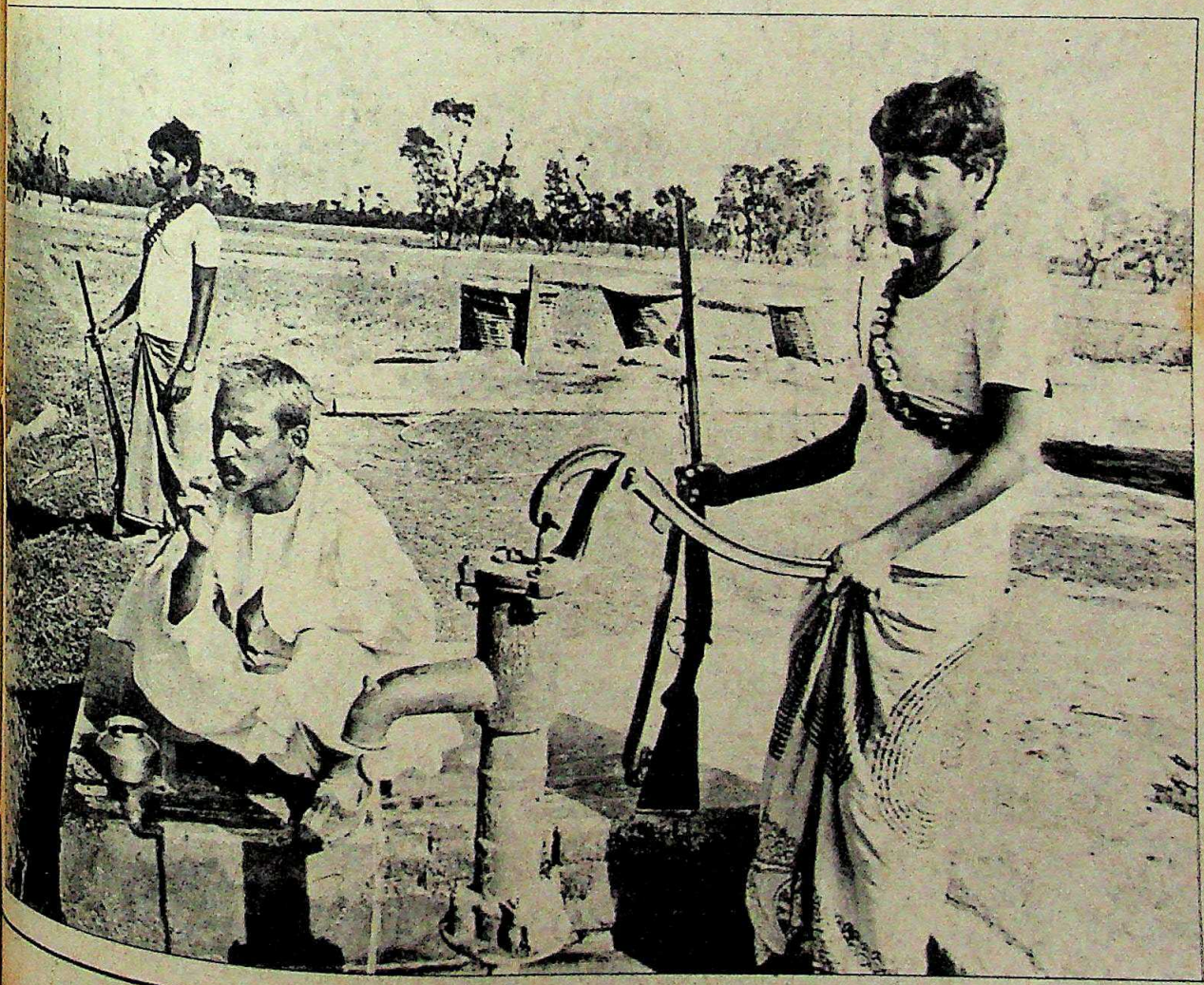
success. The police department itself started off on the wrong note. Instead of careful planning and team coordination, the project began with ego war in the police headquarters. When Rajiv Gandhi expressed his concern about the kidnappings, DGP Jagat Anand immediately prepared a blueprint to tackle the problem. Before he could announce his intentions, however, Chief Minister Dubey moved in and suggested the name of Ram Chandra Khan, DIG, Bihar Military Police to lead the operation.

Khan is a known strategist who has in the past broken 30 gangs including the dreaded gang of Kamdeo Singh, disarmed militant tribals in Bokaro and tamed the naxalites in rural Patna. Impeccable credentials, but sources revealed that Khan never could get along with Jagat Anand and when his name was suggested by the chief minister, tension was anticipated. It came. Khan was made leader but all plans and details were kept secret from him. He was not allowed to see any files at any stage but was asked to go ahead with the operation, and quickly. On March 22, when he took over charge, Khan found that even the manpower assigned to him had not arrived. Moreover, much to his dismay, the date of the operation had been openly announced. Said he: "There must be top secrecy. An operation like this must have an element of surprise but all these things were non-existent in the whole planning." Three days later, before he could formulate any strategies of his own, Khan was suddenly replaced by DIG Jyoti Kumar Sinha. The first phase of Operation Black Panther was over and nothing had been accomplished.

Sinha was swamped with many of the same problems. The manpower assigned to him was inadequate and in some cases, shabbily trained. When he wanted jeeps for a surprise attack, he was told that all the jeeps had been sent for repair. He later found out that they were all in good working condition. Then, the local administration created so many little problems in the beginning, that, as a senior officer in Patna confessed, "all the criminals got time to withdraw into their hideouts or cross over into Nepal". On April 3, Sinha, while conducting raids in some remote area, caught a message on his wireless set, that a raiding party in Dhahana village had been attacked by some criminals. He immediately radioed his base in Bettiah for reinforcements. The reinforcements took eight hours to take off and by then it was too late.

One reason for his strategies failing one after another, Sinha feels, is that the kidnappers have nurtured well-paid moles in the administration. "We are concentrating on the gangs, a list has been prepared by the CID team operating in the area, we are likely to strike soon," said Sinha, "but some of the lower level personnel in the administration are suspected to have links with the kidnappers and unless we get cooperation from the local people, we will be nowhere."

Worse, some former police officials themselves seem to be guiding the kidnappers. Ram Dheni, once a subedar in the BMP, later suspended on a murder charge, is now reported to be master-



Jhha Mishra, mukhiya: living in fear

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minding several of the kidnappers' operations. Said Sinha: "Our whole strategy may be exposed due to his presence among the criminals." Ramjatan Nonia, also now leading one of the kidnapping gangs, was once in home-guards himself and enjoys all the advantages of knowing the police working from the inside.

MOREOVER the densely forested 90-km long terrain is an unknown, unexplored world for the police force. Since the operation was flagged off in such a hurry, none of the police officers could familiarise themselves with the topography nor could any map be prepared. No reconnaissance was done and no air or ground survey carried out. The only map they had was an outdated one prepared in 1919 and since then no one had studied the interiors of the jungles. Said I. Lakra, who commands the Gobardhana Forest Zone: "The entire force is directionless, as the survey map of the forest department is leading them nowhere."

While the police grapples in the dark, the mysterious, winding jungles are working to the tremendous advantage of the kidnappers. "The hillocks act as observation posts," said J.K. Sinha, DIG, "even from a close range, the gang members can observe the activities of the police force without being seen." Still the police must do what it can. It has divided the entire area into two zones headed by commandants and each zone has been split into sectors. Thirty "posts" have been created in the trenches, fully equipped with sophisticated arms and wireless systems. In all, 11 companies of paramilitary forces have been deployed to finish only six gangs. Officers patrol the area day in and day out but the quarry has till now not showed up.

Obviously, then, the kidnappers are alive and well and probably having a good laugh as well. They enjoy full protection from some of the landlords, some of whom have even employed relations of the gang leaders as a favour to them. The local politicians are also quite unwilling to speak up against them since they bank on these criminals for their political survival during elections. Arjun Vikram Shah of the Congress(I) in Ramanagar constituency earned the

DIG Sinha: no cooperation

wrath of these gangs when he once tried to initiate action against them. During elections, gang leaders openly worked against him threatening people with death if they voted for him. Shah is now a minister of state but refuses to speak against them.

There are few willing to help the police because there are few who believe in the integrity of the police. Bacha Mishra, mukhiya of Jogappati who has employed his own armed guards said: "The gang leaders, even if arrested, would be released soon and after that they would take revenge. Once the police withdraw, there will be hell let loose by the gangs who enjoy the support of local landlords, politicians and the police." Said sarpanch Jangbahadur Mahto cynically, "It is the police in fact which is spying for the criminals. How can this operation be successful?"

The situation is certainly grave and growing more serious every year. The kidnapping business began in early 1981 on a small scale. By last year it had turned into a flourishing industry. Official statistics reveal that in 1981, the police registered only five cases of kidnapping for ransom, in 1982 it registered 16, in 1983—48, in 1984—22, and by March 16,1985 it had already recorded 22 kidnapping cases. And those are official statistics alone. Ransoms have been ranging from Rs 25,000 to Rs 4 lakh. The six kidnapper gangs—headed by Nema Ahir, Dhurup Yadav, Dhurup Mallah, Ramjatan Nonia, Satyanarain Yadav and Surajpati Yadav—have established a parallel administration that does anything it pleases. Now that the kidnappers have become rich men, they have also started acquiring property and investing money in business through benami deals. "Once we finish the operation we can probe how much benami land has been transacted or business established," said Sinha. But first, he is determined to get his kidnappers.

Just how successful he'll be in that is debatable. Last year, a special drive to arrest 204 criminals ended with the capture of only 54. Some of the dreaded gang leaders have indeed been killed in the past—but not by the police. They have died either in gang warfare or in encounters with villagers. So far no firearms have been seized, no major encounters taken place and only six innocent persons arrested for interrogation. Any new strategies that are suggested are reportedly vetoed by conventional senior police officials. According to reliable sources, Sinha had suggested rounding up the criminals during election time as many gang leaders emerge from hiding at that time to help their favoured candidates. Sinha suggested that plain clothesmen circulate amongst the canvassers to capture, or at least spy on the criminals. His idea was turned down and the police department still does not have a full description of the gang leaders.

Sinha is now a man in a hurry. He has to round up the kidnappers before the rains set in and completely cut off the forests. "I am getting good response and hope something will be done in the next two months," he said. But everything seems to be working against him and publicity, too, has done the project as much harm as anything else. Unless a miracle helps him, Operation Black Panther may end up as an expensive picnic with the kidnappers having the last laugh from their hideouts in the jungles.

Innocent villagers under arrest

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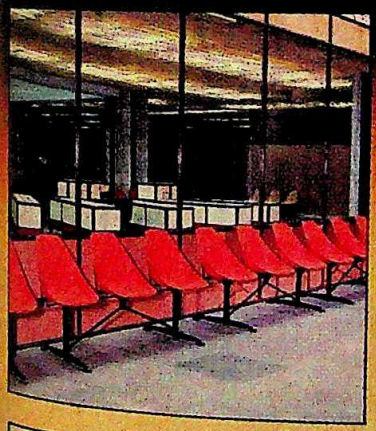

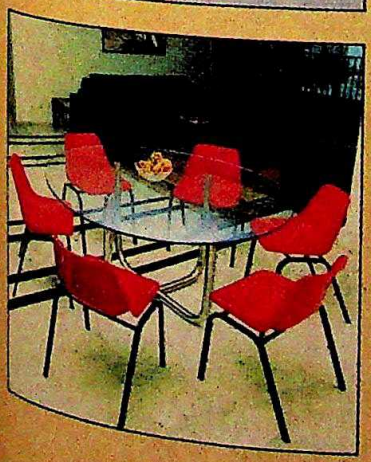

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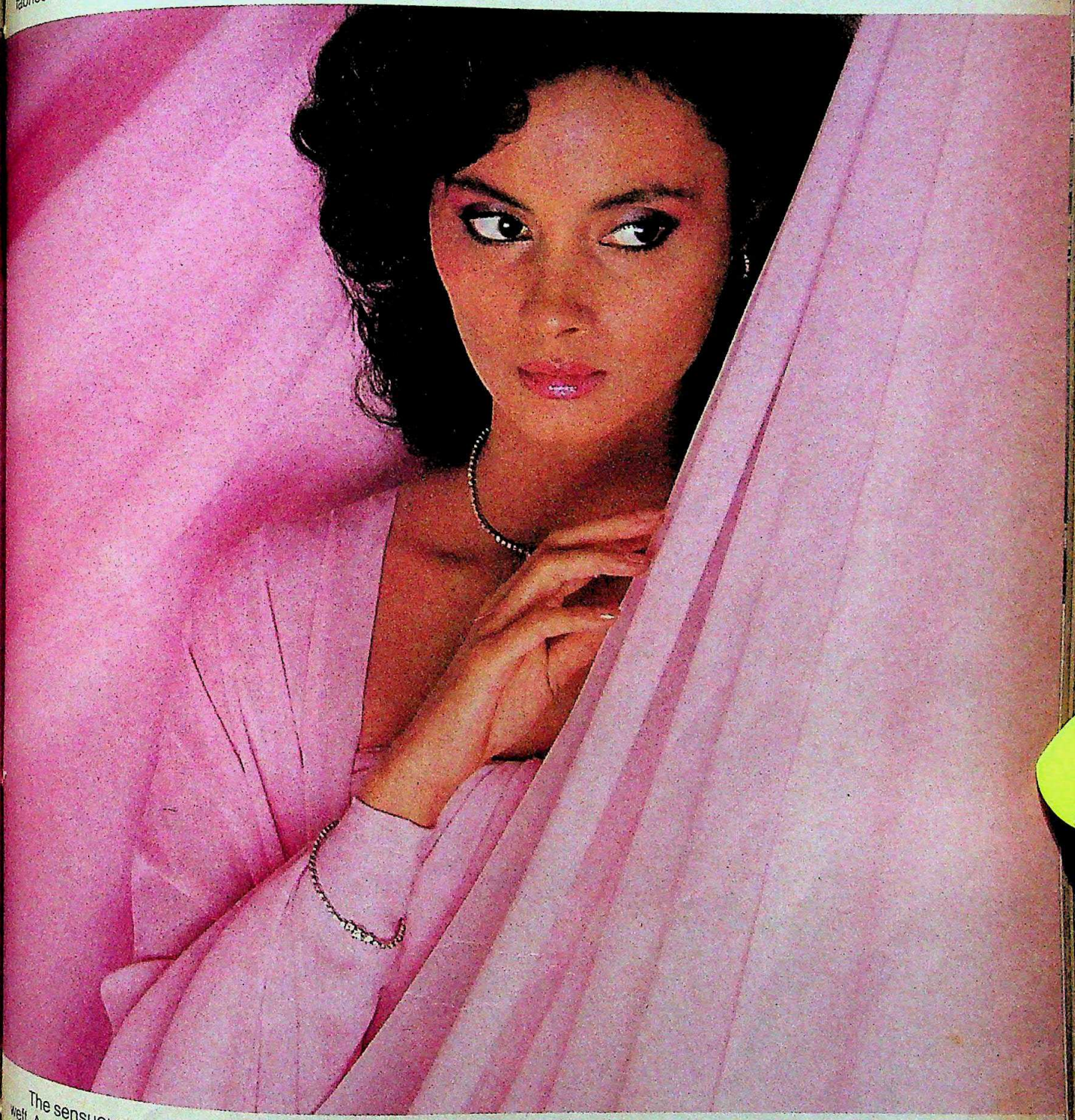

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Praful A. Shah, Managing Director, Garden Silk Mills Pvt. Ltd.; Chairman, Vareli Group.

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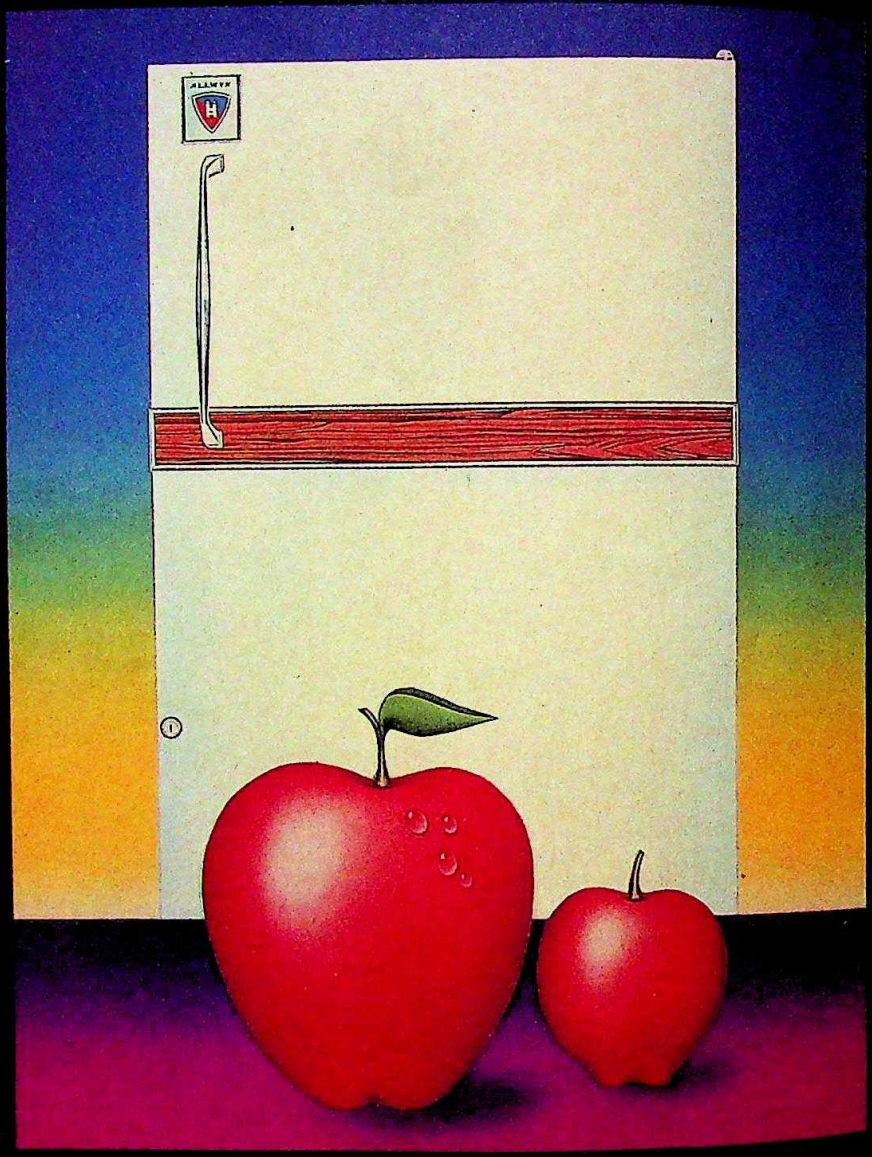

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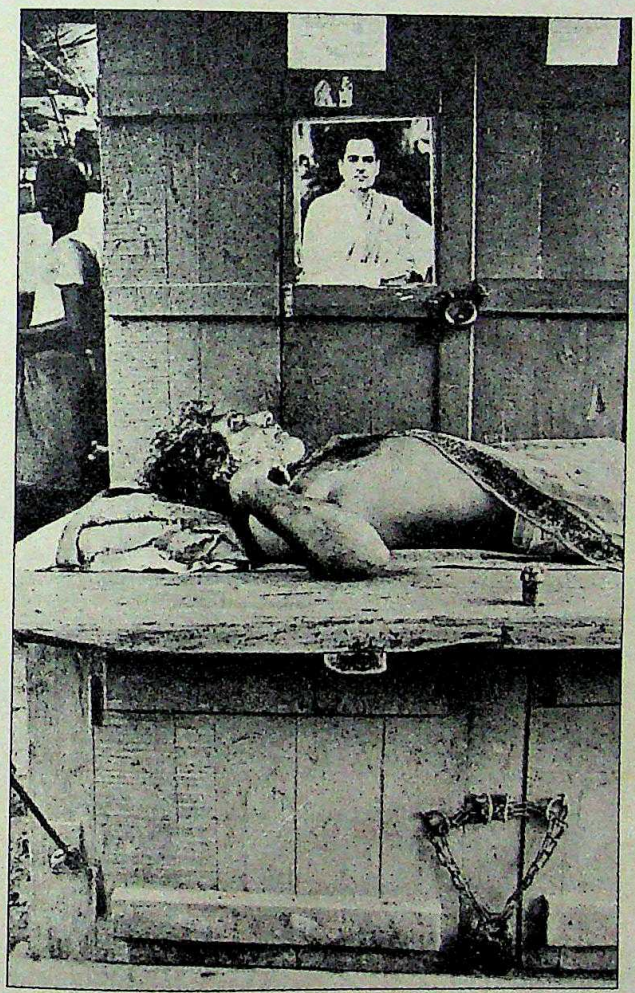
Is Calcutta DYING?

ROBERT Clive, the great empire builder, called it "the most wicked place in the universe" and poet Rudyard Kipling named it the "city of dreadful night". But it was author Geoffrey Moorhouse, who perhaps came closest to the truth. "Very few people have said anything nice about Calcutta," he wrote, "unless they were Bengali." Rajiv Gandhi isn't and his ill-advised remark in Parliament last month in which he called Calcutta a "dying city" triggered off a predictable storm of protest. The issue dominated the West Bengal Assembly for days with Left Front members led by Chief Minister Jyoti Basu demanding a retraction. An opinion poll carried out by *The Telegraph* during the peak of the controversy revealed that 60 per cent of those interviewed felt that Rajiv Gandhi had hurt their feelings and 66 per cent said that the city was definitely not dying.



The reaction was typical. Calcutta, has always attracted extreme opinions. But despite the obvious signs of decay, its inhabitants continue to display a fierce if not irrational, loyalty and pride in the city, specially the Bengalis. Last fortnight, as the sultry claws of summer clutched at the city, Rajiv's words sounded like an epitaph. The frequency of routine power cuts spurted, another half a dozen jute mills downed their shutters, the state Government ran out of money and new appointments were banned; taxis and minibuses went off the roads in protest against the petrol price hike, the municipal corporation declared it did not have enough money to maintain its new civic assets; the telephone authorities announced a whopping 55,000 lines lying 'dead' and said there was no hope of putting the tangle right before two years; and economists spoke of a steady demand recession in Calcutta which made most economic activities unproductive.

A modern-day visitor, if he comes by air, will motor down an expressway that cuts through the erstwhile eastern swamp which Job Charnock some 300 years ago found so impregnable against enemy forays that he located the city near it. The swamps have disappeared alright, giving way to the planned township of Salt Lake, often hailed as the "new Calcutta". Still the expressway leads straight into the jaws of a nightmare that is Calcutta. Across a modern flyover on the defensive canal system that the British had built in the 18th century, the roads are often no wider than by just two traffic lanes, lined with rows upon rows of crumbling stucco houses so weak that a cyclone can raze some of them to the ground. Not a monsoon passes without some of them actually going down.

Chittaranjan Avenue, the main north-central artery built during the '40s (a new road in Calcutta is such a rarity that many citizens still call it the 'new road'), has a bombed-out look reminiscent of the London blitz. It is battered and bruised by a subway system only a quarter of which has been completed in 13 years. The traffic is a maddening medley of trucks, cars, oxcarts, handcarts and 20,000 hand-pulled rickshaws, most of which are unlicensed. The traffic snarl-ups are often two kilometres long and take a whole evening to straighten out. The air has a sinister smell reeking of effluent gases pouring down on the city by convection current. And then the power supply breaks down, plunging large stretches of roads into total darkness and confusion, interrupting students' classwork, factory production even work at doctors' clinics.

Physical impressions confirm the aggregate statistics of squalor, some of which are as follows:

► about two-thirds of the people (population: 10.2 million in greater Calcutta) live in make shift, non-permanent (mud or thatched-roof) buildings;

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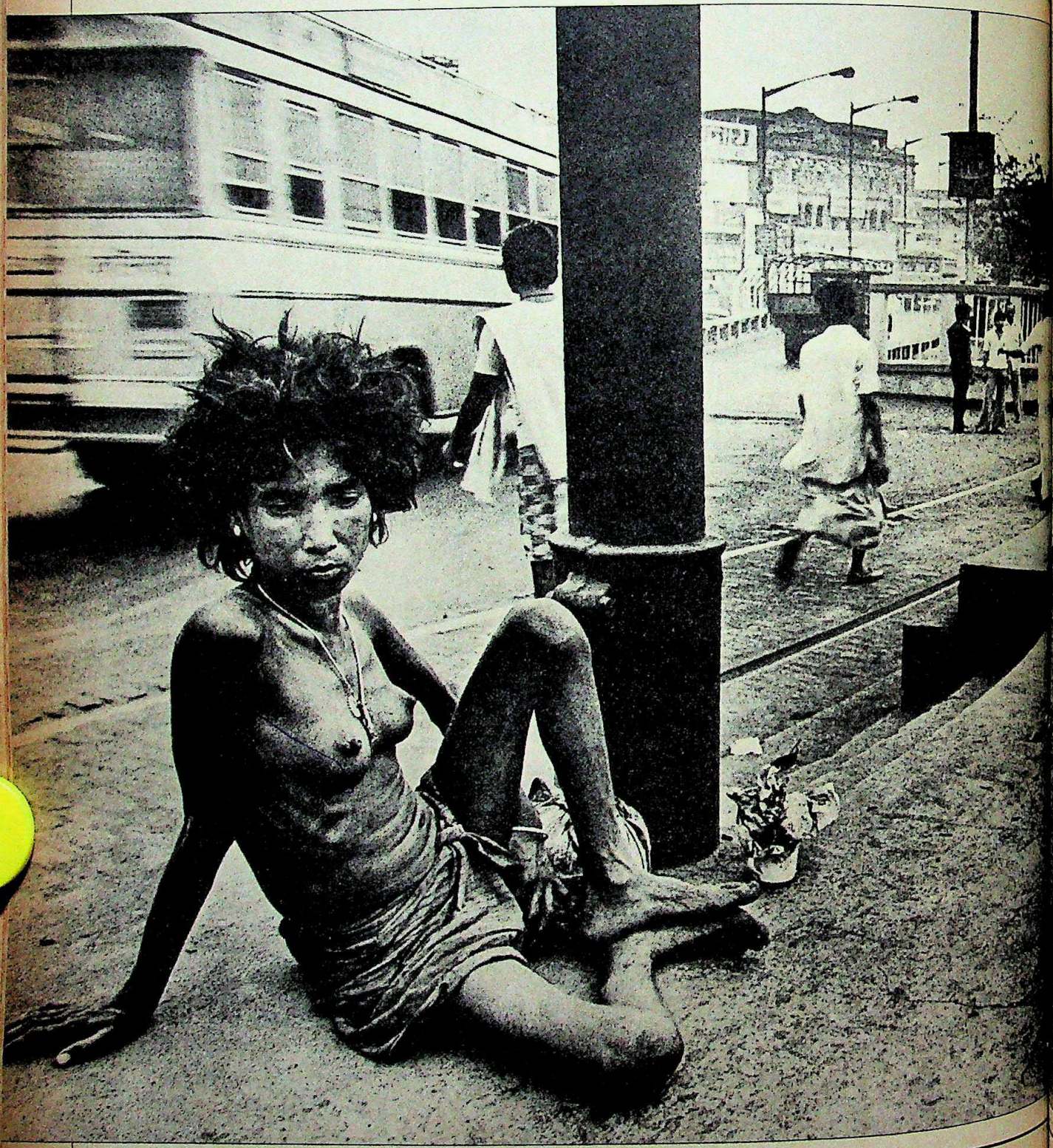
"Chittranjan Avenue has a bombed-out look reminiscent of the London blitz. It is battered and bruised by a subway system only a quarter of which has been completed in 13 years."



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▶ a third of the 3.3 million people living in the core area of the city rough it out in slums with less than 30 sq ft per dweller;

▶ the per capita open space (such as parks) in Calcutta is 21 sq ft against 250 sq ft in London: in more congested localities of the city the area is not even two square feet.

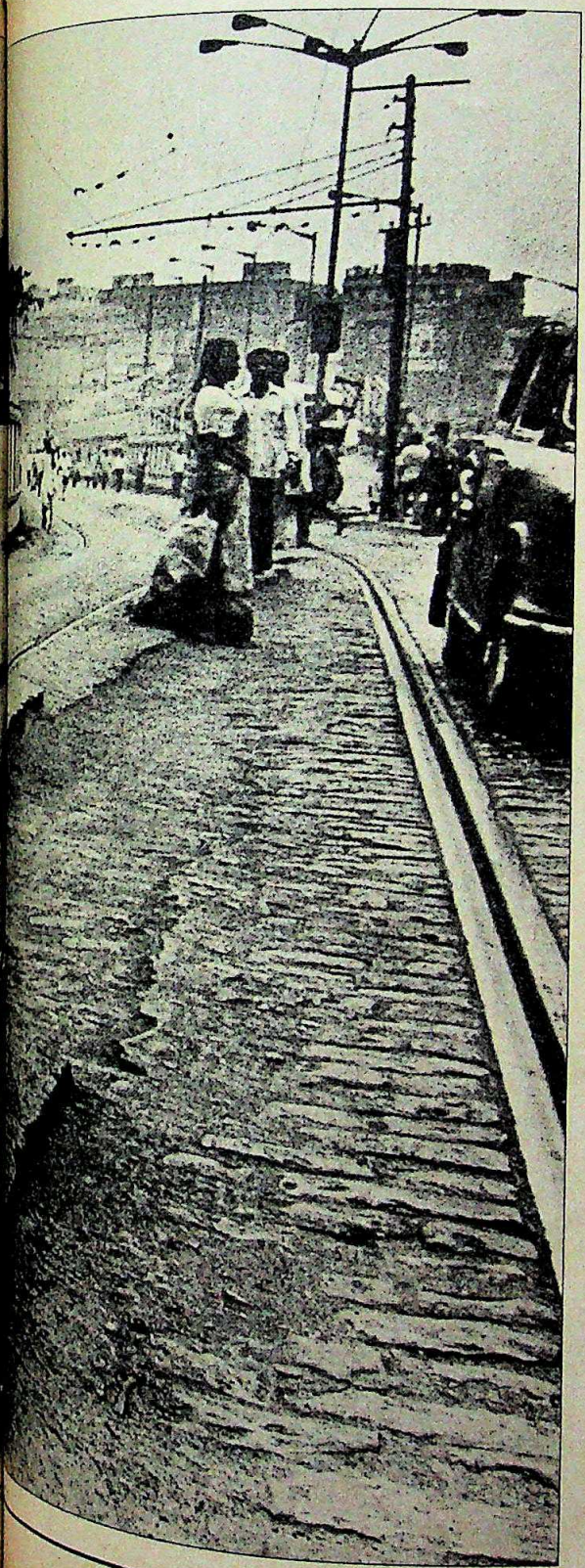
▶ only 6 per cent of Calcutta's area is under roads as against Bombay's 12 per cent and Delhi's 20 per cent;

▶ traffic crawls at an average 8 km per hour, half as fast as in Bombay which has more than thrice Calcutta's 1.9 lakh registered vehicles;

▶ three lakh Calcuttans live, procreate and die on the pavements: some of these pavement dwellers came in as early as the 1914-18 World War but could not make it to a house ever since;

▶ over 7,000 people die in Calcutta every year because of dysentry, diarrhoea, tuberculosis, and respiratory infections—just four broad categories of quality-of-life related diseases; and, worst of all,

▶ the average Calcuttan is getting poorer compared to his counterparts in Bombay and Delhi: with a per capita income of Rs 1,133 (at 1970-71 prices) in greater Calcutta, the average Calcuttan is worse off than a Bombayite by 26 per cent and than a Delhiwalla by 33 per cent.



The undeniable fact, obscured by hyperbole and emotion, is that Calcutta is not just managing to survive at its acknowledged low level of existence: on the contrary, as late British journalist James Cameron had said, "the filth is getting filthier, the squalor more squalid." In the five years beginning from 1983-84, the CMDA will be spending Rs 330 crore—or Rs 60 per resident of greater Calcutta per annum—not to speak of central investment on the metro rail (subway) project and the Rs 140-crore second Hooghly Bridge scheme.

The epitomes of Calcutta's dwindling work ethos are of course the government offices in the city, particularly the Gothic-style Writers' Building with statuary on its top. The Marxist-controlled Employees' Coordination Committee carried on a hectic campaign last year to inculcate a "new work culture" into its followers, urging them —through multi-coloured posters—to leave no work pending, to attend office punctually, and to avoid "idle gossip" during working hours. Result: when the Marxists really began insisting on punctual attendance a large chunk of the employees left them to join the Congress(I)-controlled Employees' Federation. The overriding first impression of the Writers' Building is of ill-lit corridors and grimy cubicles, of vacant chairs because the babus had gone away to attend union meetings, of the smell of egg being fried at over 20 unauthorised canteens one of which is right behind the chief minister's chamber.

Equally dismal are the affairs of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, the venerable civic body established in 1726. The cor-

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"The overriding first impression of the Writers' Building is of ill-lit corridors and grimy cubicles, of vacant chairs because the babus have gone to attend union meetings."

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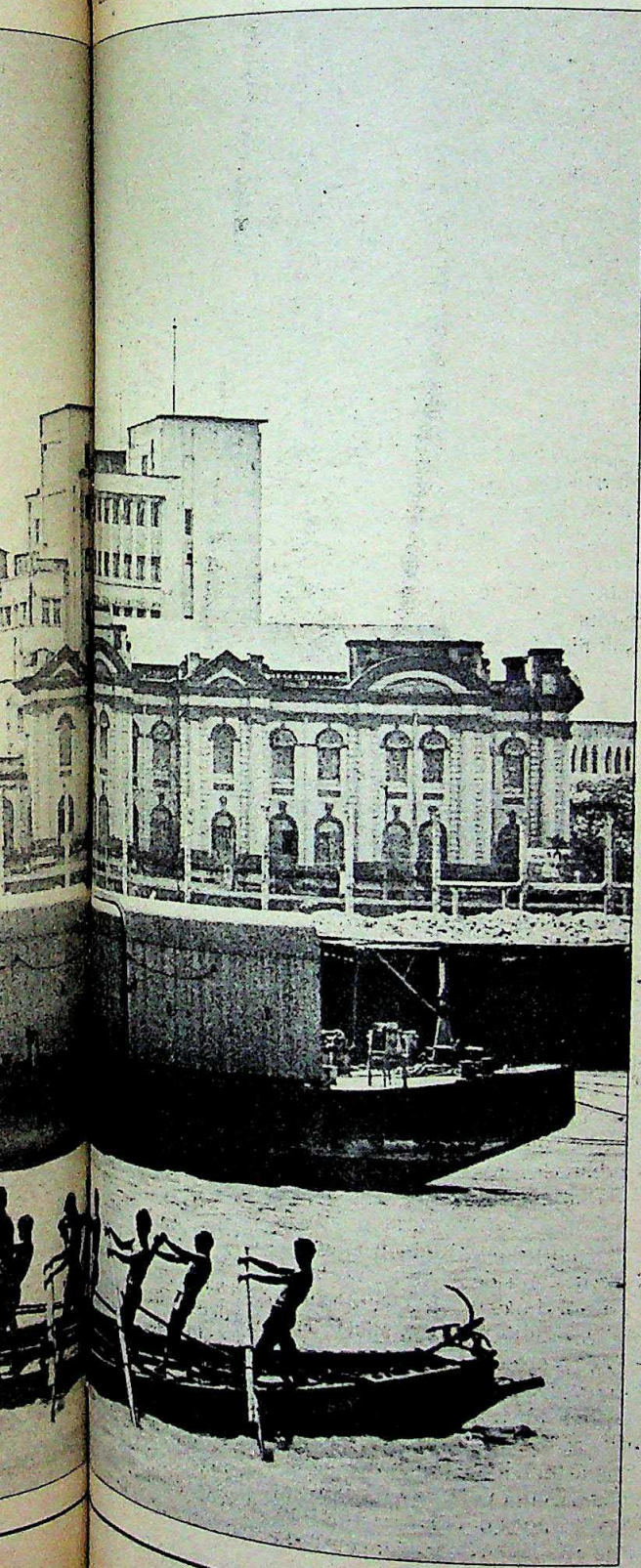
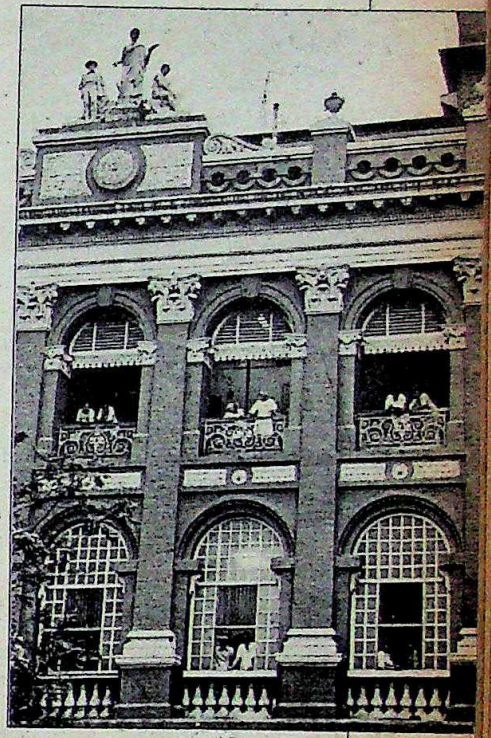
poration's 38,000 employees are organised into a record 120 trade unions and are so legalistic that they cannot be made to do anything beyond the definition of their jobs. So the driver of conservancy trucks would not condescend to check if the tyre pressure is alright; the staff whose job is to collect garbage from the vats would stay idle if the vats had been removed from their places, which is a normal occurrence anyway; the staff at the corporation-controlled crematoria would quietly leave a half-burnt body inside the chamber if load-shedding hours overlap with shift changes, and bereaved family members must wait for men on the next shift to slowly arrive.



Behind Calcutta's urban decay, there is often an overdose of politics and a pathological emphasis on legalism rather than achieving result. The Marxists are not alone to be blamed, for this is a trait that cuts across party lines. The Calcuttan is generally a great scuttler, and more often than not he scuttles his own interest. Thus, the 3,000 illegal cattle-sheds in the city, accounting for a large share of the 2,000 tonnes of daily garbage accretion, cannot be removed (there are 750 court injunctions now) even though the CMDA has spent Rs 10 crore to build alternative sheds. The metro rail project was delayed by over a year because of legal resistance offered by the affected people. The Eastern Bypass cannot be extended to thickly built-up south Calcutta because a dozen villagers whose houses fall along the way have refused handsome compensation offered by the state and the Congress(I) supports them to the hilt.



But the installation of the Left Front Government in 1977, and the two earlier United Front regimes between 1967 and 1970, clearly gave an official seal on over-righteousness and inactivity. "The work-force in Calcutta is not just militant," says Shyamal Mitra, owner of Nalanda Press which is locked up now, "but also unwilling to work: in my line, for a rupee spent on labour in Calcutta, you get an output which is at least 30 per cent less than in Delhi." Hundreds of small entrepreneurs like Mitra are bitter. But the big-time industrialists are simply withdrawing their investments and future plans from Calcutta without getting drawn into an overt confrontation with the state Government. And many of them privately allege that it is the lackadaisical labour, and the "institutional encouragement" provided to such indolence, that shaped their decisions.

The Birlas, for instance, have not set up any project in or around Calcutta since the Hindustan Motors went into production in 1953. Nor have the Goenkas of the Duncan group made any worthwhile investment in greater Calcutta in the past three decades. The children of the top industrial families of the city are gradually shifting to greener pastures in Bombay. Ashok and Aditya, two of the later generation Birlas, have made Bombay their home base. R.P. Goenka, the wealthiest member of the Duncan family, formally shifted his residence to Bombay last year. The palatial homes of the Calcutta businessmen, occupying huge tracts of land in some of the city's prime areas, are now a grim reminder of Calcutta's past glory as the nation's foremost financial centre.

With investors leaving, jobs have to follow suit. In the

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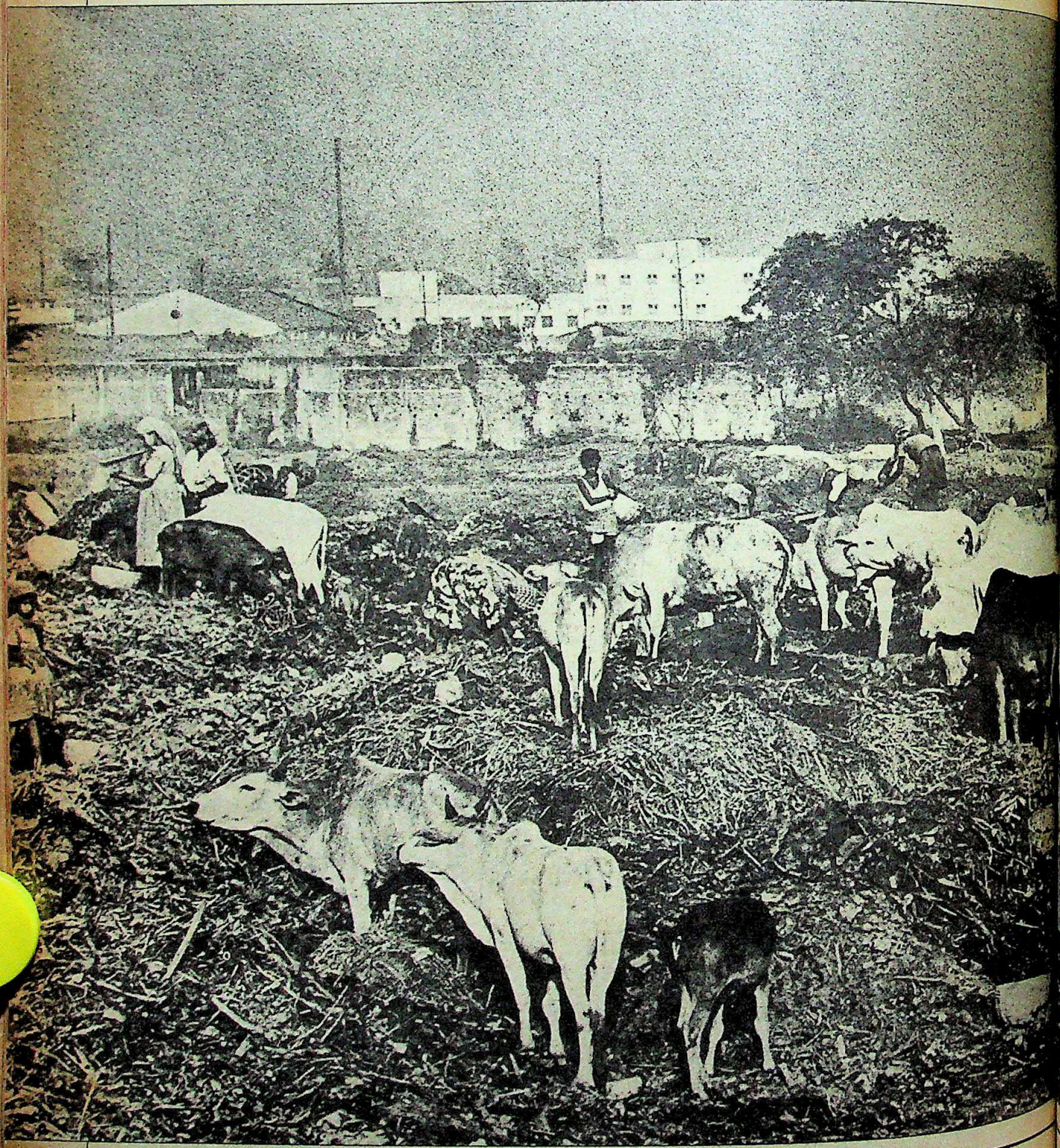

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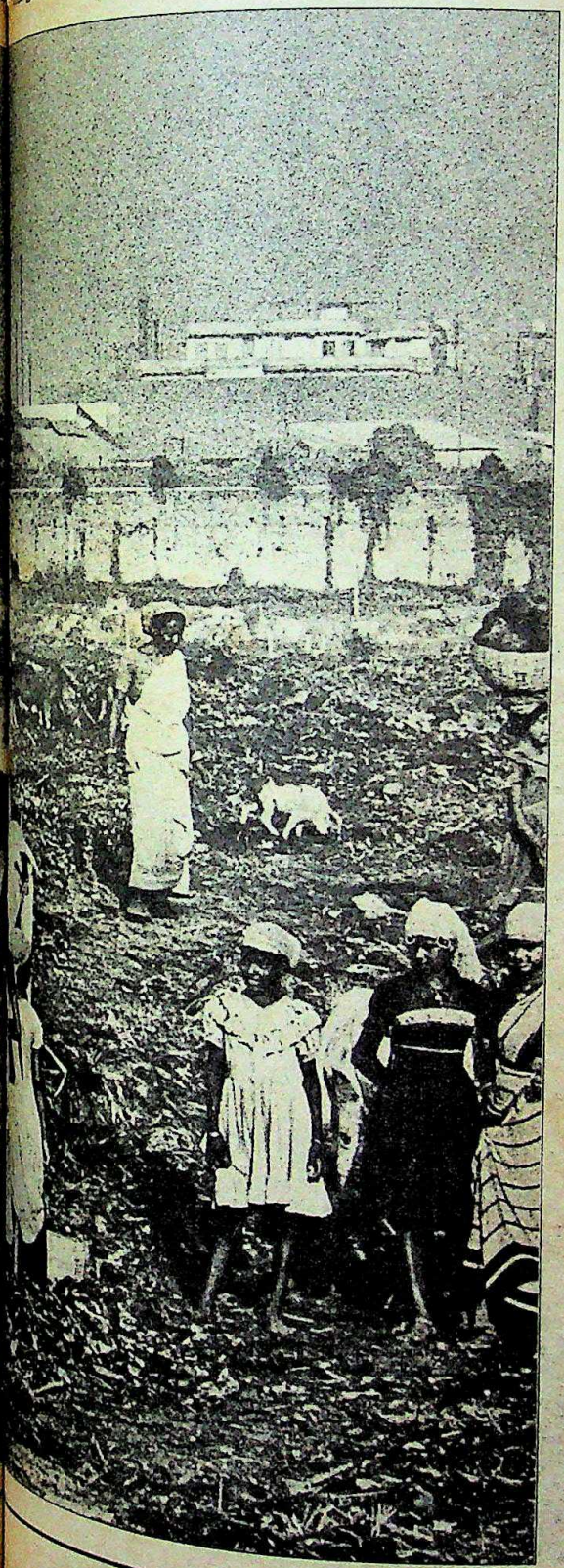
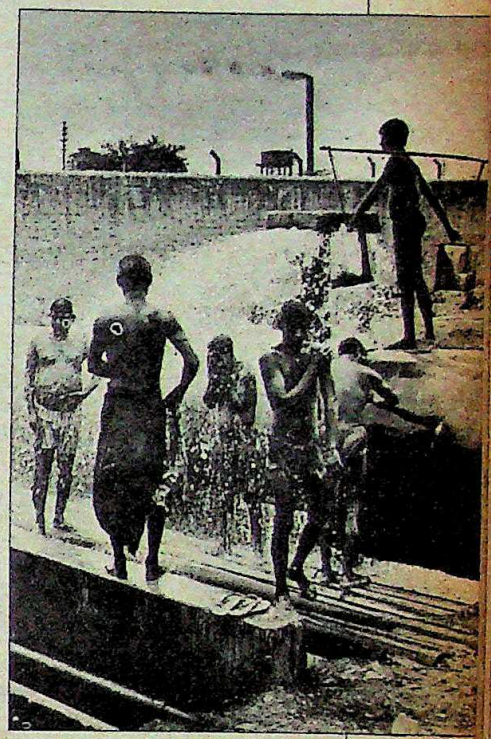
decade between 1961 and 1971, only two lakh new jobs were created in greater Calcutta even though population grew by 24 per cent to seven million. In the next 10 years, two-and-a-half lakh new jobs came up when population rose by another two million. Says Soumitra Chowdhury, a commerce graduate who has got his name registered with the employment exchange in Calcutta but has not found a job after a full year's wait: "The only job that I was offered in the past six months was that of a postal peon. My father was a lawyer. I don't want to be a peon. I must be at least a clerk. No matter what the salary is. At least a clerk." So, there is an element of self-esteem also that stands in the way of the impoverished Bengali Calcuttan taking up any job. In 1981, only 8.62 per cent of the clerical posts in Calcutta were held by non-Bengalis whereas their share of menial jobs was as high as 63.5 per cent.





In fact, the 'true blue' Calcutta Bengalis, who constitute nearly three-fourths of the population of greater Calcutta (two-thirds of the population of the core city), are caught in a cleft stick: the labour market is dominated by the upcountry labourers whereas the money market is controlled by non-Bengali traders, mainly the Marwaris. And all communities have given back to the city much less than what they have taken away.

If Bombay is a city built on the munificence of its Parsi community, Calcutta is singularly unlucky in being deprived of the generosity of its settlers. The 82 bathing steps on the river bank, the first palaces, the first parks, the early roads—they were all built by Bengali businessmen and landlords whose affluence waned with the loss of East Bengal, the main source of their earnings. As the non-Bengali traders took over the city's and the state's, economic levers, their citadel Burrabazar, turned into one of the world's most congested 'business ghetto', with five lakh people stuffed into a bare 3.5 square kilometre area. Burrabazar pays 60 per cent of the city's sales tax revenue, but it is also the biggest drag on the city's civic resources. Says Rajesh Khaitan, MLA from Burrabazar: "The only remedy left is for the state Government to close down Burrabazar and provide alternative site to the traders."

But Calcutta is also used, and abused, by the migratory and settled labour force, and by the estimated one million commuters who descend on the city every morning to work—in buses and trains that run jam-packed. There are also the thousands who flock into Calcutta lured by the city lights. Says Dipak Rudra, the scholarly secretary in the transport department: "What has really happened is that the city has passed into the grip of users, people who extract a lot from Calcutta but do not give back anything." The user's mentality spreads to every class of Calcuttan, including those who reside in the city.

Instead of ensuring a better management for Calcutta proper, the ruling Left Front is merely diluting the much-needed funds for the city's development by annexing into the area of Calcutta's urban agglomeration, called Calcutta Metropolitan District (CMD), more and more semi-urban municipal towns. The present CMD now includes 34 municipalities, three corporations, two notified areas and 182 *anchals*: some of them are 45 km away from the city proper. Funds for Calcutta's deve-

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"The true blue Calcutta Bengalis are caught in a cleft stick; the labour market is dominated by upcountry labourers whereas the money market is controlled by non-Bengali traders."

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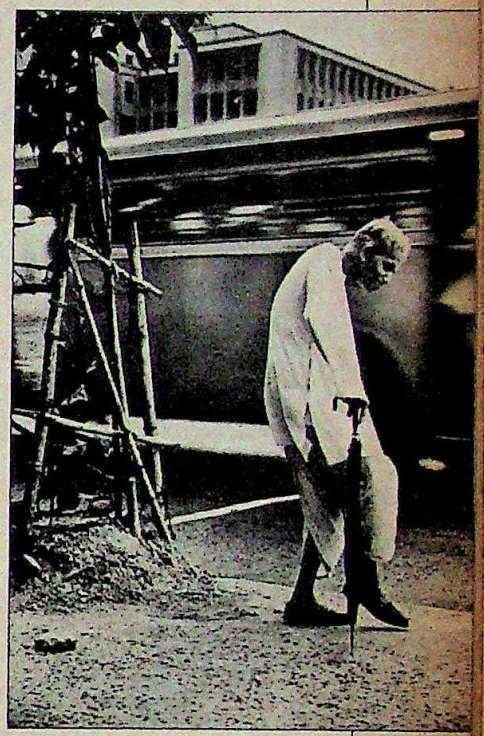
development are being systematically drained away to these small towns. The per capita planned outlay for Calcutta, which was Rs 61.54 in 1976-77, dropped to Rs 59.53 in 1980-81, but the figure for the CMDA local bodies other than Calcutta and Howrah was raised from Rs 19.88 to Rs 30.40 during the same period.

The Marxists also do not want to remove the slums, either by force or by allowing the market forces to have a free play. "It is inhuman to remove the slum dwellers by force," says Ashim Dasgupta, member of the state planning board and a Marxist economist who wields considerable influence in the Government. Only a half of the slums, where one-third Calcuttans live, have been 'improved' so far with community toilets, metal roads, electric lights and better roofing. But the improvement work mostly is a waste and the slums regain their original griminess in one or two years because the CMDA spends a meagre 5 per cent of its budget on the maintenance of assets created by it. Nor has the state Government any worthwhile scheme to resettle the slum-dwellers in cheap houses: the state housing board makes, and sells, flats worth Rs 3 lakh each but earmarks only 0.7 per cent of its funds for houses in the lowest category of income.



The CMDA's efforts have merely patched some of the gaping wounds in the city's civic fabric by adding new water treatment plant, roads, bridges, sewer and water supply system. But Lina Chakravarty, chief executive of the CMDA, admits: "We have checked further deterioration of the city to some extent but in essence most of our work has been a holding operation." The CMDA received capital assistance worth Rs 120 crore from World Bank till 1983-84, but is now receiving around Rs 160 crore from the bank for projects that will continue for another five years. A bulk of the funds is spent on capital cost, and maintenance is neglected because the municipal bodies, as well as Calcutta Corporation, cannot generate enough revenue for development.

The Left Front is also quite unable to take hard decisions and make the city's users pay enough to keep the civic bodies out of the red. In Bombay, for instance, building owners pay at rates ranging from 66 per cent to 82 per cent of the rateable (or assessed) value of their houses every year as property taxes. But in Calcutta the property taxes are only 40 per cent in the highest slab—unlike in Bombay, where all buildings are taxed, small dwellings are entirely exempt from property taxes. Sur says even his attempt to instal water metres at homes were thwarted by angry rate payers "who demand everything free". Says Dhruba Narayan Bannerjee, special secretary in the Urban Affairs Department: "Unbalanced city growth is continuing because old building bye-laws continue to be the basis for giving sanctions to building plans."

Jogendra Chowdhury, a Calcutta gynaecologist who had made common cause with a group of citizens and tried last year to stall the construction of an unauthorised building, gave vent to his bitter realisation. Said Chowdhury: "I am alarmed by the kind of city my children and grandchildren are going to inherit. In Calcutta the state has no authority, and the city's entire skyline is illegal—a graphic testament to the helplessness of

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"The poorest classes and the rooted middle class is getting increasingly debased, de-cultured and despondent as opportunities shrink, jobs become scarce and life gets harder."

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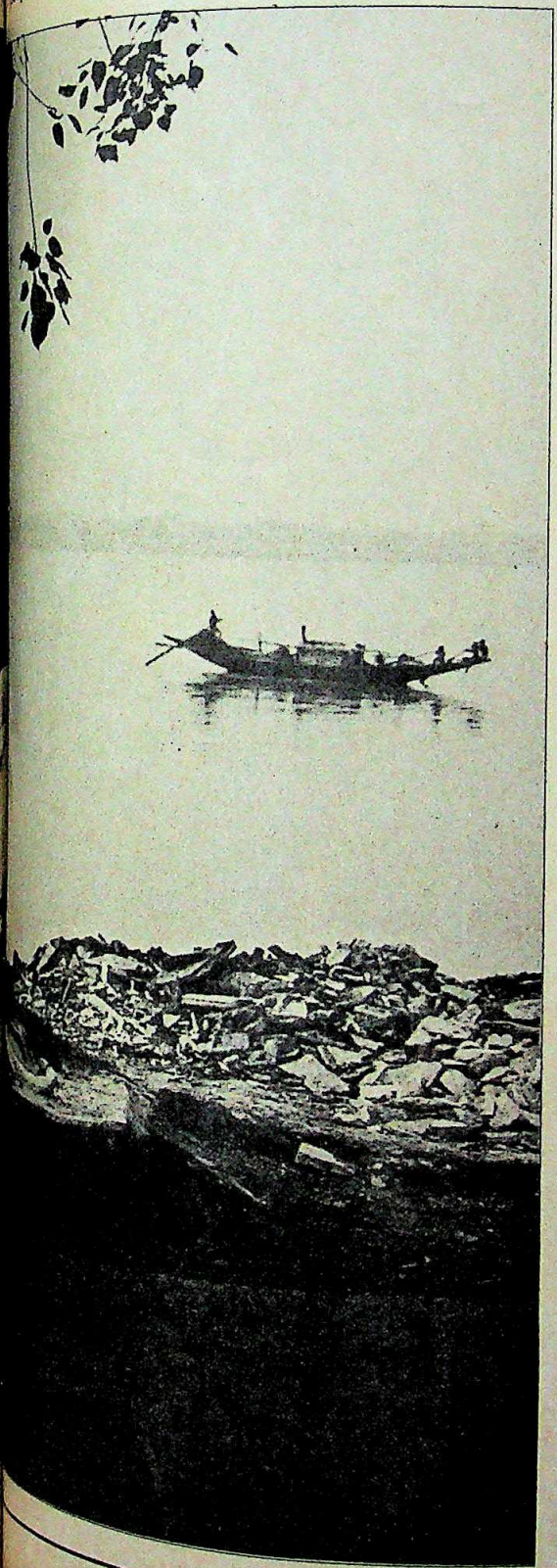
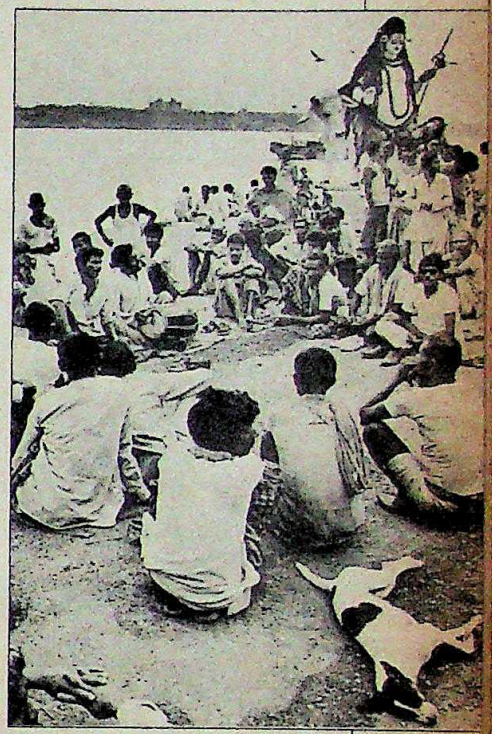
the state." The corporation has only 20 staff to check against unauthorised construction, and the standard practice of the city's buccaneering builders is to build regardless, then to secure stay order against demolition, and finally to settle for a compensation. "A sense of cynicism has set in among the people of Calcutta," says Rusi Modi, chairman of the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO), "and most people have lost the sense of consideration for the society."



The apathy of the Calcuttan to his lot is phenomenal; the level of his tolerance is mind-boggling. Says a Bengali television-manufacturer: "I have made repeated efforts to get industrialists in my area to pool funds and set up a captive power plant because the state sector will never be able to meet the demand. But my neighbours would rather suffer in silence than get together and do something." The couldn't-care-less syndrome percolates down to the lowest level. At the Dhakuria lakes overlooking the expensive high-rise buildings of Southern Avenue, pavement dwellers defecate on the open street. The ghastly sight in the morning is tolerated by citizens without even a mild frown. Nobody bats an eyelid when heavy-duty trucks enter prohibited roads upon paying a small bribe to the smiling policeman.



The inveterate Calcuttan says he is still happy, a fact borne out by *The Telegraph*'s opinion poll. For old-timers, Calcutta still evokes the memory of the pre-Partition days when the city was graceful, there was a grandeur in the tree-lined quiet European quarters of the city and the emerald green of the maidans, and the riverbank—still uncluttered by the cars of the *nouveau riche*—invested with a sense of mystery. Recalls industrialist Basant Kumar Birla: "Calcutta was not just neat and clean when I was young, it was actually beautiful. During December people from all over the country would converge here for polo tournaments, the races, the tennis matches and social events. Calcutta was right on top."

To others, Calcutta seems preferable for the intimate social ties that bind its citizens together; these ties do not exist in any other Indian metropolis. Says Manjira Bhattacharjee, a young housewife who is studying dentistry and wants to set up practice at her home in Calcutta: "I won't leave Calcutta even if someone offers me a big bungalow in Delhi or Bombay and two big cars. I know everyone in my neighbourhood and everyone knows me. We stand by each other when need arises. Tell me in which city people of a neighbourhood live like one family?" The Calcuttan grumbles, but does not think of leaving his city. And the attachment can be hardly necrophilic.

The Calcuttan makes up for his materialist lethargy with a degree of cerebration that one seldom comes across at any other Indian metropolis. Earlier this year, Calcutta hosted a festival of poetry which was attended by over one lakh people. The Calcutta Book Fair is the largest book fair in India. Relying on meagre resources, often saved from tiffin allowances, the city's unflappable literary enthusiasts brought out 732 literary magazines last year with their pages devoted neither to advertisements nor to detective stories and soft porn but pure literature, though of varying quality. In the past 30 years, the President's

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"The average Calcuttan is getting poorer. He is worse off than a Bombayite by 26 per cent and than a Delhiwalla by 33 per cent."

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Gold Medal has been bagged by 15 Bengali films made in Calcutta. It is a city whose legends are not building speculators or industrialists but men like Rabindranath Tagore, stage actor Utpal Dutt, painter Abaninanath or film maker Satyajit Ray. Says Ain Rashid Khan, police officer and maker of a well-acclaimed documentary film: "It speaks volumes for the city

that a film like Ray's *Ghare-Baire*...as complex and as devoid of cheap popular frills...can run in many theatres of Calcutta straight into what looks like a sure jubilee."

Many of the city's countless anonymous poets and unsung stage actors are holders of small jobs in obscure offices who sweat it out in public vehicles through choked streets to attend the literary *addas* (an untranslatable Bengali word, half way between a gossip circle and a discourse) or the evening theatre rehearsals. The fabled Uttam Kumar, Bengal's last matinee idol, was one such 'amateur actor' who acted after work as clerk at the Port Commissioners.

The intense cultural life of the city, the shared respect for lasting values in life and the arts, and a sense of togetherness —these are the underlying reasons that induce the Calcuttan to tolerate the squalor of Calcutta. "We grumble, we don't explode," says biochemist Indu Bhushan Chatterjee who would turn down offers of jobs abroad to stay back in the city and teach at the politics-ridden Calcutta University.

But hard physical and economic realities have begun to militate against the Calcuttan's acknowledged complacence about his city. Its cultural richness has been a product of its early economic growth, of European influences cross-fertilising local culture along the route of trade, commerce and conquest. But now the Bengali mind, though still productive, is tending to contract inwards into a provincial cocoon. The most visible manifestation of this regression is a failure to adopt new technology, to ingest new ideas and to rekindle the traditional Bengali spirit—that of rebellion. The Naxalite violence of 1970-71, in which over 1,000 people were slain on Calcutta streets purely because they chose to defend their ideas, are a matter of the past now. The quality of the city's politics has become staid, mediocre and marked by self-interest rather than passion.

And the city's economic importance is constantly ebbing away. Partition robbed it of a vast hinterland of 50 million in East Bengal. The percentage share of cargo handled at Calcutta port over the entire nation's was 43.29 per cent in 1947: it plummeted to a measly 10.9 per cent in 1981. A favourite among foreigners visiting India till the '50s, Calcutta is today avoided by the international tour groups as wormwood. In 1983, Delhi received 3.11 lakh foreign tourists, Bombay was visited by 3.35 lakh, even Madras by 78,000—but Calcutta was the destination of just 33,827 foreign visitors, mostly Bangladeshis. Says Nitish Sengupta, director-general of tourism in the Union Gov-

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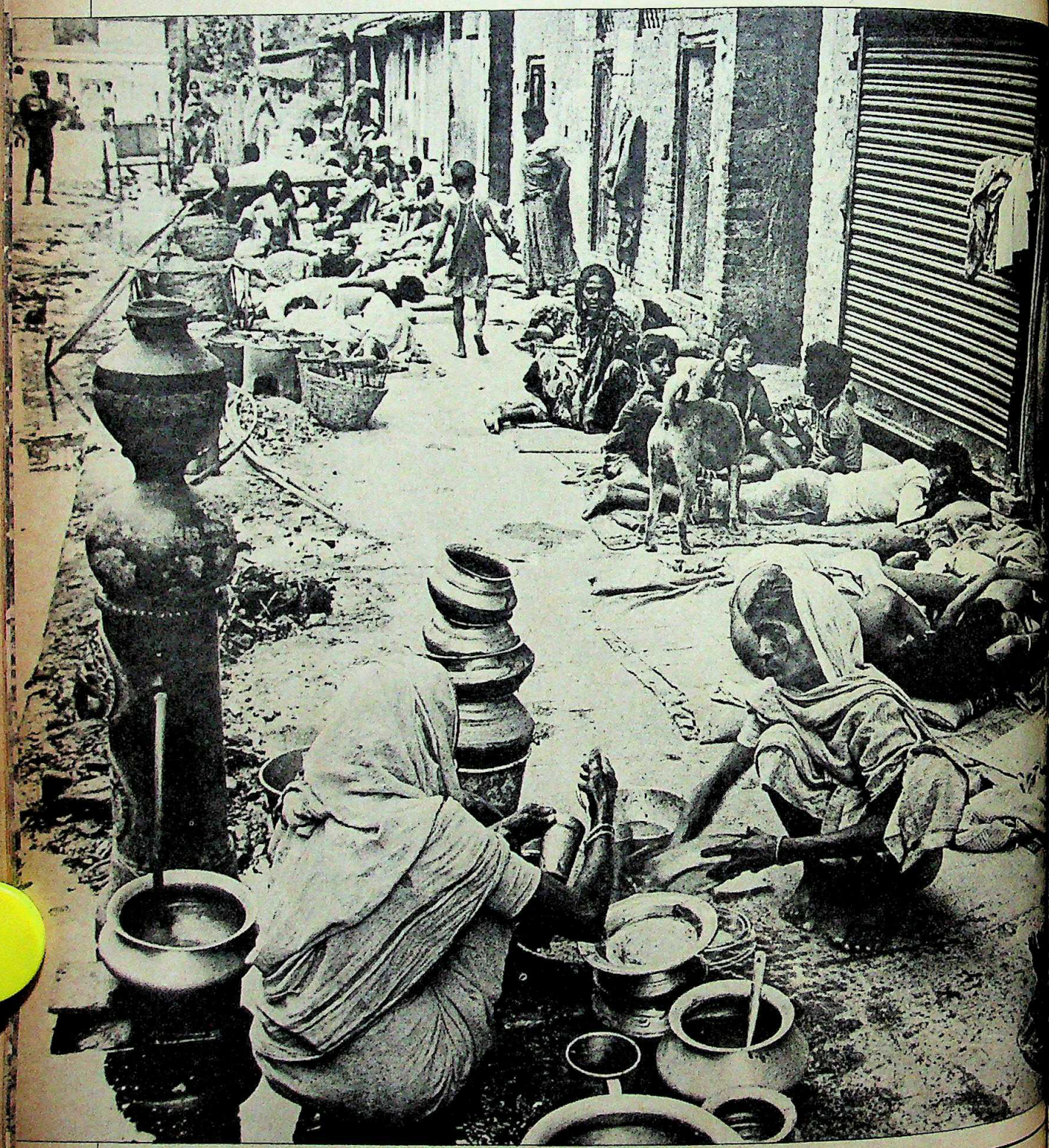
"About two-thirds of the people in greater Calcutta live in non-permanent buildings. A third of the 3.3 million people living in the core area of the city rough it out in slums."



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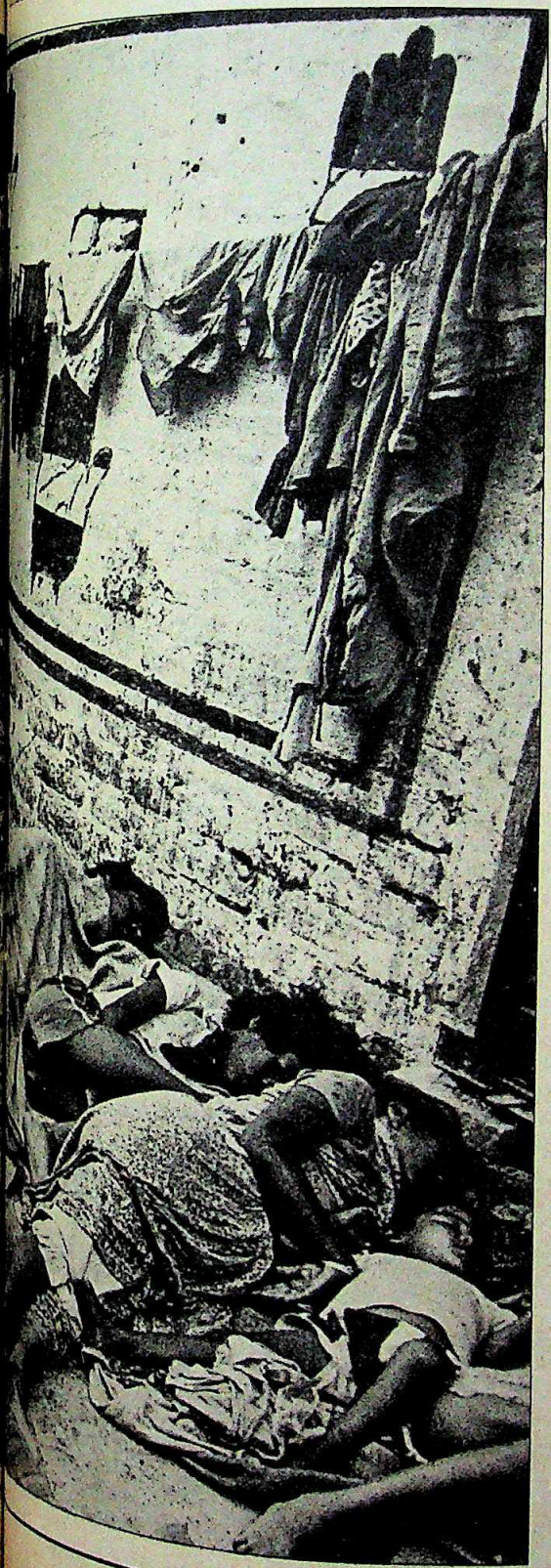
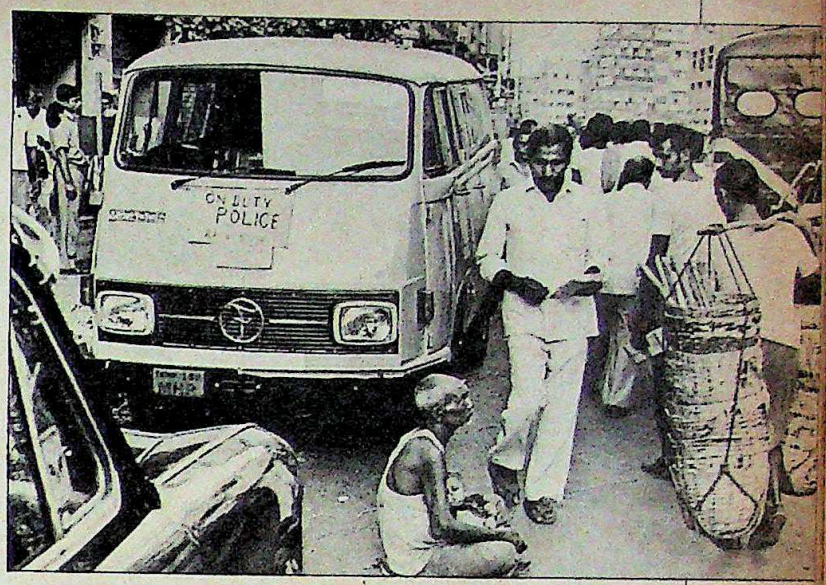
ernment who is himself a Calcuttan: "It has become impossible to sell Calcutta as a destination to foreigners. They are simply not interested."

The Left Front charges that it is in fact the Congress that is solely responsible for Calcutta's, and West Bengal's, suffering. Even Birla feels the same way. Says he:





"The Government of India's attitude to West Bengal has never been friendly." The Marxists harp on two facts: the freight equalisation policy of the Centre by which raw materials produced in Bengal and the eastern region are sold in the farthest corner of the country at the same price but the produces of other regions, such as cotton yarn, became dearer in the east; and industrial policy of the Centre which disfavoured core sector investment in West Bengal after the '50s. Nirmal Bose, the state industry minister, points out the fact that Dankuni Coal Gas complex, the first major Central industrial investment in the city's environs in recent times, was gifted by the Janata government. Added to that was the problem of refugees who had not been settled even 38 years after the Partition. Prasanta Sur, who came to political limelight organising East Bengal refugees, says: "The 4.75 million refugees from West Pakistan could be settled by the Congress Government by 1955-56; but the 4.9 million refugees from East Pakistan—whose unofficial number may be seven million—are not yet settled. The Congress is biased against Bengalis."

There may be an overdose of ire in Sur's remarks, but Calcutta still carries five lakh refugees who lead a sub human existence in suburban slums. Their progeny have mingled with the ranks of the urban poor and the impoverished middle class to provide an underpinning of violence and lawlessness to life in the city. Like ants from under the woodwork, they often come out in the open. And then occur the mindless murders, the stabbings for petty gains, the sudden orgies of violence. It is the pent up fury of the underdogs that sporadically cast on the city the shadow of an urban apocalypse.

It is this 'other Calcutta' that lives in the decaying houses of the old city and the suburbs, or in the slums that pervade 97 of the core area's 100 wards. They comprise a brotherhood of the poorest classes and the rooted middle class which is getting increasingly debased, de-cultured and despondent as opportunities shrink, jobs become scarce and life gets harder. On the other side of the fence lie the Edwardian mansions of Alipore, the expensive flats, the Honda generators that beat the load-shedding, the sweet security of the beautiful country club at Tollygunje, the pony races and the card games and the Christmas parties by the Hooghly. Like what the most determined detractor of Calcutta, Kipling, had prophesied, in a different context though, the twain shall not meet.

—SUMIT MITRA with INDRANIL BANERJIE

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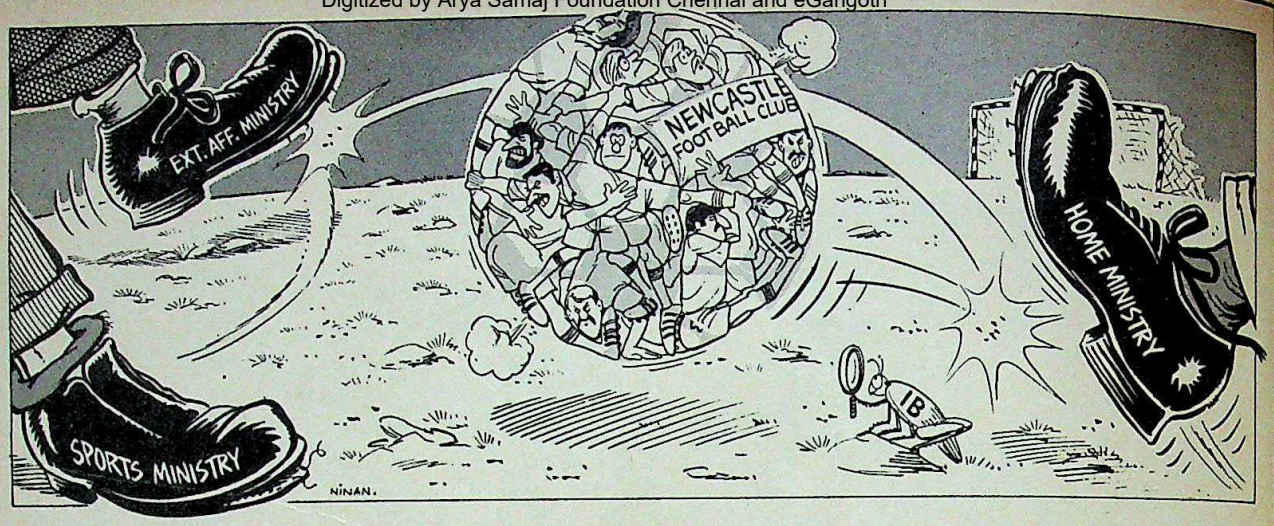

FOOTBALL

Off Side

IT WAS billed as the start of a sports exchange programme between India and Britain but instead turned out to be an embarrassing fiasco. Last fortnight, the team of young footballers from a community relations club in Newcastle-upon-Tyne returned home without setting foot on the playing field. Rather, they were lobbed from one place to another, shadowed by Intelligence Bureau (IB) sleuths and ensnarled in messy bureaucratic red tape.

As usual, there are conflicting versions of what exactly happened and why. The team members say they arrived in New Delhi but there was nobody to receive them. They made their own way to the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium where they were housed for two days before being evicted and informed that the tour was off. With no matches to play and nowhere to go, the footballers arrived at the British High Commission where they were put up before finally winging their weary way homewards, fuming at the shabby treatment meted out to them.

The Sports Ministry, on the other hand, claims that the team was informed that the tour had been called off. But the real cause of the fiasco was obviously the security aspect arising out of the team's composition—six of the players were Sikhs of Indian origin while five were Pakistani. "We were not given an official reason but we assume that being Sikhs and Muslims we were considered a security risk," says Birender Brar, 24, the captain of the team. Major General Narinder Singh, director-general of Sports Authority of India (SAI), told the team that it would be impossible to guarantee their safety and if anything happened it could create an "international incident".

That there was a security angle to the messy affair was indicated by the presence of IB sleuths shadowing the team during their stay in Delhi. But instead of quietly deporting them, the Home Ministry allowed the team to stay on as tourists and even travel around the country. Some visited Punjab while others went to Jaipur and Agra.

Meanwhile, the various ministries involved played their own game of buck passing. When the British deputy high commissioner approached the Ministry of External Affairs he was politely told that there was an "internal problem". Earlier, when SAI contacted the Ministry of External Affairs, they were told that having arrived, the team should be allowed to play football. A joint secretary wrote to SAI that it would be "inelegant" to bundle the players back to Britain as it could result in "avoidable adverse publicity", advice that apparently went unheeded. The Home Ministry, on the other hand, also informed SAI that it had no objection to the tour if the Sports Ministry made an official request. The fact that the Sports Ministry never did make the request would indicate that there were differences in the ministry regarding the tour.

Minister of State for Sports, R.K. Jaichandra Singh, insisted the team had been informed that their tour had been called off. "I don't know why they had to come in spite of the fact that they were told not to come." He said the tour "would not have served much of a purpose on the football front as these persons were mainly of Asian stock. Asians are not very good in football". Singh said he would have been interested in a professional team, even a 4th division team in the British League. He claimed not to know anything about the security aspect.

Officials in the FAI say there was a security angle which concerned not the Sikhs on the team but the five players of Pakistani origin. They claimed that after clearing the tour on paper Foreign Ministry officials had unofficially advised the SAI to postpone the matches because the Pakistanis could be in danger in view of the recent communal riots in Hyderabad and Ahmedabad.

Whatever the reason, the players returned home thinking their colour and nationality had made them unwelcome. "The ironic thing is that they knew we were a multi-racial team but here (in India) they expected a wholly British team. Colonel A.B. Masih, deputy military advisor of the Indian High Commission in London came up to Newcastle to find out about us. He knew most of us were Indians. If we were Khalistanis why were visas given to us?" asked Kamaljit Singh Kundi, 24, a team member. "We have no political affiliation at all. All we wanted to do was to come and play football in India to show how multi-cultural people get on in England." But here they found themselves caught in a multi-ministry tangle. Soured by this experience at least some of the Indian passport holders planned to change their passports into British, said Brar and Kundi. One person who will definitely hear from the team is Colonel Masih. "When we get back we are going to send him a bill for the money we spent on his hotel and food bills when he visited Newcastle," snorted an angry Kundi.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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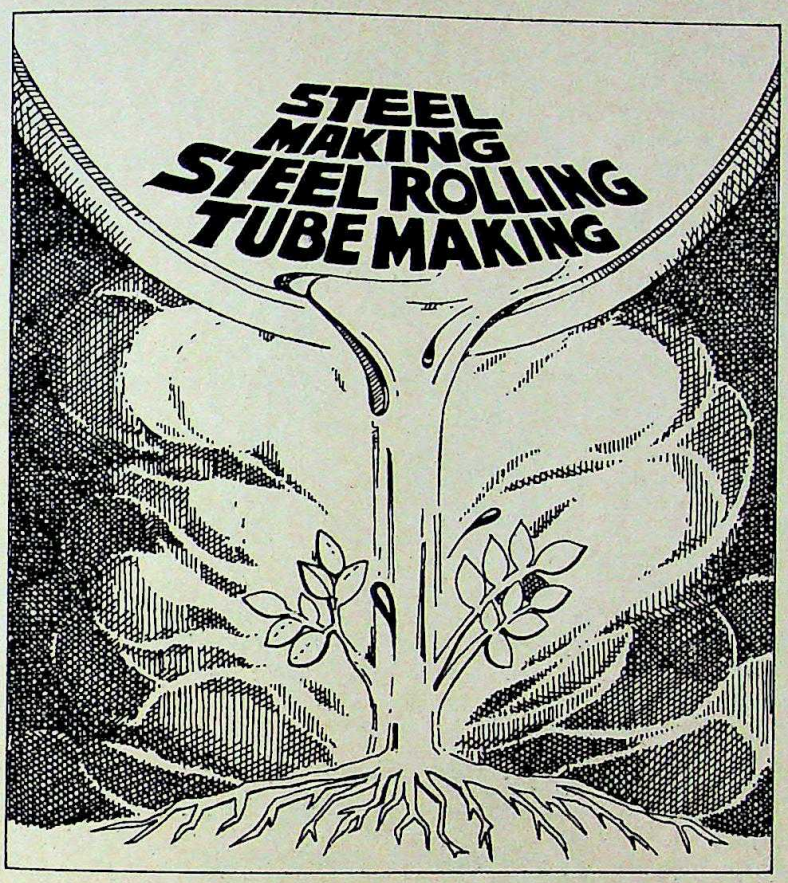

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BIHAR UNIVERSITY

Lessons of the Past

POLITICIANS in Bihar have long been notorious for meddling with higher education.Rules have been changed and appointments made under their pressure—all under the ruse of "creating a better academic climate". So it was that a major decision taken last month by the new Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey was warmly welcomed by the state's academic community.

Dubey told vice-chancellors and officials of the Education Department that even though there was an ordinance permitting vice-chancellors to appoint teachers on an ad hoc basis, no such appointments would be allowed by the new state Government which would set up a university service commission before the next academic session began in July. "This government," echoed Education Minister Uma Pandey, "will not tolerate any sort of ad hocism."

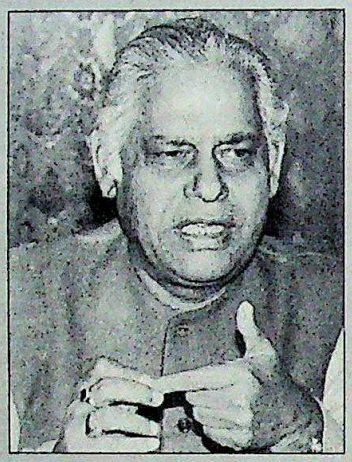
The chief minister's announcement has, in one stroke, nullified February's controversial ordinance initiated by the then education minister Nagendra Jha. Jha had described the move as a "boon" for those who had been kept waiting for appointments and promotions.

Dubey's pronouncement has been welcomed by the state's two major associations of university teachers, the Federation of University Teachers' Association of Bihar (FUTAB) and the Federation of University (Service) Teachers' Association of Bihar. FUTAB Joint Secretary Ekram Shabnam explained that following the February 5 ordinance ad hoc appointments were made indiscriminately, without any consideration for merit.

Shabnam revealed that at least two vice-chancellors had told him that the number of recommendations from political higher-ups exceeded the vacancies. Most vice-chancellors, said Shabnam, were only too willing to please their political masters with at least one vice-chancellor—of Magadh University in Bodh Gaya—showing such unseemly hurry to exercise his powers that the university had advertised vacancies on January 29, even before the ordinance had been promulgated!

This short period has not been the only time that university bosses have tried to convert the appointment of lecturers into a profitable "business". Till 1981 vice-chancellors were empowered to make ad hoc appointments for six months during which they were to be ratified by the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC). This continued virtually till March 1983, proved to be a bonanza for wheeler-dealers in education.

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



Dubey announced that though there was an ordinance permitting VC's to appoint teachers on an ad hoc basis, no such appointments would now be allowed.

A 1983 report by a university inquiry committee headed by Dr V.S. Jha, former director at the Commonwealth Education Liaison Unit (London) had cited several cases. The vice-chancellor of Bihar University, a close associate of the then chief minister Jagannath Mishra, had shown unseemly haste in promoting as many as 967 lecturers to readers in a period of theee months. "Surely it was not for nothing that the vice-chancellor went out of his way to grant favours," the report had commented.

In another case, the Jha report pointed out, a vice-chancellor who was a reader previously and who had been elevated on caste considerations had unabashedly appointed himself and his friends as professors.

Jha's report, had examined in detail what he called an "ingenious move to inject into university service, through the backdoor, lecturers whose professional competence has never been tested nor is likely to be tested". These appointments, mostly made by friends and relations, were in "hastily created" colleges set up by politicians whom Jha had described as "entrepreneurs". Nearly 7,000 such appointments were made, leading Jha to conclude: "Starting a college is a gainful business, provided you are a political boss or public nuisance."

Amid mounting public criticism the then Mishra government took the discretionary power away from the vice-chancellors and issued an ordinance providing for written tests for appointment of lecturers by the BPSC with effect from March 1983. However, before the BPSC, which is notorious for "selling" posts, could work out the details, the Mishra government went out of power.

In the intervening 20 months another problem has been created for the Dubey government to deal with: due to a liberal policy on promotions as many as 3,000 posts have fallen vacant in Bihar's universities.

Can the Government meet the three-month deadline? Uma Pandey is certain it can but the others are not so optimistic. Leading educationist, Dr Ramjee Prasad Singh, head of the Education Department of Patna University, points out that all governments had made similar commitments to carry out a thorough overhaul but all that resulted was chaos and confusion.

Patna today is a witness to the sagacity of Dr Singh's observation. The Jha commission had also pointed out that political bosses used to apply pressure to get "substandard" private colleges converted into constituent ones. Their success then still spawns hopes. Teachers, students and non-teaching staff of affiliated colleges are on a relay hunger strike near the Bihar secretariat since February 16 to demand conversion of their colleges into constituent units.

The Bihar State Affiliated Colleges Action Committee Convener Basudeo Prasad maintains that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had met them and directed the then chief minister to look into their demands. He points out that no affiliated college has been converted into a constituent one after 1980 even though the Government has an annual budgetary provision of Rs 35 lakh for the purpose. Clearly, Dubey's ministry has its work cut out in attempting an overhaul of Bihar's universities. —FARZAND AHMED

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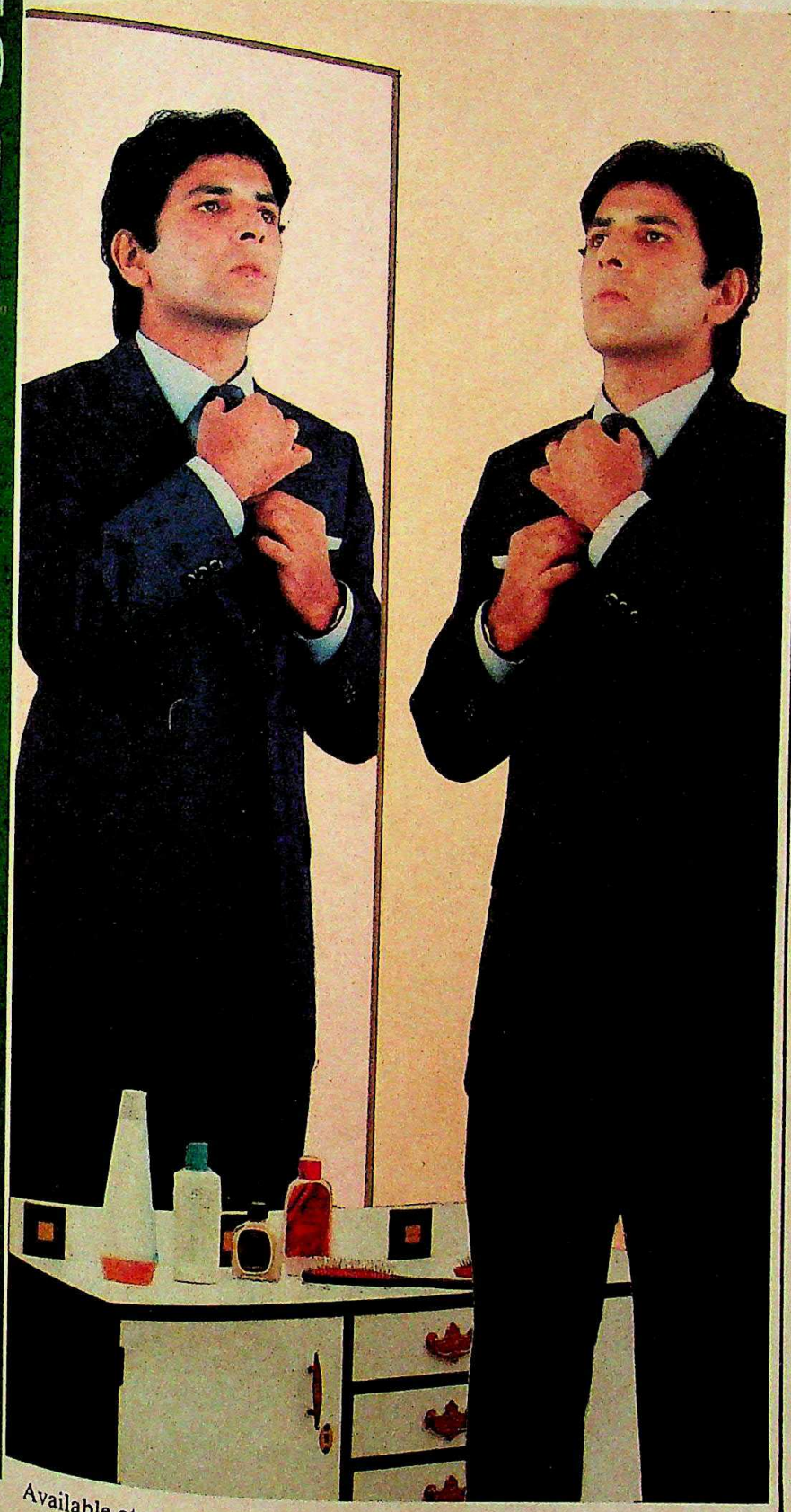

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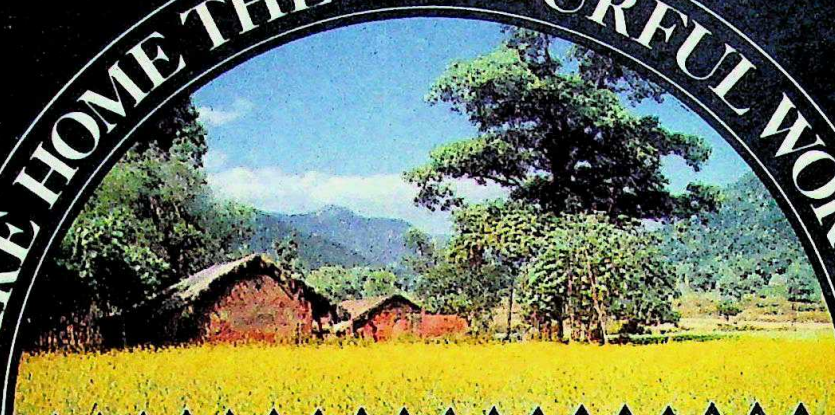

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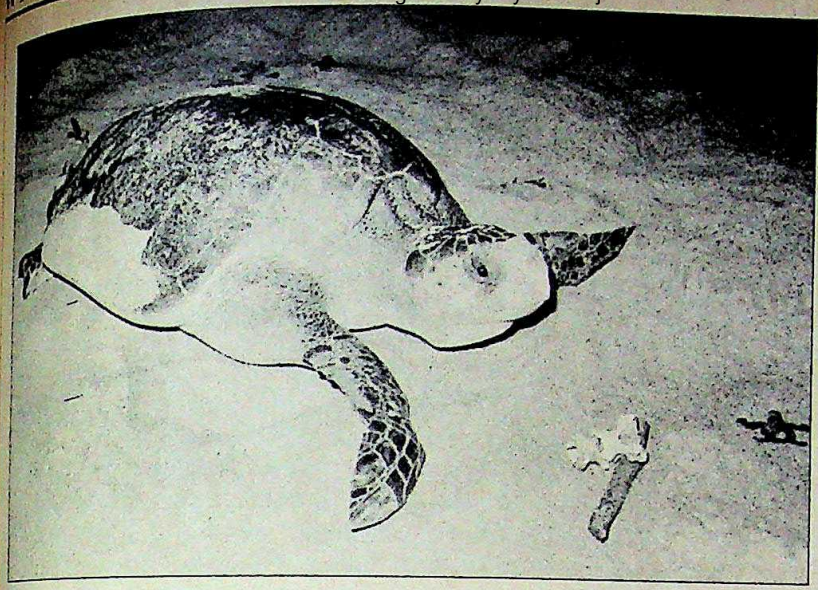
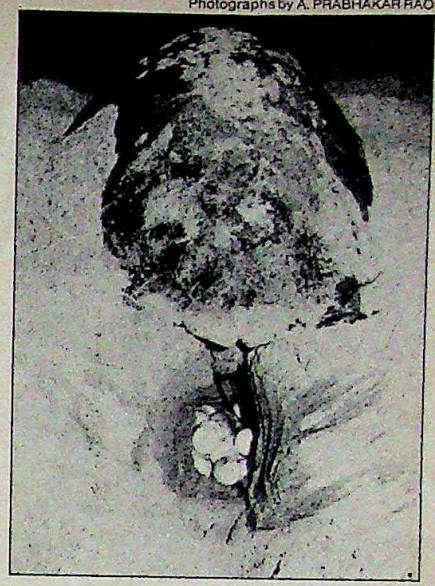




An Oliva Ridely scoops up sand (left) before nesting on Ekakula beach

TURTLES

A Reptilian Refuge

THE EKAKULA beach on the Orissa coast stretches for 15 km and sits at one end of the picturesque Gahirmatha sanctuary. On most occasions, it is a desolate place where the wind whistles eerily through the casuarina trees and the water resembles tinted glass. For the first three months of the year, however, Ekakula enjoys the unique distinction of being the world's largest nesting site of the Oliva Ridely turtle. In that sense, Ekakula also symbolises the concerted battle being fought by conservationists to try and strike the ungainly, flippered reptiles off the Red List of endangered species

Each night during the nesting period, groups of men armed with rifles and torches patrol the beach to protect the reptiles from poachers and also to record all arrivals and departures. For the second successive year, the number of turtle arrivals has crossed the 300,000 mark and conservation officials in Orissa are elated that their efforts to save the reptile from extinction —a three-year concerted campaign against poaching—are finally beginning to pay rich dividends.

Paradoxically, Orissa itself has no market for turtle poachers. But turtle meat and soup is in great demand in West Bengal where sales had reached alarming proportions in recent years with Digha beach in the state's Midnapore district having become one of the major centres for the illegal turtle trade (INDIA TODAY, March 31, 1982).

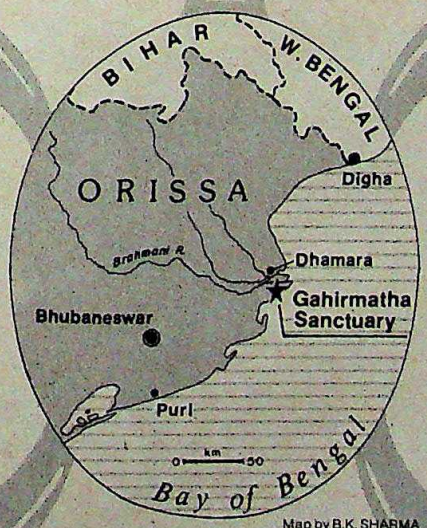
Fishermen from Digha have been hired by illegal traders to trap turtles off the Ekakula beach and even steal their eggs, greatly valued as an aphrodisiac in West Bengal. Poaching is encouraged by the fact that the turtles are easy to catch either in nets or while mating in the sea off the coast, a process which can last up to 52 hours. Even more are caught when the females leave the water at night to come ashore for nesting.

Subsequently, more females fall prey to the poachers than the males, who never leave the sea, leading to a crucial imbalance in the sex ratio. This is further compounded by the rich harvest of eggs reaped by poachers. The females lay their eggs in shallow pits scooped out of the sand—each turtle lays an average of 100 ping-pong ball-sized eggs—and cover them with sand before returning to the sea. The poachers are easily able to identify the pits and dig out the eggs.

But things literally turned turtle in 1982 when the then prime minister Indira Gandhi orchestrated an all-out effort to protect the Oliva Ridely turtle after her office was flooded with angry letters from conservationists alarmed at the rampant poaching. The programme involved the Orissa forest department, the Indian navy, the coast guard and the state fisheries department. Oil India and Indian Metals and Ferro-Alloys Ltd loaned the project helicopters for reconnaissance flights during the nesting season. The results were dramatic. Over 70 poachers were caught and fishing boats impounded while turtle arrivals at Ekakula rose from 170,000 in 1982 to over 300,000 at present

But conservationists agree that there are still gaps in the defence. Says S.K. Mishra, head of the Gahirmatha sanctuary: "If the poachers get organised, we will need seaworthy speedboats to counter them as coast guard vessels cannot come in close to the shore or into the estuaries." Another problem is the steady erosion of the beach which could all but disappear in time to come. But for the moment, Project Ekakula is nothing less than a resounding success that has transformed a stretch of deserted and poacher-infested beach into a vital reptilian refuge.

—AMARNATH K. MENON



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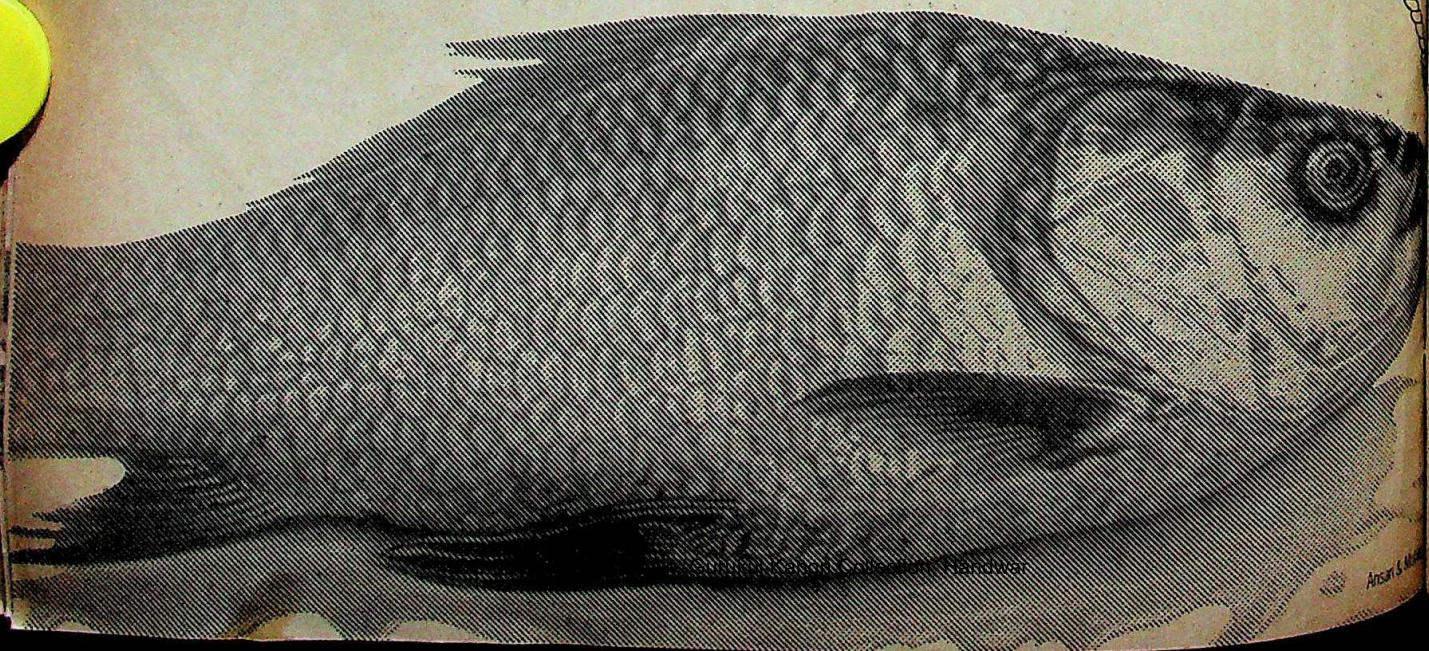

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A Man and the Myth

MOUNTBATTEN—THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY
BY PHILIP ZIEGLER
Published by William Collins, London, 1985
Price: £15 (Rs 229.50); Pages: 781

MUCH has been written of Mountbatten in India and a lot more said. He was himself an indefatigable and adept self publicist—but he rather overdid it and as a result wantonly lost ground in public esteem. Particularly towards the end of his life, it had tended to become obsessive and at times unbridled in fantasy and waywardness.

This fat book, so well-written, replete with charm, vitality and vivid illustrations both in words and photographs of a career of astonishing range and achievement, however, sets the record straight.

What is most fascinating is the way it unfolds; how from being just "an ordinary little boy", Mountbatten developed his potentialities, and deployed them step by bounding step with such spectacular success in so many different fields. The Indian episode concerns us most; but it occupies only one part of the book. There are four others; and they are hardly less remarkable or absorbing. His father, an outstanding naval officer inspired him in his naval career; but his mother, Queen Victoria's grand daughter, named after her, was the real architect in instilling in his character, the values of grit, and indomitable self-confidence that brought him to the top time and again.

Philip Ziegler is justifiably dubbed in the blurb as being: "kindly, understanding, admiring yet undeceived", by Mountbatten's almost compulsive incense burning at his own shrine. All credit to him; and to Mountbatten's innate nature and qualities that in this winnowing process Mountbatten emerges as a much more attractive character, and more significant historical figure than he, and some of his recent publicists, had succeeded in projecting him.

Much again has been made of Mountbatten's royal connections—not least by himself—and of his addiction to genealogy (not dissimilar to that of astrology that besots some of our politicians); and of Lady Mountbatten's great wealth, and in her youth her stellar role in Britain's fastest, and most self-indulgent social set. It thus comes as a surprise (and explains a great deal of how and why they fitted in so well later in the Indian scene, then at the peak of our national gestation) to read:

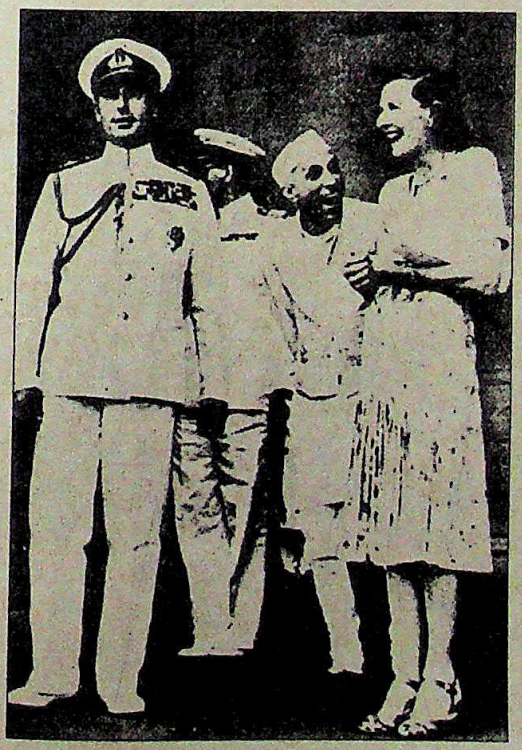
"Politics meant little to him except as a means to some particular end. Edwina was predisposed to admire all things of the Left. It is fascinating being here again...she wrote from Moscow (in 1929) at the height of the Stalinist purges... I gather shorter hours, higher wages and lower prices (not only from what Intourist tell me!!) and the people on the whole are contented, and the young ones happy and enthusiastic." Mountbatten was more pragmatic and less gullible. He too inclined to favour the Left, but from a generous if vague conviction that the poor and deprived ought to be given a better chance, rather than commitment to any ideology. His dislike of fascism was an over-riding factor: whoever opposed it was his friend. When Robert Bruce Lockhart...in October 1936...talked to him of Spain he reported: "He is very frightened of a Fascist triangle and thinks it will be very bad for us. He would prefer a left-wing victory in Spain—even communist."

The Mountbattens' marriage—a real love affair—metamorphosed itself after many a storm, into an enduring partnership in public service, of companionship, deep affection and esteem of which their time together in India was perhaps the zenith, crowned as it was by the inclusion by mutual consent and approval of Jawaharlal Nehru within its ambit. This was a striking example of civilised behaviour, tolerance and generosity in trying circumstances that would have broken lesser mortals. It is a sad proof of the incapacity of Indian authors, social scientists, and historians to break the stranglehold that the dead hand of Victorian Anglo-Indian social hypocrisy still exercises on their psyche, unmanning them from writing about such relationships, and evaluating their effect on their subject's public life, that one has to be enlightened about one, concerning even the career of Jawaharlal Nehru by a foreigner.

Undoubtedly, the sincere, spontaneous relationship that developed between Edwina Mountbatten and Jawaharlal Nehru in the autumn of their lives, contributed towards encouraging the latter to seek a new form of relationship with Britain. The once most passionate and influential advocate for a complete break from the British connection, as enunciated in his January 26, 1929 Lahore Congress Presidential address, accepted, after prolonged negotiations, membership along with Britain in a refurbished Commonwealth. Many factors— political, economic and strategic —influenced these two opposed stands at two critical junctures of Indian history. But the psychological factors should not be overlooked. As much as the former stance was a reaction to the Jalianwala Bagh massacre; the harsh and ugly visage that Britain then presented, symbolised by the racially hate-filled personality of General Dyer and his like; the latter, was a response to the civilised, humane, internationalism of the Mountbattens.

—BADR-UD-DIN TYABJI

The Mountbattens and Nehru: a spontaneous relationship



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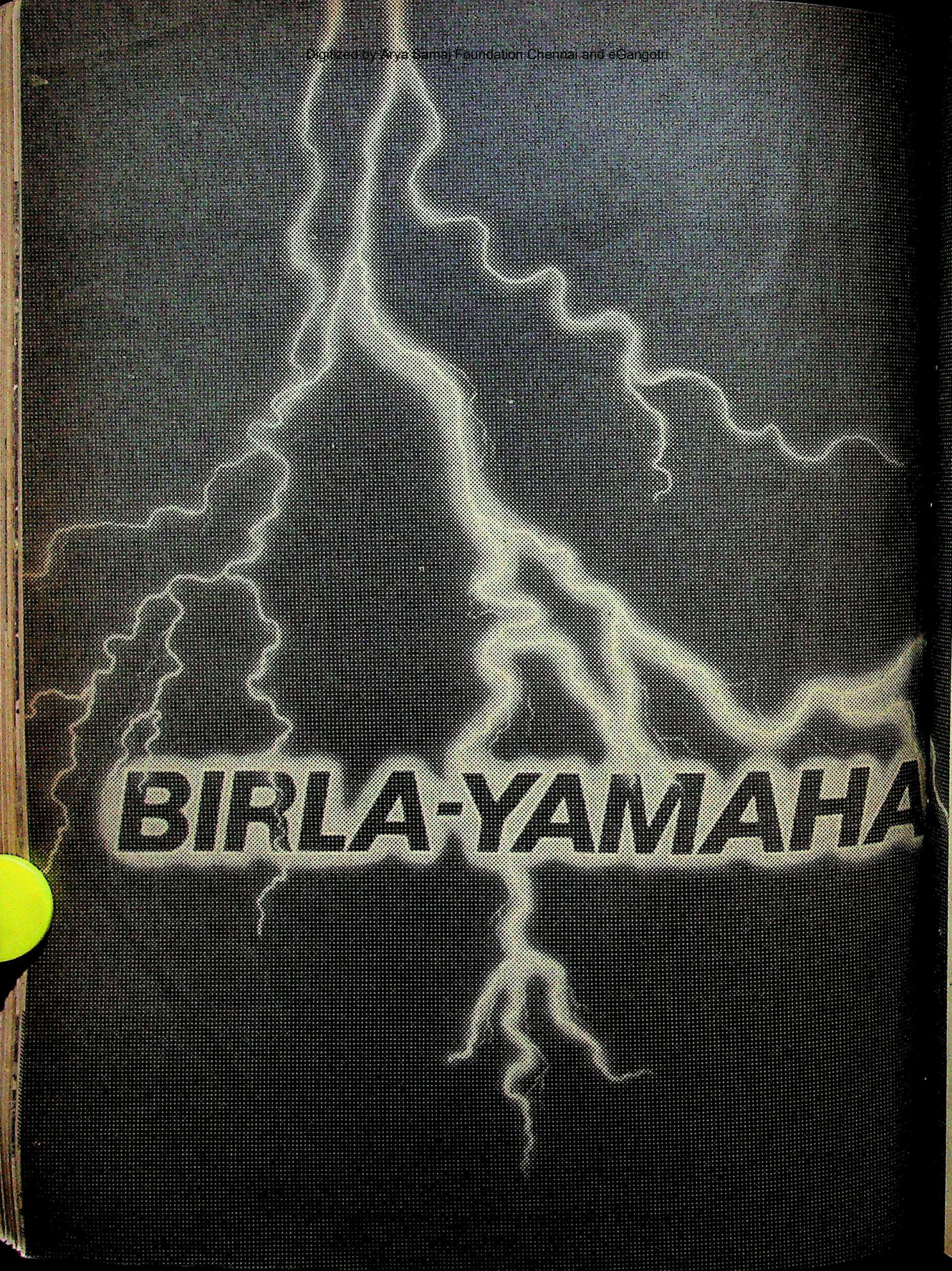

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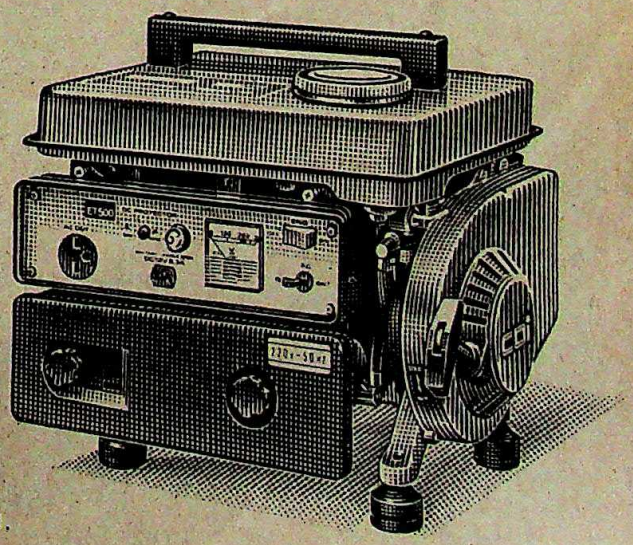

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AFTER-CARE HOME

Den of Darkness

THE INTENTION is lofty—to protect and gradually reform women ostracised from society and denied participation in the act of daily life and living. The reality, however, is starkly different. The State After-Care Home (SACH) in Patna, the only one of its kind in Bihar, is a den of darkness in which women, ostensibly rescued from misery, only sink deeper into the morass. Said one inmate, brokenly, "This is worse than a jail. We are brought here for protection, but once we are in, we are thrown to the mercy of hunger, disease and dirt."

Set up in 1958 as a wing of the state's Welfare Department in the crowded Pathar-ki-Masjid Mohalla in east Patna, the haveli-like home nestles depressingly behind a board that proclaims 'Protected Area'. But the home continues to offer little protection to the 100-odd women sheltered behind the huge wooden gate. Crowded into two dingy rooms and a verandah are a pathetic herd of humanity, a cross-section of the mentally deranged, the physically handicapped, the diseased, all equally pitiable. Worse, they live in constant fear of the roof crumbling upon them, so old and so shaky is the structure. Not surprisingly, the sorry state of the building symbolises the life within. And even as superintendent Vidya Sinha insists that "this is a reform and rehabilitation centre, not a jail", her words cannot drown those of a fellow worker who confesses: "We are getting no cooperation from any side—society or the Government."

"The Government is aware of the grave situation and something will be done," claims Sinha. But how aware the Government is, is questionable. As one member of the staff remarked: "The institution, like its inmates, is a discard. This speaks volumes about the Government's concern for welfare."

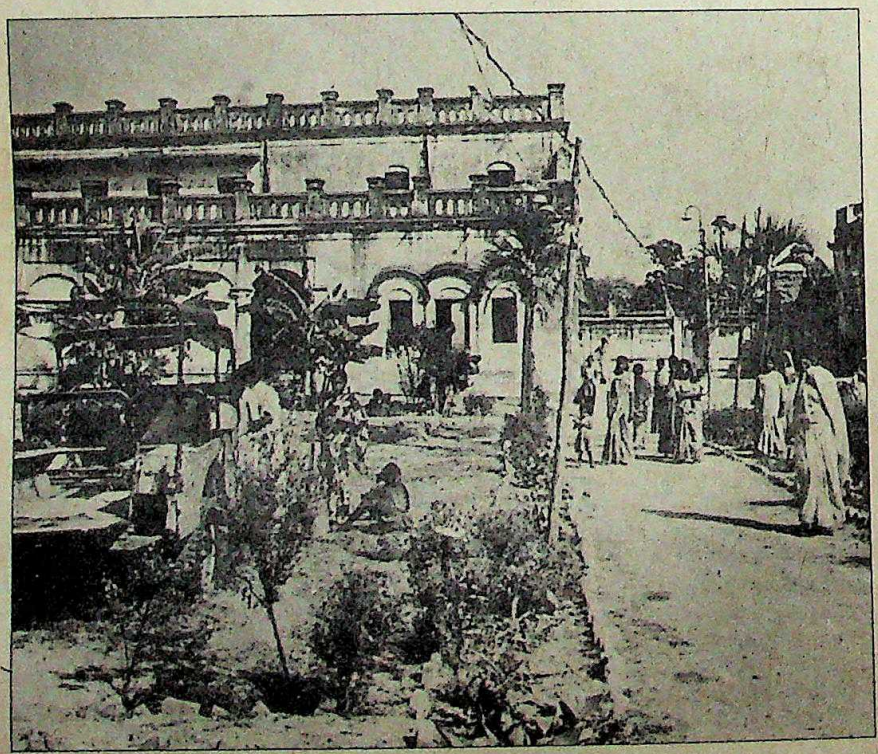
SACH is badly in need of a radical round of revamping, covering the entire gamut from money allocation to security to medical facilities to basic amenities. All this, in the face of misplaced claims by a Welfare Department official that "since this institution is very important from the social point of view, the Government provides the inmates with free food, clothing, medical care, training, and education so that they are made good citizens and earn their own livelihood independently when they are released."

The State After-Care Home in Patna is a den of darkness in which women, ostensibly rescued from misery, only sink deeper into the morass.

Medicare, food, clothing—these are provided cheap, but in doses so skimpy they hardly cover the human beings they claim to preserve and protect. Medical care, for instance, is kept to an improbably low level on an annual fund allocation of Rs 1,500 and is left in the trust of an old doctor who has been visiting the home since 1958 on an astonishingly low honorarium of Rs 50. He is so old now, he has to be brought to the home every week by his son, and has to treat a variety of cases lumped together in common quarters—seven cases of mental illness, six of speech impairment, half-a-dozen of tuberculosis, and, until two months ago, two cases of leprosy—many of whom he is in dubious position to examine, let alone treat. SACH staff also point out the high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among the women.

As for food and hygiene, the Govern-

The After-Care Home (left) and a blind inmate: appalling neglect



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Photographs by K M. KISHAN

Inmates crowded into a verandah

ent apparently believes in the theory t one must merely eat to stay alive. In a of generosity last August, the Bihar vernment raised the daily food allot- nt from Rs 3 to Rs 5—a whole two ges jump! It also allows Rs 150 per d annually for clothing and Rs 5 per d a month for toilet articles. The Gov- ment has not lagged behind in the ter of education either—it has posted ee teachers at SACH to school the men up to standard seven level, but unfortunately overlooked the ques- n of teaching aids. SACH has neither ebooks nor notebooks.

In an ironic statement on the situa- n, SACH is flanked on one side by the eguards training centre which, for women, is more a security hazard n a protective force. It is not unusual find illiterate trainees joining rec- ised rowdy elements in jumping the h wall and frightening the women, metimes forcibly taking them away. local police chip in with their own d of injustice by refusing to register plaints of trespassing or even kid- ping on the specious logic that the in- ates are, in any case, what they term d characters'. Once guarded by four

"The Government is aware of the grave situation and something will be done."

VIDYA SINHA
superintendent

securitymen, not one now remains, leaving the institution's inmates exposed to exploitation by miscreants and criminals. Last year, for instance, when 16-year-old Sabrunissa was kidnapped from the home by some persons, the local police refused point-blank to intervene in the matter. In another instance, when police brought young Mala Sinha to the home, freshly rescued from the clutches of flesh traders, a whole crop of individuals turned up in the superintendent's office, claiming to be her legal guardian. When Vidya Sinha tried to rebuff their claims, she was threatened with dire consequences.

Tales of exploitation of innocent young women and moleslation are legion. Maina Devi, a Nepali hailing from a respectable family, was one such girl who fell prey to a Bihari's lascivious intentions. Robbed of all her money and jewellery, and pregnant, she gave herself up to the mercy of the police who produced her before the chief judicial magistrate who, in turn, sent her to the home. It is now four years since she first came, but the SACH's repeated requests to the court and to the Government to arrange for her return to Nepal have fallen on deaf ears. Said Maina: "I have nowhere to go and nobody is listening to me." And if nothing is done, the trauma of the shocking events in her life may eventually kill her.

Death is not new for the women. Last year alone, four women died due to the after-effects of extreme shock or disease, and at least six more are counting their days. Consequently, the Bihar State After-Care Home has started to resemble a crumbling graveyard for victims of the Government's callous indifference.

—FARZAND AHMED

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ANTARCTICA EXPEDITION

Call of the Cold

Expedition members at Dakshin Gangotri ice station: experiencing the long night

THE CALL of the cold continent is getting increasingly more powerful as far as India is concerned. Last month, a 12-man Antarctica team sailed into Goa's Mormugao harbour to an emotional home-coming after the most arduous test of them all—the six-month long sunless Antarctic winter. The team, which spent 14 months on the frozen wastes of Antarctica, is the fourth expedition launched by India since the tricolour was unfurled to mark the success of 'Operation Gangotri' in January 1982.

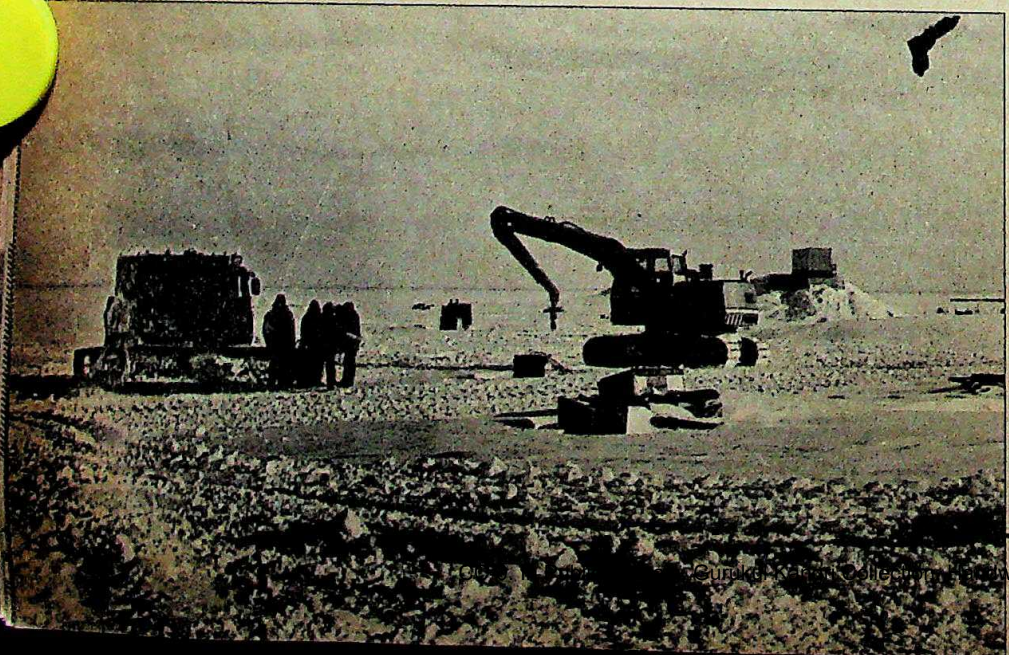
That same year, a second expedition landed at eastern Antarctica in the area christened Dakshin Gangotri to select a suitable site for an all-year station. The third expedition reached there in December 1983 to construct the all-weather ice station and 12 members of that expedition stayed back to form the 'doughty dozen' who would be the first to actually live through the forbidding 'Long Night', the half-yearly period between April and September when the sun never shows.

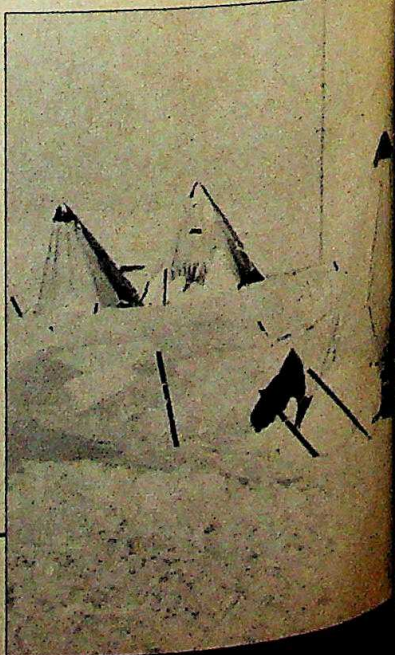
Naturally, the basic requirement was physical and psychological fitness which is why all but two of the members were from the army or the navy including the expedition leader, Lt-Colonel S.S. Sharma of the Defence Research and Development Organisation. Essentially, their task was to establish whether the double-storey ice station could weather the winter with temperatures of minus 50 degrees Celsius and blinding snowstorms where wind speeds reached 300 kmph.

Construction work on an airstrip

Their brief was to find out whether the structure required strengthening, the various psychological hazards involved and pin-point the signals for abrupt changes in temperature.

"The most striking thing was the silence which is initially surprising considering that wind speeds are normally so high. But even wind can whistle only if it has something to rush through or swirl around," says S.G. Prabhu Matondkar, a microbiologist with the National Institute of Oceanography in Goa and the only man who has been on all four of the Indian expeditions. Matondkar, in fact, wanted to stay on in Antarctica for the next winter expedition but was ordered back by Dr S.Z. Qasim, secretary, Department of Ocean Development (DOD). Says Qasim: "Antarctica is so strongly enticing that I have yet to meet a scientist who is





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willing to go there again." As a micro-biologist, however, Matondkar's enthusiasm is understandable. "The place is an area of discovery. We have brought back data we will be analysing for years," he enthused.

But the expedition was also a major stepping-stone for an even more ambitious project—an expedition to the South Pole at the end of the year. In that context, the fourth expedition did some vital preliminary work which included:

- the setting up of three huts about 75 km south of Dakshin Gangotri;
- the construction of a 60 m x 10 m garage for snowmobiles;
- a 5 kw high frequency radio link between Dakshin Gangotri and India;
- an airstrip on which transport aircraft can possibly land by the end of 1985.

A five-man team led by Lt-Colonel J.K. Qasim, an experienced mountaineer and a gliding expert, after detailed reconnaissance surveys, worked out alternate routes and fuel dump locations for the 6,000 km trip across Antarctica to the South Pole. The eventual trip will be longer and more dangerous than those undertaken by other countries since the approach will be from the north over hills, ice and plateaus. This is unavoidable because the first Indian Antarctica expedition landed on the north-eastern side which was closest to India. "At that time we didn't thought of the South Pole," Qasim says, "but our task is clear. We have to reach the South Pole from Dakshin Gangotri. It will be tougher and more difficult than a Himalayan climb and the weather could change as we go along but we will surely find our way there."

The data brought back by the fourth expedition will also prove invaluable. Every member was assigned specific tasks in addition to normal everyday chores. Though they had all been trained in emergency procedures, the tension in end-March when the 'Long Night' began was palpable. Says Matondkar: "If one appreciates the place and the panorama of blue and white there is really no problem. Otherwise, it would be difficult to get along with the person you share a cabin with." The toughest part was adjusting to sleep in the sunless conditions and the morale of the team dropped to its lowest in May when the Antarctic winter was at its peak and the swirling snow cut visibility to a few inches.

UNDER instructions, the team mainly restricted itself to the 2,300 sq metre ice station and its vicinity. To ease the strain, the ice station was well-stocked with video films while table tennis and carrom helped relieve the boredom. The temperature inside the station was a comfortable 10 degrees Celsius and liquor was available for those who wanted. A telephone and video link with the DOD headquarters in Delhi allowed members to send greetings and receive news of their families and one member, Dr S.R. Rizvi, even went on a fast during Ramzan using Greenwich Mean Time as markers.

The team did not miss their normal diet since there were plenty of concentrates of Kashmiri and Mughlai food and dry mixes for making sambar and mulligatawny. The biggest problem was the isolation and boredom. Says Rizvi: "We had all the creature comforts but the lack of privacy means that the smallest irritation can ruin relationships."

But the basic objective of the expeditions and India's permanent presence in Antarctica—exploration and possible exploitation of mineral wealth under the ice—still remains a distant dream. As Qasim admits: "The exploration of oil and minerals in Antarctica calls for 21st century technology," another way of saying that machinery to extract minerals in those conditions is yet to be designed.

Meanwhile, the only exploitation is in a renewable resource—krill, the shrimp-like crustacean which is a rich source of protein for human and animal requirements. Eleven countries are currently annually netting 400,000 of the estimated 150 million tonnes of krill and India is readying to join the club. *Sagar Sampada*, a ship bought by the DOD, will hopefully start fishing in Antarctican waters by the end of the year and bring back an estimated 100 tonnes from each voyage.

The growing geo-political and economic interest in Antarctica is attracting more countries with China, Peru, Italy, Uruguay and Sweden all preparing to join the exclusive club of 12 countries that have established bases there and are members of the Antarctica Treaty.

India, as one of the 12, is making a heavy investment in Antarctica. The DOD has spent Rs 14 crore on the four expeditions and will spend another Rs 9 crore to try and get the first Indian to the South Pole in the next expedition. It also plans to invest another Rs 40 crore on an ice-breaker-cum-ocean research vessel to be delivered by 1990. The DOD will to step up its scientific programme through the proposed Antarctica study centre to be set up in Goa and is preparing a ten-year profile on the short-term and long-term gains from Antarctica exploration. But for the moment, the DOD is eagerly awaiting the green signal for Operation South Pole.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

Expedition members at a field station and (right) the three new huts built during winter: preparing for the Pole

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NAMAS BHOJANI

Naidu: a pretty picture

◆ In 1971, when **Leela Naidu** quit films, one day before her marriage to poet Dom Moraes, everyone thought—that for better or for verse—she'd never come back. Now, a decade-and-a-half later, Dom-struck Leela has returned, and as she says "it's a breeze". She will play the central character, in Shyam Benegal's latest film being shot on Goan sands. "I have matured a lot as an actress," said Leela, once considered among the five most beautiful women in the world, "and it's so much more fun than before." Seems like lovely Leela is going to continue sitting pretty for a long time now.

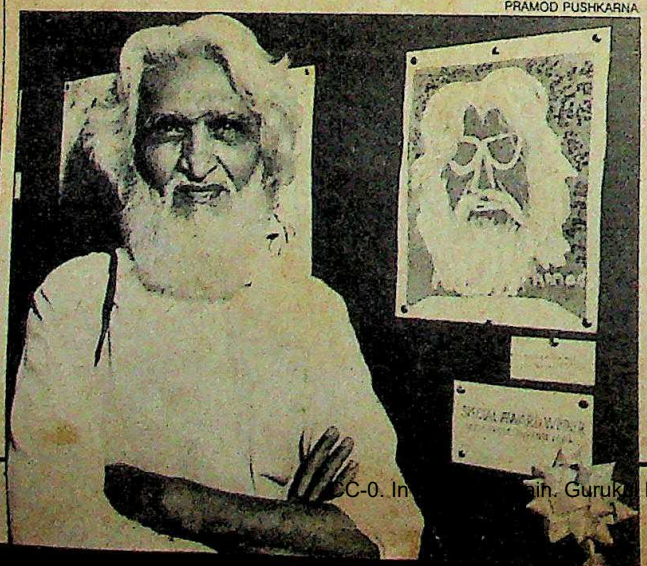
◆ Imagine **M.F. Husain**, a cowboy hat on that hoary head, astride a bucking bronco and zipping away into the sunset? At least, that's how one young schoolboy visualised the venerable artist. Last month, when *Mashoor Mahal* threw out an open challenge to send in a sketch of Husain for a small cash prize, they little anticipated the response they got. Within a few days, over 7,000 entries came pouring in. There was Husain—bashful, kindly, frivolous, jazzy and one imaginative artist even put his face on a horse's body. When Husain saw these strokes of genius, he almost had an 'art attack'. "I feel I'm in a hall of mirrors," he said at a display of the paintings in New Delhi last week, "the faces I have never seen in myself, I saw here."

Husain: face to face

◆ "You've come a long way, baby!" At least **Simi Garewal** thinks so and on her TV show 'It's a Woman's World'—Sunday, prime time—she wants to make certain that her sex get a fair deal. The programme, which was inaugurated last fortnight, features some of the nation's best-known women on fashion, beauty, health and other such issues, the idea generally being to advise women on the shape of the future and on how to make up for lost time. "It's for the woman who is progressive, ambitious and very, very feminine," said Simi. A real heart to heart show—or should that be chic to chic.

Simi: future woman

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



◆ "It all depends on the impulse. Neither the audience nor we know what's going to happen at the end of the show," said **Sheela Raj**, a contemporary dancer who lives in France and who performed in her country for the first time last week. Well, neither was the beginning nor the middle of the show quite what the conventional capital was prepared for either. Raj and her two male partners coordinated the most modern of dance movements to the most traditional of Indian ragas. And at the surprise end, the gifted young choreographer simply jumped off stage, pirouetted amongst the audience, threw flowers around and even placed herself on the laps of a few amused viewers. "For me my life is like a yatra," said Raj nostalgically, "from east to west to east."

SANJIV DAYAL

Sheela Raj: one step ahead

◆ When **Volker Fink** a German diplomat, moved to New Delhi some time ago, he decided that his experien of India wouldn't be quite om-plete without an all-Indian pet. So the Fink family went right ahead and got the pet after their heart—a seven-and-a-half foot, heavyweight, real, live female python. **Mohini**, as the beloved serpent is called, is scaling new heights in reptilian luxury. She sits blithely in a corner of the garden, bathes in a private pool, takes an evening slither, feeds on the choicest rats and leads the kind of life that would make any less privileged animal turn green with envy. Initially, though, the family had problems finding rodents. But word got around "and then," said Fink, "the letters offering mice kept pouring in." Trust a snake to always charm the people.

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

Fink and Mohini: for heaven's snakes!

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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DUPLICATE
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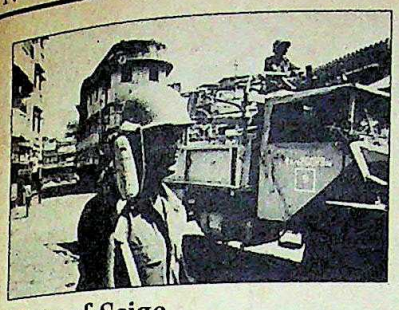
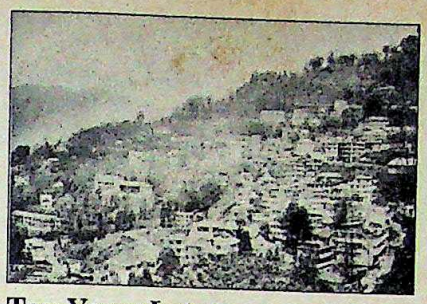
IN FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT



State of Seige

The violence in Gujarat took an ominous turn with the police going on a rampage and the public retaliating by lynching a policeman. The Centre turned down demands for Solanki's dismissal even as the situation refused to come under control.

COVER STORY 58



Ten Years Later

The opponents of Sikkim's merger are today's leaders and few give thought to the controversial event 10 years ago. The signs of development are plentiful, but tensions between the indigenous Bhutiya-Lepcha and migrant Nepali communities remain.

SPECIAL FEATURE 84

Crackdown in Bombay

Bombay's ubiquitous underworld was back in focus last fortnight following the surfacing of two cassette tapes showing the police in embarrassing light. It was obviously a ploy to counter the current crackdown on the Bombay mafia that threatens their rule.

SPECIAL REPORT 72

The Last Encore

Nothing in Kishore Kumar's life has ever been predictable, least of all his farewell to the film industry just when he is poised at the peak of his career. But the man with the golden voice insists that it is time to return to his roots.

PROFILE 116

Crippling Scourge

Water in the desert belt of Rajasthan has been giving not life but sickness—in the form of fluorosis, a crippling disease that spares no one. And with no help coming from the Government, many young children seem destined to a maimed future.

HEALTH 140

Breaking the Bonds

Chandralekha walked out on Bharatanatyam 14 years ago believing it had reached a dead end. Today she is back with *Angika*, a brilliant and innovative new dance work that represents a radical departure from traditional dance forms.

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Cover photograph by RAGHU RAI

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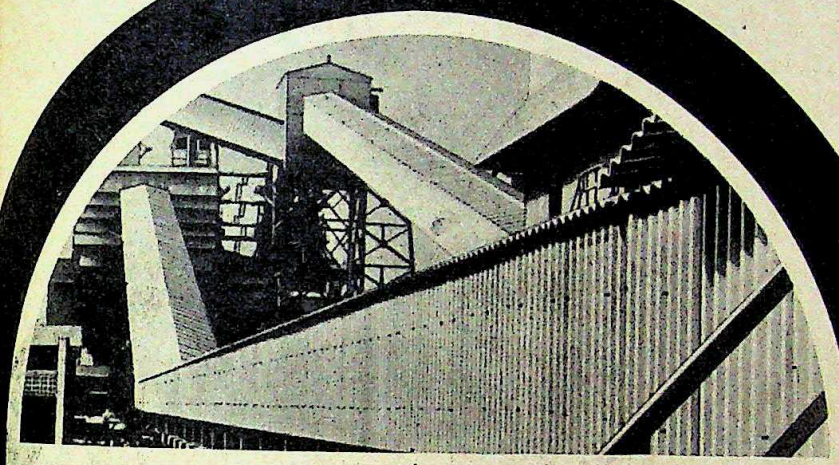

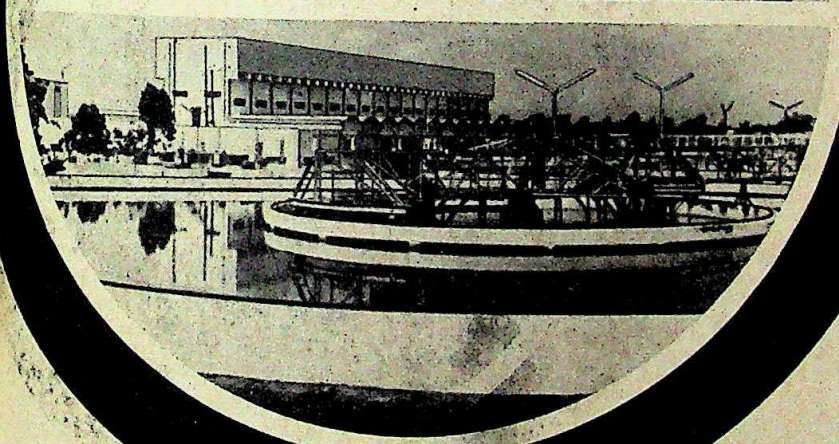

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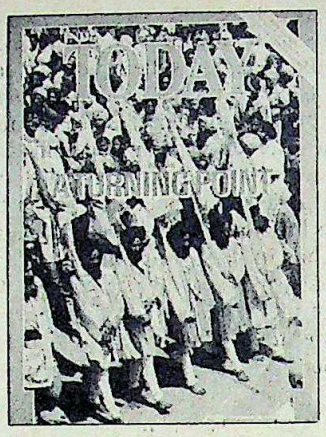

PEACE PATH

Apropos of the cover story on Punjab "A Turning Point" (April 30) it is commendable that the Centre has announced a package of concessions for the Sikhs without negotiations. It will assuage their hurt feelings and soften the Akali Dal's hostility towards the Government. But the acceptance of a few demands contained in the ultimatum served on the Government by the Akali Dal confirms that the former is not willing to show all its cards and expects the latter to reciprocate.

Merely postponing the "action programme" is not enough. The Akalis should realise that they are being clubbed together with the extremists in a large part of the country. Therefore they must denounce terrorism and restore to the majority their lost sense of well-being and safety by organising communal harmony meetings.

Chandigarh ASHOK GROVER

■ The recent initiatives of the Government are certainly a step forward in the path towards solving the tragic situation in Punjab. But at the same time there have also been events which in no way would contribute to the restoration of peace in the state. The Government's ill-timed decoration of soldiers involved in the Operation Bluestar and the Akalis' glorification of the assassins of Mrs Gandhi may prove detrimental to an early settlement. The Akalis should shed their intransigence and reciprocate the Government's overtures by joining it in the search for peace.

Kathmandu SANJAY UPADHYA

■ The present state of affairs in Punjab is of its own creation. The Sikh leaders should come out and fight for the nation's welfare and not just their own. This alone can restore their lost credibility.

Madras R. RETNASWAMY

GETTING THE PICTURE

Raghu Rai's stunning photo feature "Is Calcutta Dying" (April 30) is like the city's past itself: long, fascinating, intricate, yet powerfully poignant.

Madras SOSA MAMMEN

GROWTH POTENTIAL

In the Economy "Growth Rate: India 2000 AD (April 30) Dr Dubashi says "The question is not whether we shall ever catch up with China or America or Japan, but whether we shall catch up with ourselves and our potential for growth and greatness." Obviously our state governments do not believe that we have the potential, at least as far as the construction industry is concerned. For any reasonably-sized project, they do not even look at an Indian tender unless there is a foreign collaborator. The foreigners are taking advantage of this and, once in, they will be extremely difficult to dislodge. It is high time we slowed down our "industrialisation express" just enough to allow the natives to scramble on to the bandwagon unaided.

New Delhi RAJESHWARI SINGH

BUDGET BLUES

Your cover story "A Bold New Approach" (April 15) highlighted only the plus points of the budget rather than looking at it critically. True, it has given prime importance to the private sector which was in the need of a boost but agriculture, the bread-winner for almost 70 per cent of India's population, has been totally neglected and you as well have conveniently ignored it. The rise in prices of the basic household items has also missed mention.

Mysore B.S. ARUN

■ The change in direction of the Union budget has been rightly termed as a bold new step. By giving such a budget, the finance minister has done his part and it is now up to the industrialists to make full use of it.

Nagercoil V.N. [illegible]

■ While the so-called wealthy class (who) elated over the budget proposals and praised it as the boldest and best ever budget, the vast majority of the ordinary Indians have been badly let down by the new Government. All the incentives were aimed at the elite whereas there was nothing in the budget for consolation of the hard-pressed poor people, who are the ones responsible for the massive mandate

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the Government received in the December elections.

In short the carrots will be cornered by the elite comprising less than 2 per cent of the total population, whereas the sticks are reserved for the remaining 98 per cent of the less fortunate Indians.

JACOB OLLUKKARAN
Bombay

■ The opposition parties as usual have criticised the budget, the economists have praised it and there are opposite or favourable views by the industrialists and agriculturalists. But nobody is bothered about the reaction of the poverty-stricken population (a sizeable portion by any standards) who are hit the hardest. The prices of all the goods have increased whether additional taxes were levied on them or not. One feature of our annual budget has been the price increase after every budget. The lop-sidedness and the pro-richness of the budget can be judged from the fact that whereas the lower income tax limit has been increased by a mere Rs 3,000, the highest slab has been increased by 16 per cent from 66 per cent to 50 per cent. Only the next year's budget will tell us how wrong this budget was.

Rampur
KULDIP SINGH

COMMUNITY FEELINGS

"You are right in suggesting the formation of a high-powered all-party body on communal harmony ("Games Politicians Play", April 15). The national commission suggested by the National Police Commission, is also a good idea. But communal feelings are so deep-rooted in the Indian mind that in spite of efforts to eliminate them, they are increasing. Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders left no stone unturned to secure Hindu-Muslim unity, but the result was growing tensions which finally resulted in the Partition. I feel that no number of inquiries or commissions will be able to solve this problem. All those leaders who preach communal harmony themselves indulge in communal discrimination. Who does not favour his own community? Candidates for elections are always selected from amongst dominating castes of the region both by the Government and the Opposition. The only persons willing to bring about communal peace are the few resourceless and ineffective social workers and philanthropists.

S.C. MATHUR

RESERVATION RUMPUS

Your article on the reservation policy—"The Caste Crunch" (April 15) is thought-provoking. The anti-social elements are taking undue advantage of the situation. As far as the policy of reservation is concerned, a sea change should take place. Even according to the author of the reservation policy, Dr Ambedkar, it was never meant to be extended over a long period. The policy extended to 35 years has not brought economic equality and has in turn contributed to the low standard in the administration. The criteria of merit, talent and skill are being ignored totally.

Bijapur
K. SURYANARAYANA RAO

■ I would like to remove the prevailing illusion which holds the upper middle class as well-to-do people and that it is only the reserved category that is poor and requires support and privileges from the Government. In the days of unemployment the situation is further complicated by the reservations in jobs for the different backward class categories. Being an "upper caste" commerce graduate with 58 per cent marks I am compelled to drive an autorickshaw while the reserved category candidates get jobs in the government sector with ease and with as low as 44 per cent marks.

I am not against policies aimed for the uplift of the under privileged class of society. But what sort of social uplift does the Government want to bring by favouring someone at the cost of a more deserving candidate who is also in need but cannot get help because of the so-called "upper class" tag.

Baroda
DEVESH D. DESAI

■ The classification of more and more castes as backward has started giving negative results. The solution does not lie in increasing the already high percentage of reservations. It would be worthwhile if the efforts of the Government were geared towards the uplift of the economically backward sections of the society, irrespective of their castes.

Kandagaon, Bastar Dist.
B.V. RANGADHAM

■ I fully support the anti-reservation stir. It is absolutely ridiculous that in Madhya Pradesh 78 per cent of the seats are "reserved". Jagjivan Ram says that he is in favour of the continuation of the reservation policy in the form it is being implemented currently because it is an instrument of social change. I think he is absolutely wrong. If he had said that reservation is a means of economic uplift, one could agree with him. In fact the reservation policy has become the root cause for inducing the caste distinction in the minds of the younger generation—the future of the country—resulting in bleak prospects.

Nagpur
ABHIJIT DAM

■ It is leaders like Jagjivan Ram who exploit the sensitive issues by making ridiculous statements like "will a Brahmin call me to his house for a meal", to gain their ulterior motives. A common man does not talk of castes and races, but the reservation policy will compel him to think in those terms.

Calcutta
RAJNISH BALI

■ The report "Caste Crunch" aptly illustrates the way in which purely social issues are politicised, paving way for communal disturbances, loss of life and property as also creating an atmosphere of tension in the society. After having seen the way political parties and politicians have striven to maintain vote banks on the basis of caste, creed and communities, there is no doubt that the present state of affairs is solely the creation of our political parties.

Vasco da Gama
ANNIE FRANCIS

NO CHILD'S PLAY

I was really shocked to read the article "Exploiting Innocence" (April 15). It is high time the authorities concerned took some stern steps to stop these evils still prevalent in our society. Mere laws on paper will do nothing. Only serious action against those involved in such exploitation can open the eyes of others.

Manavalakurichy, Tamil Nadu
T.K. HARI HARA IYER

■ Our prime minister wants to take the country to the 21st century, but will he be successful in his endeavour with such age-old traditions as child marriage still ruling our society? In reality child marriages amount to plain and simple exploitation. Law-making alone would not be sufficient to break this tradition. Drastic social efforts have to be made.

Joara, Madhya Pradesh
SARBJIT SINGH BAINS

WRONG COMPANY

This refers to your report "HBJ Pipeline: Building Up Pressure" (March 31) in which you state that the Assam-Barauni pipeline built by Dodsal started leaking five years after it was laid. I would like to state that the Assam-Barauni pipeline was not built by Dodsal.

Bombay
RAJEN A. KILACHAND
Chairman, Dodsal Pvt Ltd

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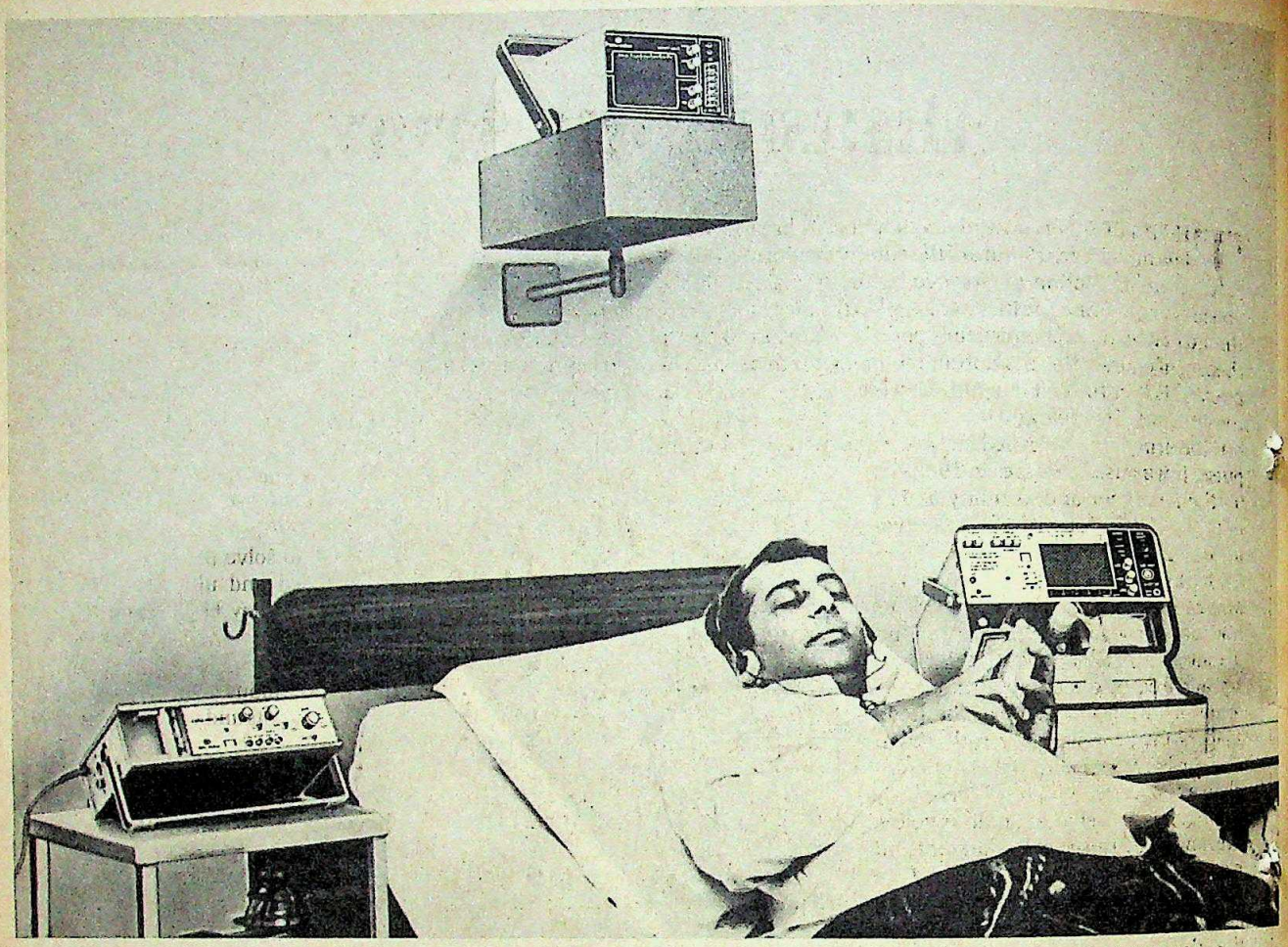

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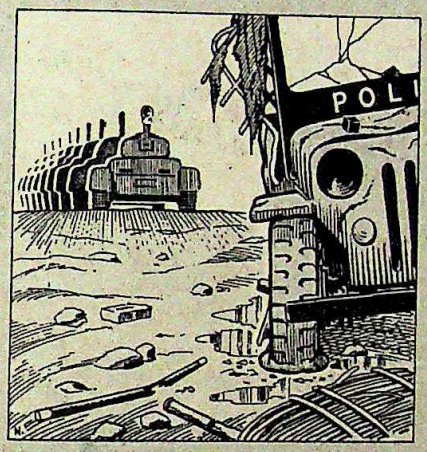
Misusing the Army

THE PATTERN is now all too familiar. A breakdown in law and order, a failure of the administration to contain it, an escalation of violence beyond the ability of the police to cope—and the inevitable call to the army to come to the aid of what is euphemistically called civilian authority. In theory, of course, there is nothing wrong with this drill. The practice is that the civilian authority seems to break down at the first hint of trouble and instead of a measure of the last resort, the army is being called out more and more as a first impulse. It was used 82 times in 1982-83, 96 the next year and as many as 175 times in 1984-85, mostly for maintenance of law and order.



It doesn't take a Nagaland or a Mizoram or even a Punjab to tell us how dangerous this trend is. The Bhiwandis and Ahmedabads of this country are frequent enough to keep the army on the front pages of the newspapers, in full public glare, rather than in their barracks or trenches, in complete anonymity, which is where they belong. It is as well that anxious voices are now being raised in Parliament and elsewhere, asking the Government to take cognisance of this misuse of the army, and there is reason to believe that the Government is beginning to take notice. Certainly, even casual conversation with serving generals indicates that the army itself is acutely aware of the problem and most reluctant to become embroiled in controversial action.

It is not hard to see why. First, the army is being asked to do a job for which it is not trained. It took several years before the army was able to learn how to cope with insurgency in the North-east. In the process, it earned itself an unwarrantedly bad name. Similarly problems have arisen more recently in Punjab where the army was expected to keep the peace after Operation Bluestar last June. The basic fact is that the army is trained to deal with the nation's enemies, not its own citizenry; with opposing soldiers in uniform, not civilians. Out of its milieu, it runs the risk of discrediting itself. Military men have proud traditions, and any slur or any compulsion to undertake unsavoury tasks tends to have an immediate impact on morale and discipline.

Second, the more the army comes into law and order operations, the closer it comes to the political process. All too often, riots and the breakdown of law and order are political events, contrived at by interested parties. It is no secret that spontaneous public outbursts are often seized upon for political gain and trouble often allowed or even encouraged to escalate in an effort to garner dubious advantage. The police knows this and is frequently aware of the processes at work and the people responsible, but often cannot or will not act on its knowledge. So far the army has managed to remain untouched by these distortions, but will it continue to if it becomes routine for it to handle problems that the local administration and the police ought to?

Third, this is a country with democratic traditions, a nation which prides itself on civilian government and with justification distances itself from military dictatorships and those nations whose civilian governments are in fact propped up by military clout. The use of the army hurts this image and, more important, the reality. Just as the use of force has never been able to solve social problems, democracy has never been served by the use of the army in keeping law and order.

Finally, the solution runs the risk of becoming the problem. The more frequently that administrations lean on the army to solve their problems, the less inclined and ultimately the less capable will they be of doing the job themselves. An easy way out is to pass the buck, and buck passing has assumed scandalous dimensions in the handling of riots and violence, whether it is sectarian or spontaneous. Last week's shocking episode concerning the Ahmedabad police is not the first time such a thing has happened. If administrations and governments continue to evade their responsibility or heap law and order problems on the shoulders of the army, it certainly won't be the last time either.

This is the crux of the problem. Time and again, whether it was in Delhi last November or in Punjab through the months of rising terrorism or Gujarat last week, not to mention other notorious incidents as in Bombay and Uttar Pradesh, it is the police which provides the weakest link. If the problem has to be tackled, it can only be done by a thorough overhaul of the country's police forces, their morale, leadership, working conditions, their value systems.

There's no dearth of ideas. The Police Commission's reports, which bring together the collective wisdom of top police officers and administrators, lie gathering dust in the Home Ministry. There have been recommendations time and again each time there has been a breakdown of police discipline, but they have been dealt with half-heartedly or not at all. The answer does not lie in creating new organs—there are enough, as it is, between the armed and unarmed police and the reserve forces—but in getting what already exist to simply do the job.

This is only in part the responsibility of the police brass. Politicians, who have over the years debased the police forces and converted them into VIP protection squads must take the first step, a hands-off decision which will keep them out of police affairs and allow the forces to professionalise themselves. Unless this is done, and done very soon, more police forces will go the way of the Ahmedabad police, and administrations will call in the army. And who can say they weren't warned if some hothead in uniform decides that he can do a better job of running the show than a bunch of bumbling civilians.

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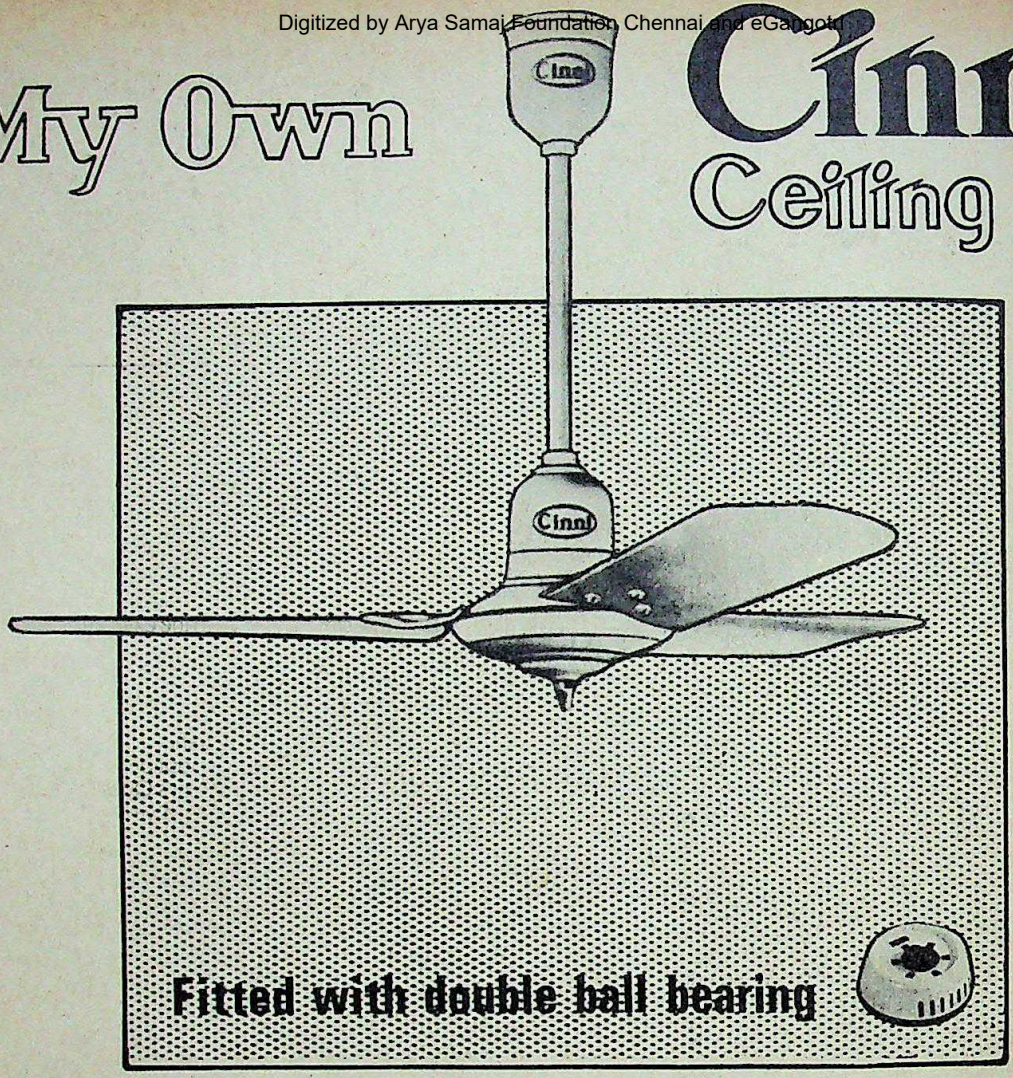

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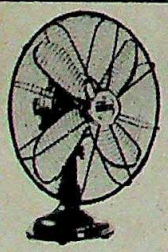

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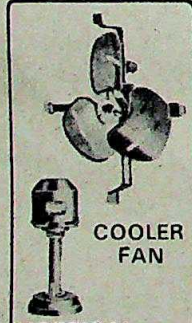

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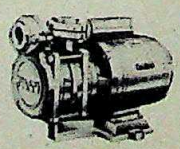

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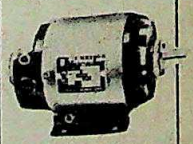

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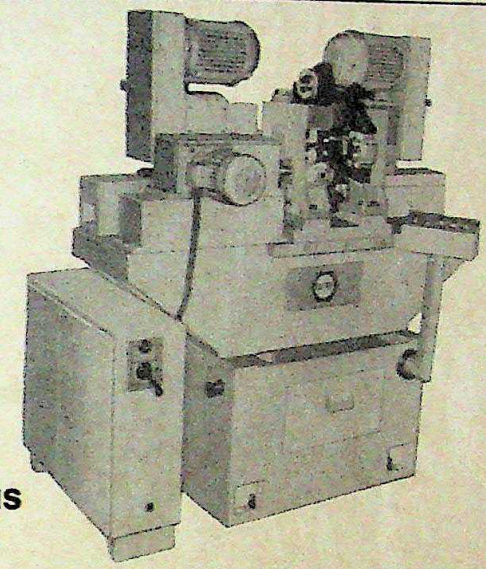

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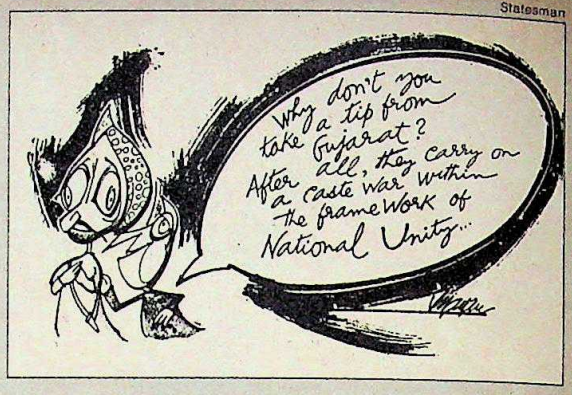

● *I am not here (in Punjab) to impress anyone. My immediate task is to have a feel of the situation... I intend to make all-round efforts, not confine myself to politics alone.*

■ ARJUN SINGH in *The Telegraph*

● *Yes, a chief minister is more powerful. Now I am in a position to take steps directly. I want to wipe away the tears from each worker's eyes.*

■ BINDESHWARI DUBEY in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *Can Rajiv Gandhi—and the young set of midnight's children he is gathering around him—work any magic on India where others have failed before?*

■ DONALD TRELFORD in *The Observer*

● *It is not a question of an Indian risk (for foreign investments) being worth it, but whether one can risk staying away from India.*

■ M. NARASIMHAN, chairman, Round Table on India at the European Management Forum

● *I am not a gentleman. I am a communist.*

■ ASHOK MITRA, finance minister, West Bengal in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *I do not look upon journalists as great heroes... nor do I look upon them as missionaries. In my opinion we cannot go wrong as long as we look upon ourselves as professionals with a social conscience.*

■ PREM BHATIA at a seminar on investigative journalism in Jaipur

● *It is because other people are less than normal that they think I am eccentric.*

■ CHO RAMASWAMY in *Savvy*

● *The overall effect (of films like* A Passage to India *and* Jewel in the Crown*) is rather like a literary version of mulligatawny soup. It tries to taste Indian but ends up being ultraparochially British, only with too much pepper.*

■ SALMAN RUSHDIE quoted in *Life*

● *My credentials as a novelist are high brow. I find the French film-maker Goddard as sickening and cliche-ridden as a Bombay film.*

■ MANOHAR SHYAM JOSHI, writer of *Hum Log* in *Sunday*

● *I am not a kill joy, I am not against comedy. Unfortunately our clients are interested in instant cheap entertainment... instant programming makes superficial programming.*

■ HARISH KHANNA, director-general, Doordarshan in *The Sunday Observer*

● *I was upset for a long time for being dismissed as "Mard" Singh. If I've a typical Punjabi frame physically it doesn't mean that I cease to be feminine.*

■ AMRITA SINGH in *Star & Style*

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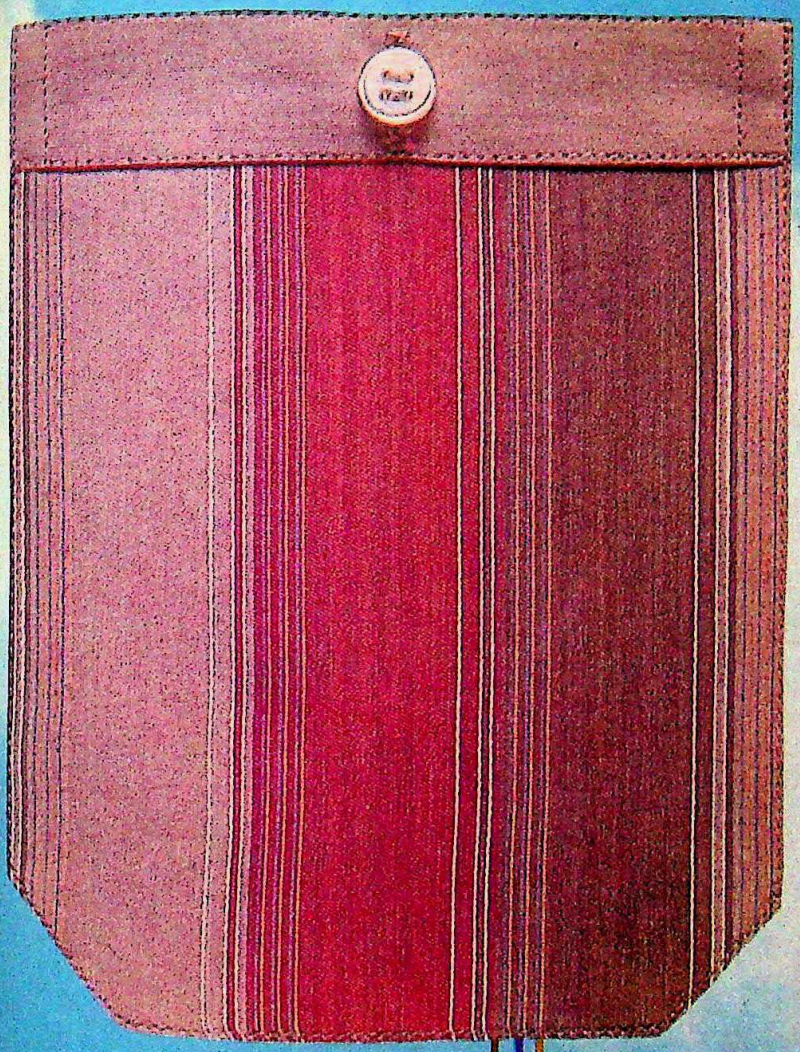

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REBEL RIVALRY

■ The Congress(I) is beginning to look a little like the United States of America, circa 1860 A.D: the loyalist Union on one side and the rebel Confederacy on the other. In the elections to the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC), there sometimes seems to be one rebel for every loyalist and their face-off is nothing short of a civil war. Take the case of R. Ranganath and Herbert Beretto.

Ranganath is playing rebel to Beretto's loyalist in Ward 43. Last month, Ranganath filed an application for two pandals in the ward and was allowed to set them up: one near the Maheshwari Udyan and the other near the Matunga Kabutarkhana. No sooner had the labourers hammered in the last peg than Beretto claimed that he had applied for the same spots and as he was the official party candidate the spots belonged to him.

Perhaps fearing the direct action that the party is famous for, Ranganath hastened to the civil court for a stay order. Tragically, court orders are flimsy things compared to the heat of political passions and when Ranganath returned he discovered that the pandals had been completely destroyed. By all indications, this is not going to be a very civic poll.

FILMING FIASCO

■ Films are the breath of life in India and, especially in the south, any householder's idea of bliss is to lend his house for a day's shooting and stand in a corner watching muscled beauties and beasts wrestling on his carpet. However, the floor show is not everybody's idea of pure bliss, as is indicated in a recent incident in Madras.

A gentleman in the affluent locality of Annanagar had combined business with pleasure in renting his house out to film units. The neighbours did not like it and protested to the police about noise pollution and air pollution caused by the generator. The householder got away with a fine of Rs 50.

Then the neighbours got good and mad and filed a public interest suit, complaining

that the shooting was not just a nuisance but also a hazard, because of the crowds it attracted. Despite the defendant's pleas that his was a commercial activity on the lines of bank branches, which are permitted in residential areas, the court granted an interim injunction, restraining him from using the house as a ready-made set. Jayalalitha and Kamalahasan are not as popular as they think.

PAINFUL POINT

■ On April 7, all of Patna seemed to be talking about mosquitoes. It talks about mosquitoes a lot of the time, because the mosquito presence in the state capital is, like Dolly Parton, overpowering, but April 7 was something special.

To begin at the beginning, a large procession of hard-bitten demonstrators wandered through the city led by

two men with a banner saying: "Machchar Bhagao, Jaan Bachao," which translates as: "Make the mosquitoes run for their life, or run for your own." Unfortunately, this had no effect on the health authorities. This as it turned out, was their undoing.

Before they knew what was happening, a thousand mosquitoes descended on them, biting, poking, pricking, very, very painfully. The scene at the Sultangunj Health Office was akin to an anthill with a careless boot inside. The reason was simple: the demonstrators, to put a fine point on their demands, had unsheathed pins and needles and were sinking them into every government servant they could see. The idea, as one protester said between one thrust and the next, was to "make them conscious of the pain from a mosquito bite". His victims couldn't but get the point.

CANINE CAPER

■ A stray dog fears nothing so much as the large pair of pincers held by corporation dog-catchers. So it was that when a posse of pincer-packing people assaulted a locality in Calcutta, the dogs ran helter-skelter. Even so, a few were caught.

But if a dog is man's best friend, then man sometimes reciprocates the gesture. All the street urchins in the area congregated on the spot and started arguing for the release of their four-legged fellows. The babus were just about to give them up when a well-fed pot-bellied gentleman erupted onto the scene, scolding the boys for siding with the "public nuisances". The boys retorted that the dogs were the best warning against thieves. However, they were on a losing wicket

until someone noticed that among the captured dogs was a nursing mother.

His remark put an end to the proceedings. "They are catching suckling mothers. Didn't you suckle your baby?" Then, as pot-belly turned purple, "Didn't your wife, I mean?" he asked. It took just a jiffy to open the door of the van and let the prisoners run away to freedom.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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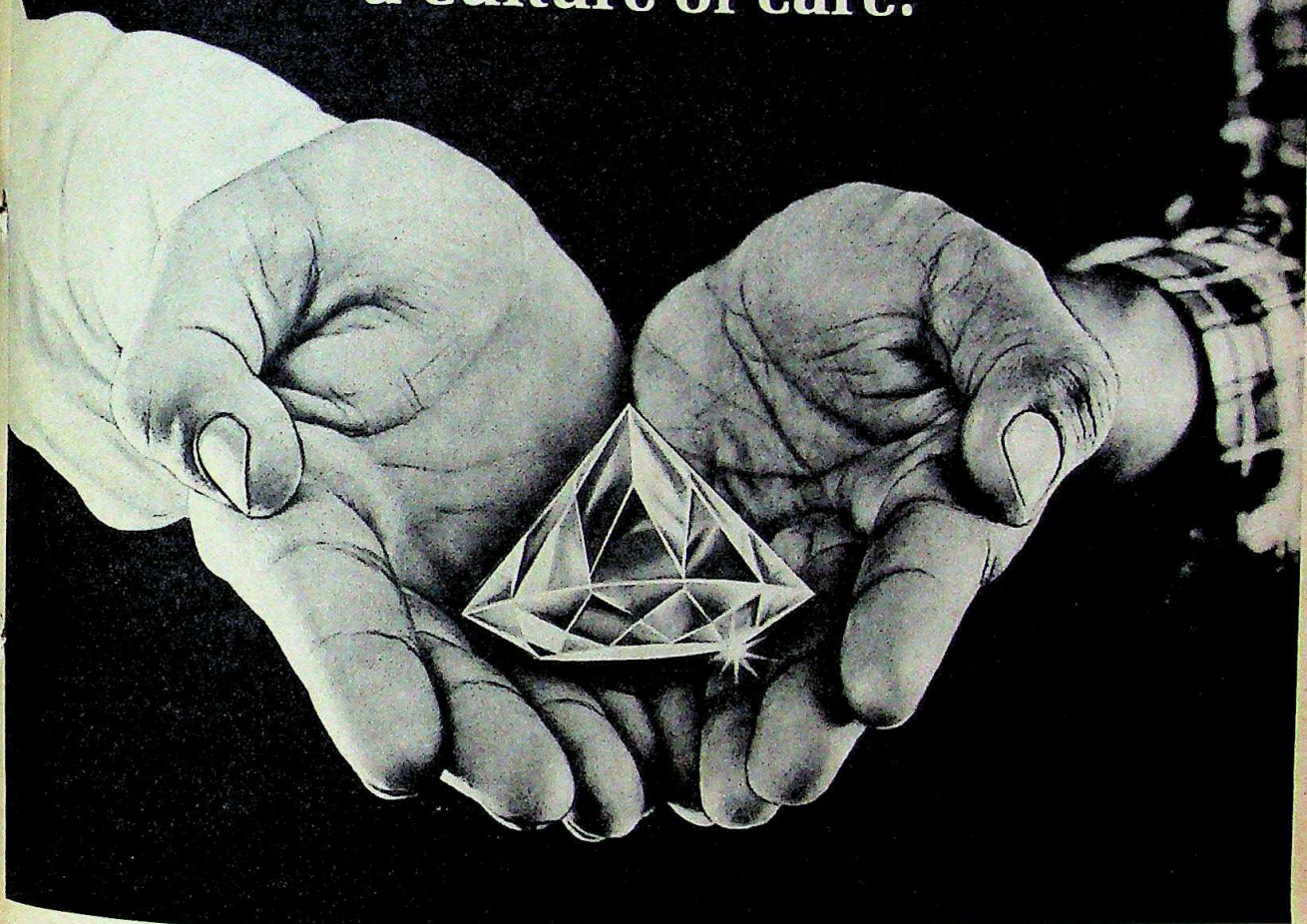

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HIJACKERS' TRIAL

Stalling Tactics

FOR a country known more for a somewhat dubious brand of jurisprudence, the special court at Lahore's bustling Davis Road has a surprisingly grandiose look. Passers-by stare, intrigued at the large congregation of armed policemen standing around the building of the agriculture department adjoining the headquarter of the sub-martial law authority in Lahore. Most miss the small signboard that reads, cryptically, "Special Court".

Inside the compound, the protection would do justice to a military court. Police commandos displaying automatics in open holsters and plain clothed intelligence-men mill around, forming a daunting array. There isn't one policeman carrying a lathi, which is understandable because the crowds are not likely to be a problem here. The entry to the high-ceilinged, centrally air-conditioned chamber, which used to be the agriculture department's convention hall, is strictly regulated through passes issued by the registrar of the court. Only officials, selected newsmen and lawyers are entitled to one.

Last fortnight, this motley bunch sat quietly through the initial but vital stages of what may, in terms of its bearing on India-Pakistan relations, become the most important legal case in the subcontinent's history. The Government of India has been indicating that its attitude towards Pakistan in times to come would be decided by the manner in which Pakistan treats the two sets of Indian Airlines aircraft hijackers, who landed at Lahore in September 1981 and August 1984, respectively. And the Pakistani officials say they want to make it an example of "goodwill" and their claim of a hands-off policy on the Sikh crisis in India. But, the case had its element of surprise.

For the Indians, it came in the form of two traditionally dressed Sikh women, Kulwant Kaur Khalsa and Gurcharan Kaur Khalsa, who turned up to witness the proceedings with Sham Singh, a rabid Pakistani Sikh based in Thatta, near Karachi. He has often been seen provoking and indoctrinating the Indian Sikh pilgrims visiting the shrines of Panja Sahib and Nankana Sahib.

Morning after morning, as the five accused walked in, shouting slogans for Khalistan and Bhindranwale and condemning the Indian Government, Amnesty International, the UN and Human Rights Commission, the women welcomed them with folded hands and the traditional Sikh salutation: *Sat Siri Akal*. Their usual restraint gave way when, on a request from Gajinder Singh, supposedly, the leader of the hijackers, Sessions Judge Fazal Karim permitted the women to meet the accused immediately before the rising of the court. Amidst impassioned embraces and tears, the hijackers shouted without inhibition, "Don't worry about us, sisters, we will finish the job we have to do. We will liberate India."

But much more than the show of emotions, what upset the Indian officials was the fact that after each day's hearing, the two women and Sham Singh would sit together with the Pakistani intelligence officials for a round of debriefing and then give angry interviews to some Urdu papers. Adding to Indian discomfiture was the fact that Kulwant Kaur is believed to be the wife of Talwinder Singh Parmar, a Canadian citizen, leader of the Babbar Khalsa Dal and wanted in connection with the Lala Jagat Narain murder case. The Canadian Government has turned down India's repeated requests for his extradition. "This really is like adding insult to injury," remarked an Indian official, mentioning that the same women were carrying a portrait of an armed Talwinder and quoting scriptures to justify violence.

> **The defence lawyers had clearly revealed a strategy combining political rhetoric to prolong the proceedings and legalese to secure adjournments.**

Even on the legal plane too, there was cause for worry for the Indian side. Even as the committal proceedings were completed last fortnight the defence lawyers had clearly revealed a strategy combining political rhetoric to prolong the proceedings and legalese to secure adjournments. For a whole week, as the five-member crew of the hijacked Indian Airlines aircraft sat closeted in the Lahore Intercontinental, defence lawyers S.M. Zafar and Dr Abdul Basit Khan filibustered on a series of applications, all in the quest of securing an adjournment.

Zafar, a former federal law minister and one of the most prominent—and expensive—lawyers in Pakistan, challenged the very basis of the case, questioning the Pakistani court's jurisdiction in trying a crime which was "committed in the Indian skies, over Moga, which is a hundred miles from Lahore". Basit, on the other hand, followed a different approach, seeking an assurance that, in spite of the absence of provisions in Pakistani law to serve summons on witnesses in India, the defence would be given "Aladin's *charagh* (lamp), which the prosecution used" to bring along the Indian Airlines crew.

While the judge set aside Zafar's objections and put off Basit's, saying, "we will decide when the time comes to examine defence witnesses", he did concede his request for lifting of restriction on the coverage of the trial by the Pakistani press. The restraints were imposed on Indian request.

For the defence lawyers, this was no small victory and it suited their strategy. Already, Basit has given ample indication that his approach is going to be to embarrass the Indian Government as much as

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SHEKHAR GUPTA

Special Court building in Lahore

possible in the court-room, perhaps to the point where the cost of persisting with the trial becomes unacceptable in terms of adverse publicity. Pleading for the lifting of the press ban, Basit argued: "The Government of India, wants to kill two birds with one stone. It wants to tell the Sikhs that it has control over Pakistan and thus they can expect no sanctuaries there. On the other hand, if this case ends in acquittal, it will become a big *casus belli* against Pakistan as the Indians will tell the world, here is the country that harbours our criminals. Thus the world must know from the press that it is a fair trial."

More significant, he sought to explain the act of hijacking in terms of the "oppression of the Sikhs" and wanted to call witnesses from "India, Canada, UK and all over the world" to explain to the court how the "Sikhs were betrayed during 1947", how "Sikh nationalism is being suppressed by the creation of Nirankaris by the Government" and how the "Indian army destroyed and desecrated their *kaaba*."

THE MESSAGE was clear. As the trial progresses, the defence will call in as witnesses key Khalistan activists, many of whom may be in prison on various charges. What, as an official argued, could the Indian Government do if the defence sought the presence of someone like Harminder Singh Sandhu, the general secretary of AISSF? There is no way the Government would allow that and the defence would immediately question the fairness of the trial.

SHEKHAR GUPTA

Zafar: buying time

Indian officials also concede that adverse pubilicity and stalling tactics are inevitabilities they can do very little about. They cannot even press the Pakistan Government to do something about it as the matter is in a civil court. Said an Indian official: "The problem is this is becoming a political campaign. This will never be like an ordinary criminal trial."

At least on that point even the defence lawyers planding for the hijackers seem to be in agreement. Said Zafar, who recently won fame as the successful attorney for Abdul Qadir Khan, the Pakistani nuclear scientist, in his appeal against an earlier verdict handing out a four-year sentence in absentia for nuclear espionage: "This is by no means an ordinary case. This case can not be devoid of its legal nuances."

With the case going along these lines now, Pakistani officials are using the opportunity to tell their Indian counterparts how sensible it would have been not to have sought the trial in the first place. Indian officials counter this by saying that they had wanted the hijackers to be tried the same way the Pakistani Governmment deals with its own hijackers —one of them, Nasir Baluch, has been hanged even on charge of complicity in the 1982 PIA plane hijacking. But, asserts additional secretary in the foreign office at Islamabad and former Pakistani ambassador in India, Abdus Sattar: "We do not apply martial law regulations to foreigners, so they have to be tried in a civil court where lawyers are obviously likely to make full use of the legal tricks available to them."

In fact, Sattar now justifies the initial Pakistani reluctance to put the hijackers on trial saying, "we had told the Indian Government the worst that can happen to the hijackers is a prison sentence because, in the course of the hijacking, no one was physically harmed. That purpose is being served as the men are in prison, anyway. But now the trial has begun and Indian Government is very happy. So we are told." Sattar says the Pakistan Government now faces a difficult dilemma. The defence lawyers would like to "parade witnesses" from all over the world. "If we grant them visas, there will be a lot of adverse publicity and if we don't, the fairness of the trial will be questioned."

Chances are, the visas will be granted, for the men campaigning for the hijackers' defence are also a determined and resourceful lot. The defence lawyers are not mere *amicus curiae*, they have been hired by the International Committee of Sikhs' Defence run by Ganga Singh Dhillon who visited Pakistan frequently in connection with the trial. Zafar admits being in frequent telex contact with Pritam Singh, Queen's Counsel in London and is upset that the Pakistani immigration authorities sent him back from Karachi airport last fortnight. "How can you stop him, the only Asian Queen's Counsel? I am taking it up with the Government," he says. The same argument will be advanced in case of many others and, in case the Government accepts it in principle the case which India wants to use as a message to the militants, will become a godsend publicity coup for their non-resident champions.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Lahore

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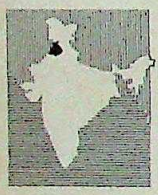
RAMINDAR SINGH

Tohra at the Golden Temple: from hope to dismay

PUNJAB

Mounting Alienation



IN AN uncanny replay of past events the pendulum in Punjab swung once again from hope to dismay. The hope that had been generated by the Government's announcement of an enquiry into the November 1984 violence against Sikhs in Delhi, and the subsequent release of some Akali leaders, was tainted by the blood of the AICC(I) General secretary Raghunandan Lal Bhatia which flowed on Amritsar's Mall Road as suspected terrorists struck again last fortnight. Luckily Bhatia survived despite three bullets in his jaw, neck and back, but a political worker who had come to see him was not so lucky. Two young terrorists had mingled with an early morning crowd of deputationists outside Bhatia's house, and started firing on him as he ran indoors. None of the 60-odd persons tried to stop the assailants who grabbed the scooter of a passerby and fled. As the prime minister's Parliamentary Secretary Arun Singh and state Governor Arjun Singh rushed to Bhatia's side, it became clear that the shooting was aimed at scuttling any chances of a rapprochement between the Akalis and the Government. And it served notice that the state still teeters dangerously on a razor's edge with many elements ever ready to push it over.

There were some new complications too. The Bhatia shooting was followed by a raid by the security forces on the sarais adjoining the Golden Temple. While this scored the point that there can be no refuge beyond the reach of the law, it yielded no culprits. Instead, it predictably incensed the Akalis and staff of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Two days later the SGPC President Gurcharan Singh Tohra injected a new element into the uncertain scenario when, on reaching Amritsar after release from detention, he announced that the Akal Takht may have to be rebuilt.

The Government named Supreme Court judge Ranganath Mishra to enquire into the November 1984 riots in Delhi, and the Akali Dal president Harchand Singh Longowal spent three days in the capital trying to convince students and intellectuals that Akalis stood for the country's unity and integrity, and touring the violence affected areas. But it was difficult to say whether listening to the experiences of the surviors would harden his stance. On past occasions like this the Akali leaders have tended to shoot from the hip without thinking out the long-term effect of their statements.

This was proved once again by the increased stridency which crept into Tohra's statements the moment he reached Amritsar and saw some of the ruins left behind by Operation Bluestar, particularly the smoke blackened shell of the building which once housed his office. On the plane from Delhi, Tohra appeared subdued and somewhat helpless. "How can we control the Punjab youth when we have nothing to offer them," he told INDIA TODAY. "The Government can strengthen our hands by conceding the Anandpur Sahib resolution, abolishing the special courts and withdrawing the Disturbed Areas Act before any talks."

He said the basic question was how to remove the dissatisfaction and insecurity of the Sikhs who needed to feel that their culture and religion were protected. He ventured: "Some special protection can be given in the Constitution. Let the Government think sincerely about it."

But after a walk around the parikrama of the Golden Temple and a visit to the rebuilt Akal Takht, the beetle-browed Tohra chose to address his followers in the charred, first floor hall of the SGPC building. Here he was all fire and brimstone saying that the Government had unleashed violence worse than the Mughals to "teach our *qaum* (community) a lesson." Tohra felt any enquiry into the Delhi riots would be meaningless unless the Akalis were consulted about the terms of reference, and it was made clear from the beginning that the guilty would be punished. The Tarkunde and Sikri enquiry committees had pointed an accusing finger at persons who were now ministers and MP's. "How will they allow a fair enquiry?" he asked.

At a press conference two hours later, Tohra dropped the bombshell

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about the possibility of rebuilding the Akal Takht. But he was careful enough to leave himself an option: this, he said, was only his personal view and any such step could only be taken after taking the Khalsa Panth into confidence. "For the time being we may not be able to do it as we are engaged in another struggle," he said. Asked why he wanted to demolish the Akal Takht, he replied: "Because the Government has built it; the people won't accept places of worship built by the Government; only the followers of the faith should do this." And, he said, if the Government wanted peace, "let Rajiv Gandhi come here and apologise, and give a guarantee that the police will never enter the temple again." Hadn't the the Sikhs readily forgiven the then Punjab chief minister Bhimsen Sachar when he apologised after the police entered the temple in 1955, he asked, and hadn't Arjun Singh as Madhya Pradesh chief minister gone to an Indore gurudwara and apologised for the entry of the police into it?

Like all Akalis, Tohra too proclaimed himself in favour of a settlement —but, on his terms. But he did concede: "We have suffered, the Hindus have suffered and above all Punjab has suffered. Those whose houses are on fire do not want the flames to continue raging."

Of all the things Tohra said on his first day in Amritsar, it was his proposal to demolish and rebuild the Akal Takht that seemed to catch on. Whether or not he said it as yet another negotiating point to be raised by the Akalis, it certainly took everyone by surprise. Veteran CPI leader Satya Paul Dang said it would divide the Sikhs. And so it did. Dilbir Singh, 54, outspoken Amritsar industrialist and general secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the main educational body of the Sikhs, said: "Tohra is welcome to further beautify and extend the Akal Takht but demolishing a gurudwara already built cannot be approved." He wondered why the Akal Takht, which has not been an issue so far, was being turned into one. "We should reduce the number of issues, not increase them," he said.

But the proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by Amrinder Singh, convenor of the Sikh Forum, only to be refuted the next day by co-convenor Lt-General Jagjit Singh Aurora who clarified that this could only be Amrinder Singh's personal view. Aurora said that the Forum Council would meet to take a view on the Takht proposal and meanwhile he would take Tohra's remarks with a pinch of salt. It was probably another case of adopting a hard line to gain credibilty, Aurora said.

But whatever people like Dilbir Singh and Aurora might say, the Tohra announcement seemed to be immensely popular with Sikh commoners and shopkeepers around the Golden Temple. Sitting at a book shop in Bazaar Mai Sewan, Dr Darshan Singh, a renowned agricultural scientist and retired head of the Agronomy Department at the Punjab Agricultural University, came out wholeheartedly in support of it.

People like Dang, however, advised that the Government should persevere in not getting provoked by such statements and come forth with more initiatives. Dang also felt that the Congress(I) could contribute by instructing its units in Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh to "keep their mouths shut about the future of Chandigarh" and mobilise public opinion for the acceptance of any award the Centre may give in the national interest.

But while there is still no sign of further initiatives—barring the release of former Akali chief minister Prakash Singh Badal—the tension in the state is palpable. Police checking up on civilians often evokes hostile reactions, particularly when the police is aggressive in its searches. Last fortnight, the alleged manhandling of a bus driver by a CRP patrol led to a strike by roadways staff and suspension of all bus services. It was only when the Deputy Commissioner, Ramesh Inder Singh, ordered a magisterial enquiry into the incident that the roadways staff returned to duty.

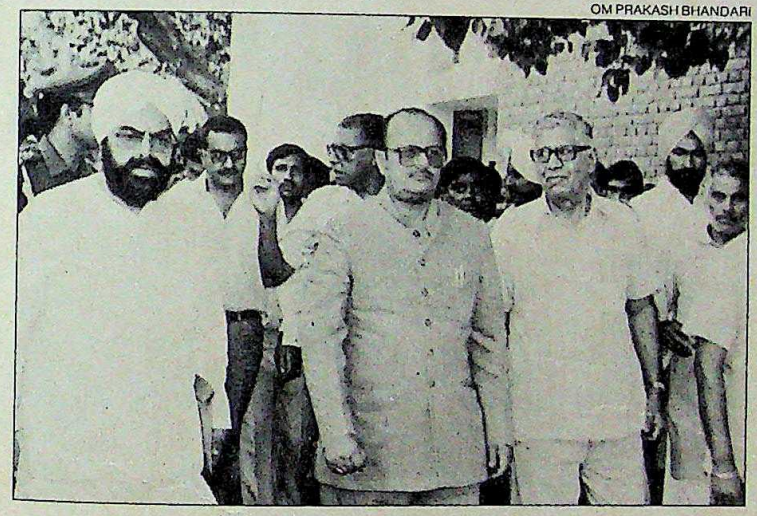
Police action is more vigorous after the sort of murderous violence that was dealt against Bhatia, and both the violence and the follow up tend to cloud the atmosphere more. If the Sikhs resent the police for its ham-handedness, the Hindus protest its ineffectiveness. Both communities ask why the police and security forces have failed to apprehend terrorists after daring attacks such as the one on Bhatia. "Previously it used to be alleged that terrorists came from the Golden Temple and returned to it after killing people. Now that they have no such refuge why are the culprits not being caught?" asks Dilbir Singh. The president of the Punjab Bharatiya Janata Party, Dr Baldev Prakash, counters that the police is either afraid or sympathetic, and is still "groping in the dark" for Bhatia's attackers.

Ramesh Inder Singh, however, asserts that arrests have been made in 90 per cent of the cases of terrorism. Of the three persons arrested after the raid on sarais adjoining the temple, one was a listed bad character and another an SGPC sewadar who was carrying a licensed weapon but without endorsement on the licence.

However unsuccessful they may be in catching terrorists, the authorities show a paranoid concern for security. Taking a flight from Amritsar airport means running a security gauntlet which involves having one's baggage sniffed by an Alsation dog once in the security lounge and once again at the foot of the aircraft stairs, multiple friskings and body checks with hand held metal detectors, apart from the customary X-ray scan of baggage and walking through a doorframe metal detector. After checking in at the airline counter, the passenger proceeds to a police counter to be accosted by three policemen who take down the passenger's name, father's name, address, ticket number, and details of the number of recent trips to Amritsar. All of this points to the growing gulf between Punjab and the rest of the country. That was how the north-east once felt. Now that same sense of alienation is creeping up on Punjab.

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Amritsar

OM PRAKASH BHANDARI



Arjun Singh and Arun Singh in Amritsar: uncertain scenarios

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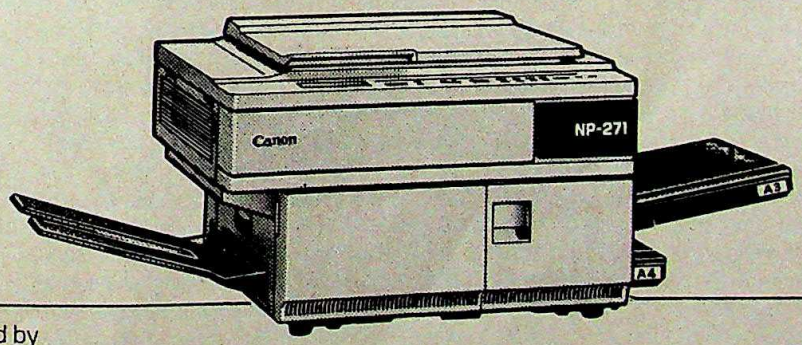

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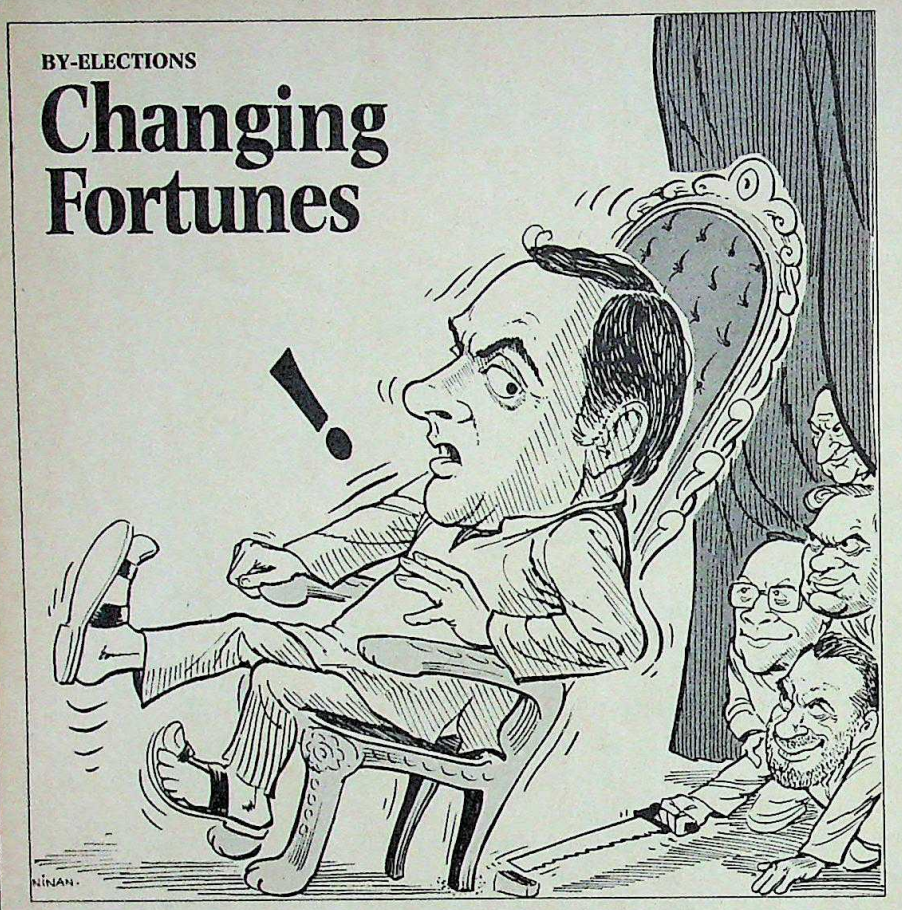
BY-ELECTIONS

Changing Fortunes



A NOR'WESTER does not spell the monsoon. Nor does a bad patch in by-elections signify an all-round decline in popularity. Yet the seizure that gripped the Congress(I) at the by-elections to three Lok Sabha and 26 assembly seats, concluded last fortnight, gives a measure of the quicksand on which its popularity rests. In the assembly polls, spread evenly among states ruled by the Congress(I) as well as the Opposition, its tallyboard remained stuck at a shockingly low seven. And its victory in one of the three Lok Sabha constituencies could hardly be considered a compensation for the humiliation suffered by it at the hands of the much-abused Shiv Sena in the elections to the Bombay Municipal Corporation (*see box*).

The verdict of five million voters, spread over 10 states, was admittedly harsher than the one given in the March assembly when polls the Congress(I) had bagged 60 per cent of the total seats. It won a little over a fourth this time round. In Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal, where the party came out with flying colours in the Lok Sabha elections, it managed to win just two of the 10 seats contested. Altogether it wrested only three seats from the Opposition, but lost out on seven.

The party merely shrugged off its reverses. All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) General Secretary Srikant Verma, the party's man for all seasons, said: "By-elections are like a mere sentence in a book. A sentence may be badly phrased here and there, but that does not take away from the merit of the book." But Verma is a poet, and many thought the metaphor was rather clumsy. Said Atal Behari Vajpayee, president of the BJP: "I also agree that too much meaning should not be read into by-elections. But it was a warning to the ruling party, and people are generally not warned so soon after taking charge."

It was truly a stern warning served to the Congress(I) in Uttar Pradesh, home state of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The party lost two of the three seats in the state. Ram Singh Khanna, Uttar Pradesh minister till March and veteran Congressman, was badly mauled in his traditional constituency of Bareilly city by a BJP candidate, Dinesh Jauhari, who won by a margin of 14,885 votes. Even the Congress(J)—certainly no favourite of the bookies—scored a victory over the Congress(I) at Phulpur constituency in Azamgarh district. It was only Harishankar Tiwari, sitting MLA from Bilgram constituency in Hardoi district, who registered a face-saving victory for the party by defeating his nearest Lok Dal candidate. Said Union Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh, who is also the president of the state unit of the party: "We expected much better results."

Expectations were equally belied in Orissa, the state where the Congress(I) had had made a clean sweep of the Lok Sabha polls, winning 20 of the 21 seats. This time, however, it came a cropper, losing all the three assembly constituencies. The hardest blow came at Khurda, the constituency vacated by chief minister Janaki Ballav Patnaik who had contested from two seats in the March assembly elections. Patnaik had won the seat by a whopping 25,000 votes: but this time round the tables were turned on the Congress(I) which lost the seat by a over 2,500 votes to a Congress(I) rebel, Parasanna Patsani, a known supporter of Basanta Kumar Biswal, Patnaik's former friend who was upstaged by the high command on the eve of the assembly polls. Patsani resigned from the party last month as his claim to the Khurda seat was not entertained by the party. Subsequently, Patnaik sacked him from chairmanship of the Orissa State Cooperative Land Development Board and slapped corruption charges on him.

The Janata Party in Orissa, led by the fiery Biju Patnaik, wrested the reserved tribal seat of Keonjhar from the Congress(I), as well as the Kakatpur seat. There was a renewed bout of optimism in the Janata camp, sulking for months after its defeat in the Lok Sabha and the assembly elections. Said Biju Patnaik: "The results have proved the present Government's sharp decline in popularity. The earlier victories were a mere fluke, caused by sudden and unnatural events. Now the real issues are back on the scene, and the Congress(I) is fast losing ground."

The verdict in neighbouring West Bengal was particularly galling to the Congress(I) which had of late been in a state of euphoria over its recent successes in the Left Front-ruled state: the Congress(I) had quadrupled its tally (from four to 16) at the last Lok Sabha elections. However, the Marxist-led Left Front struck back defeating Congress(I) candidates in all the three constituencies where by-elections were held. Umakanta Roy, candidate of the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), a Front partner, defeated the Congress(I)'s Asit Mal by 3,478 votes at the Hasan reserved seat in Birbhum district. And this was clearly a slap in the face for Pranab Muk-

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BOMBAY MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

The Aye of the Tiger

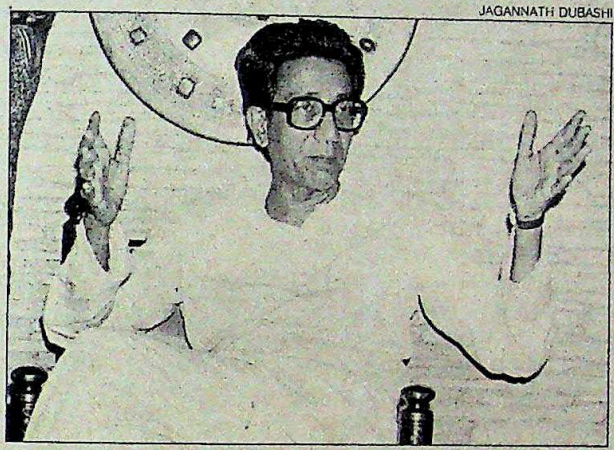
THE DRAWING-ROOM, stuffed with gods and tigers, was crammed to capacity and more. The thin man in spotless white stood quietly in a corner, smoking his trademark pipe as, one by one, a string of people touched his feet. Bal Thackeray was a happy man. "Today we have proved that Bombay belongs to the Maharashtrians," he said with that famous clipped smile and muttering: "Jai Maharashtra". He said a moment later over the head of one of the newly-elected corporators: "Now they will have to listen to us."

It was Thackeray and his Shiv Sena's finest hour. Against all odds and predictions, in the teeth of the supposed "Rajiv wave", brushing aside the cobwebs of past defeats, the fanatically parochial party has run away with the country's richest and most powerful corporation. It won 74 of the 140 seats it contested, leaving it 12 short of a majority in the 170-member corporation. The Congress(I) resembled nothing so much as a pricked balloon, winning only 37 seats, the Congress(S) and the Janata Party together took 19, and the BJP, as usual going it alone, finished with 13. The CPI ended with one and independents and others—including nine rebel Congressmen—accounted for a crucial 26. In its sweep, the Sena humbled many stalwarts like former mayor B.K. Boman Behram, contesting as an independent, and Bombay Regional Congress Committee (I) Vice-President Tabjibhai Solanki. Only a third of the Congress(I) sitting corporators given a ticket got through.

The Shiv Sena's performance was astounding. Even at the previous height of its popularity, in 1968, it had got only 42 seats and in the outgoing corporation it had held only half that. To explain the feat of more than trebling the earlier tally is something which even the cocky Thackeray—he understandably looked a little dazed by the sweep—is hard put to perform. Sudhir Joshi, ex-mayor, comments: "Our councillors were the only ones who worked in their wards and that is why they voted for us. Rajiv Gandhi does not count in a local election."

The reasons why for the first time a single opposition party came only a dozen short of a majority in the BMC are varied. The vote, for one, was poor, estimated at only 40 per cent. For another it was heavily split, not just among parties but among the candidates of each party. The Congress(I)'s 170 candidates were reportedly being opposed by at least 300 rebels and in some wards were facing three or four rebels each.

JAGANNATH DUBASHI



Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray back with a bang

It was Vasantdada Patil who set the ball rolling with what is said by Bombay Congressmen to have been a calculatedly inflammatory remark about a move to bring Bombay under Central rule, and that the need of the hour was to oppose it even at the cost of one's life. Thackeray's campaigners immediately made much of this in their meetings. Then the chief minister, whose dislike of the city politicians is well-known, came out with another statement to a local paper about the many Congress(I) candidates said to be of dubious antecedents: "Don't vote for them. Defeat them." What was worse, he did not retract the statements. Says city Congress(I) leader Murli Deora, who resigned as soon as the trend became clear: "We have not lost because of our candidates. The rumour was spread that Bombay was being taken away from Maharashtra and this was enough to inflame passions."

The chief minister is quickly being painted as the villain of the piece of the Congress(I). He reportedly refused to campaign for the party and even refused to release the manifesto. Complaints to him about partymen actively working against party interests fell on deaf ears. Says D. Patil, MLA from Bhandup where the Congress(I) lost all six wards for the first time in many years: "In our area an MLA known to be close to the chief minister was moving around with rebel candidates." Charges Gurudas Kamat, MP from Bombay: "The police was inactive. Countless instances of bogus polling were ignored."

Even as the Congress leaders got set for a right royal squabble, the Shiv Sainiks are getting ready for power after a long dry season. There is no doubt that the victory has come as a much-needed shot in the arm—despite Thackeray's assertion that "it did not come as oxygen for us." And last fortnight Thackeray was getting ready to dole out the spoils, explaining that he did not believe in intra-party democracy. He appealed to the people of other states to "respect the language and culture of Bombay and to live harmoniously. They must share not only our joys but also our sorrows." First, of course, he has to find the dozen or so people for a majority and was unusually accommodating. "We are not going to see party labels on the floor of the house. We will go by the proposal."

Among the winners from other political parties were Ramdas Nayak of the BJP. Says Arun Mehta, general secretary of the state Congress(S): "The vote was heavily split. A quick calculation shows that in many cases the national opposition parties polled the highest, but the Sena's win is a creditable one." And what does Shiv Sena rule mean for Bombay? Thackeray plans to begin the reign by renaming Bombay Mumbai. Then he plans to control the influx of people into Mumbai by denying licences and permits to people from other states coming there on business. No doubt the former cartoonist will think of other treats as time goes on. Which should make for exciting times.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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herjee, the newly-appointed West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) Committee president, who is a son of Birbhum. This was regardless of the fact that Union Law Minister Asoke Sen and weighty state leader Subrata Mukherjee had campaigned at Hasan. Front candidates also breezily went past the winning post at Garbeta in the coastal district of Midnapore, and Kranti in the northern district of Jalpaiguri.

It was equally tough going for the Congress(I) in the two southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, lost to it anyway. Out of the five seats in Andhra Pradesh, the party won one while its ally, the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM), won another. N.T. Rama Rao, the chief minister, had earlier contested three seats and, characteristically, won all. The two seats vacated by him subsequently—Gudiwada and Nalagonda—have gone back to the ruling Telugu Desam, not to speak of the Makthal seat which was wrested by the Janata Party, an ally of the Telugu Desam, from the Congress(I). Ravi Sohanadari, the campaign manager of Rama Rao, won the Gudiwada seat by a margin of 21,643 votes. Says P. Upendra, general secretary of the Telugu Desam: "The people have reposed their faith once again in the leadership of Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao."

It was also a question of faith in the state of Karnataka next door where candidates belonging to Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's Janata Party clinched both the seats where by-elections were held. Their margins of victory were resounding by any standard: K.L. Shivalinge Gowda trounced Marilingaiah of the Congress(I) by over 18,000 votes at Sathanur while Umesh Katti beat Congressman S.S. Mahajan Shetty by a margin of more than 22,000. Earlier H.D. Deve Gowda, a minister in the Hegde Cabinet, had won the Sathanur seat by a margin of 12,800 votes but vacated it in favour of Holenarsipur. Said M. Chandrashekhar, recently elected president of the state Janata Party: "We have done it again and again, proving that the people are happy with our government."

The Congress(I) performed better in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. And despite the violence in Bihar—where four people were killed on polling day—the party conducted itself not entirely without credit, winning two of the five seats. In Madhya Pradesh, Ajay Singh, son of the former chief minister and Punjab Governor Arjun Singh, won the Churhat seat vacated by his illustrious father. This was the only seat where a by-poll was due. In Rajasthan, however, the Congress(I) won two of the three seats that it contested; it won the prize seat of Amber, captured earlier by influential BJP leader Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, former chief minister. However, the BJP also retrieved from the Congress(I) the Kishengarh seat: the defeated Congress(I) candidate is no less than Kastur Chand Chowdhary, son of the Rajasthan PCC(I) general secretary, Kesari Chand Chowdhary.

In Bihar, the BJP won the industrial constituency of Bokaro. The Latehar seat, first stated to have been won by the BJP, was later unofficially declared won by the Congress(I).

It was only in Tamil Nadu, under the benign eye of friendly Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, that the Congress(I) scored a decisive victory over its Janata Party rival in the Lok Sabha constituency of Tiruchendur. The margin of its victory, however, was reduced from 2.23 lakh last December—following which the winning candidate died—to 76,000 now. But the Janata Party avenged its defeat at Baramati in Maharashtra, trouncing the Congress(I) candidate by a margin of 35,000 votes in the by-election necessitated by Sharad Pawar vacating the seat.

It was anything but half-heartedness that caused the sketchy performance of the Congress(I). Even though Rajiv did not move out this time, seven state cabinet ministers assisted Tiwari in the campaign in Uttar Pradesh. It was even ensured that there was no tripping in power supply to the relevant constituencies for a few weeks before the polls. In Rajasthan, a number of hand-pumps were hurriedly installed in the constituencies that were going to the polls. To cap it all, the Congress(I), in all its campaign rallies, harped on the promise of a better future—more jobs, more technological advancement, better education.

But electoral allurements in India are effective only when they are accompanied by strong emotional motivations—such as during the aftermath of the assassination of Mrs Gandhi last year. When the emotional batteries are drained, as they are now, Rajiv and his Congress(I) have to face the electorate on the strength of achievements.

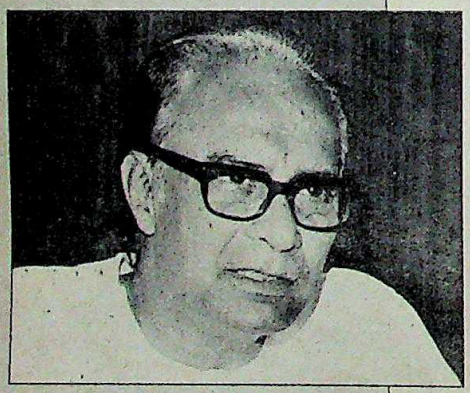
—PRABHU CHAWLA with bureau reports.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"By-elections are like a mere sentence in a book. A sentence may be badly phrased here and there, but that does not take away from the merit of the book."

SRIKANT VERMA
AICC(I) *General Secretary*

BHAWAN SINGH



"The (Congress-I's) earlier victories were a mere fluke caused by sudden and unnatural events. Now the real issues are back on the scene, and it is fast losing ground."

BIJU PATNAIK
Orissa Janata Party chief

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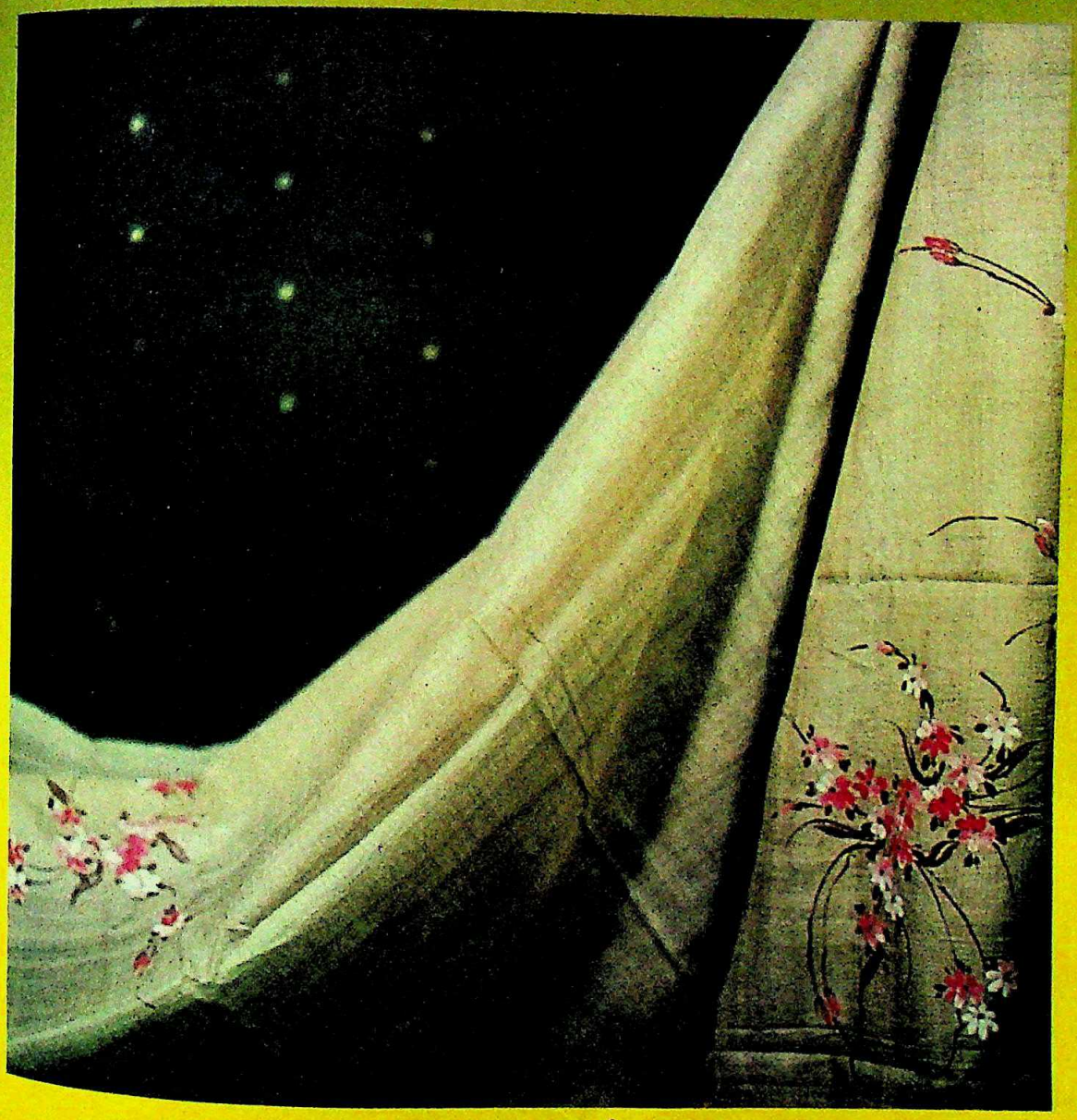

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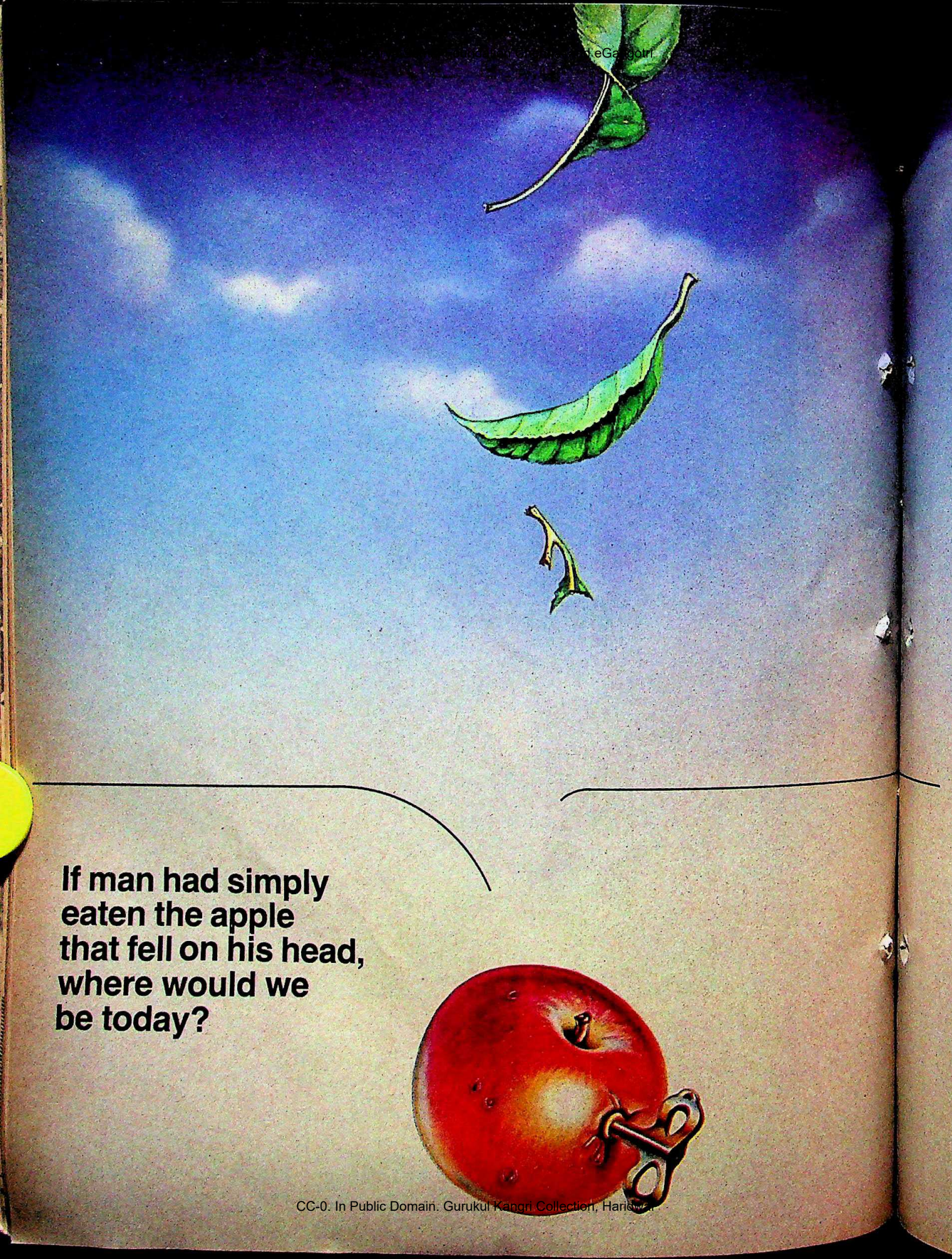

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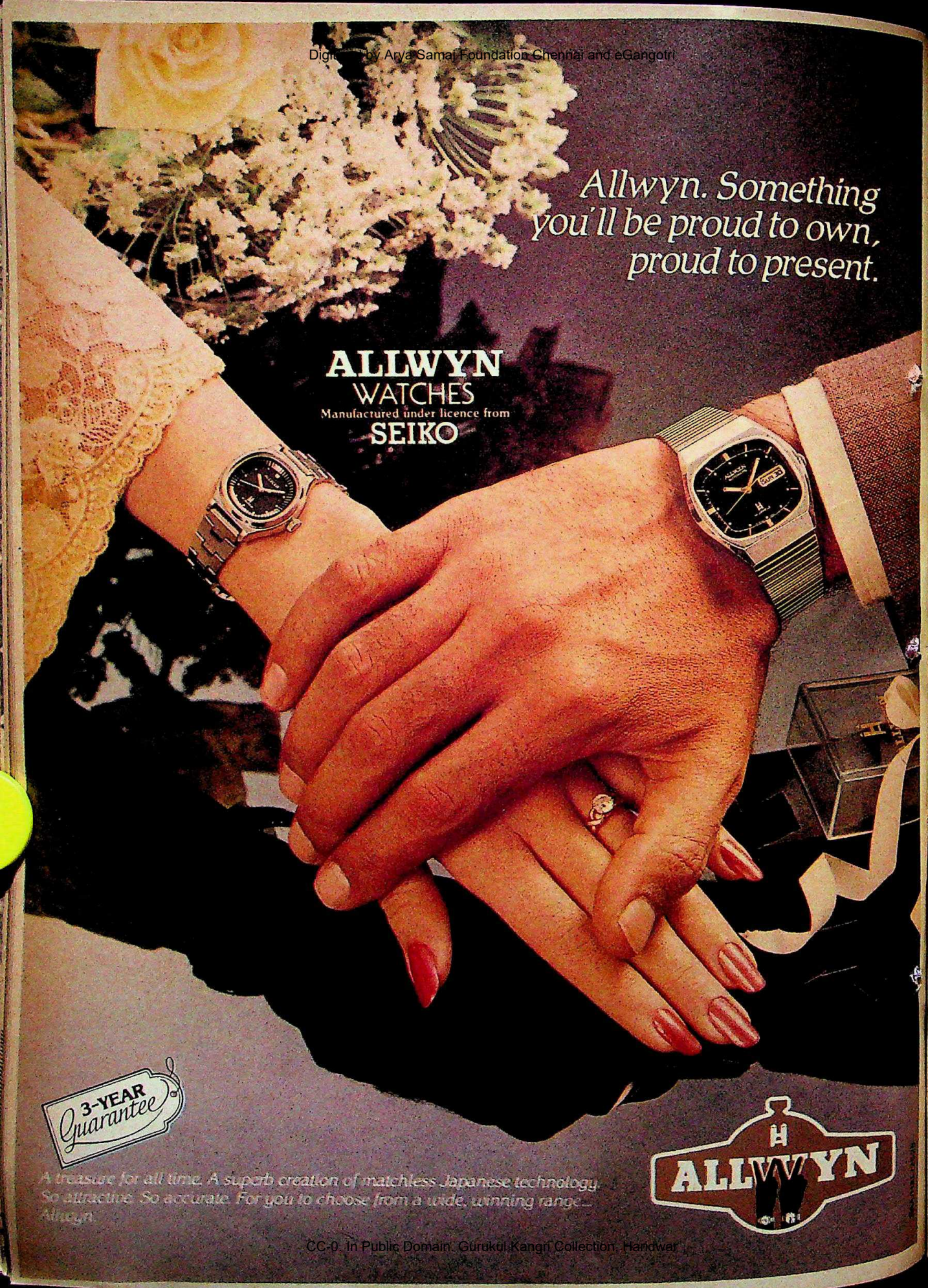

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THE PRESIDENT

Extreme Charges

IT ISN'T often that polemical broadsides are aimed at the august person of the President of India, a national symbol who is supposed to be above controversy. So more than a few eyebrows went up last fortnight when a Congress(I) MP, K.K. Tiwari, alleged in the Lok Sabha that two Sikhs supposed to be connected with extremists overseas had been President Zail Singh's guests at Rashtrapati Bhawan in 1983.

Tiwari's remarks came close on the heels of stories in sections of the media alleging that the President had links with extremists. Admittedly, the stories were sensational and polemical in content and style, and they looked suspiciously like a campaign. Consequently, they raised a controversy which generated more heat than light.

The most blatant accusation came from Tiwari. Speaking in a debate last fortnight on a public hearing on the so-called "human rights" issue in Punjab in Washington, Tiwari said that Deedar Singh Bains and Bhajan Singh Jogi, two men who he said were associated with such extremist leaders as Jagjit Singh Chauhan and Ganga Singh Dhillon, had stayed at Rashtrapati Bhawan in 1983. Presuming on the basis of this that there was some link thus established between Rashtrapati Bhawan and these protagonists of Khalistan, Tiwari thundered: "I would like to ask the (home) minister how their stay was possible."

Home Minister S.B. Chavan seemed less than enthusiastic in his reply. Taking two days to make a riposte, all he did was to read out the official denial issued by Rashtrapati Bhawan saying that Bains and Jogi had not stayed there.

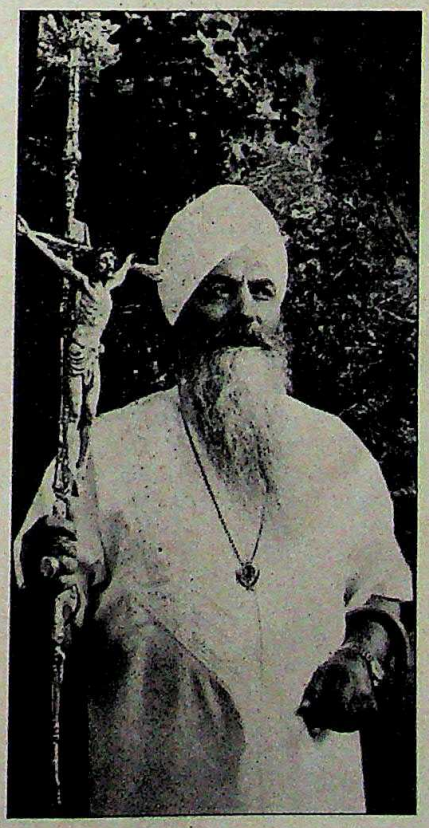
Perhaps, but what makes Tiwari's allegation interesting is not just that it was made but that he doesn't seem to have been taken to task for speaking out of turn. What is more, a feeling has got around—not least because Chavan's defence was so half-hearted—among opposition leaders that the feelings he expressed were actually inspired by guidance from higher-up. But Tiwari firmly denies that he was acting on orders. Said he: "I have been in Parliament for six years and I have been known to speak my mind. This was an issue I felt strongly about."

Contacted by INDIA TODAY, an official of Rashtrapati Bhawan declined to get involved in a discussion on the subject and stuck to the letter of the official denial. "The office of the President cannot be dragged into this," he said. While that may be a valid argument, inquiries by INDIA TODAY reveal that both Bains and Jogi visited India several times and Jogi at least had been in Rashtrapati Bhawan as a visitor if not overnight guest. Jogi had also met the late prime minister Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi before he became prime minister.

So was it a storm in a teacup? In one sense it certainly was. Jogi, a former customs inspector in Delhi, left India in the '60s to settle in the United States. He is credited with having converted a number of white Americans to Sikhism and has become a wealthy man owning property including ashrams in several parts of the US.

But he is no stranger to India. According to the official records, he was in India on December 9, 1982, and stayed with his disciples in a five-star hotel in the capital. He was back in India in 1984 and sat in the VIP enclosure at the Republic Day parade. Three months later, when President Zail Singh visited Mexico, he dropped in on Jogi's Los Angeles ashram. Said a presidential aide: "There was no secrecy. Even (Minister of State for Steel) Natwar Singh, who was then foreign secretary, was with him." The itinerary, he added significantly, was approved by the Government.

Bhajan Singh Jogi: suspect visitor



Deedar Singh Bains is now one of the wealthiest of Sikhs in the US to which he migrated shortly after Independence in 1947. He owns some 10,000 acres of orchards and agricultural lands in California and has been an acquaintance of —Zail Singh's for some time. But Operation Bluestar changed his view on his country of origin completely. Shortly after the crack-down on extremists in the Golden Temple last June, he told INDIA TODAY (July 15, 1984) in the US: "My only solution now is Khalistan. Before the raid I was not too much for it."

Bains too is reported to have visited India often though not since the army crack-down. More important, he was once considered for an honour by Mrs Gandhi's government.

According to information from intelligence sources, Jogi and Bains are in different ways committed to the extremist cause. But while Jogi is known more for his flamboyance, Bains may actually be more active in the separatist movement. But the way things are, it would do nobody any good, certainly not the President, to publicly own up to a friendship with the two.

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem likely that such controversies will die out. They're too much a part of the mishandling of Punjab, the long story of lost opportunities and Congress(I) factionalism which helped bring the state to its present mess.

Before he became President, Zail Singh was embroiled in an unseemly battle for influence within the Congress(I) in Punjab, battling his chief rival in the party, Darbara Singh, in a manner which gave all the advantage to the extremist leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Incidents in which the rivalry between these two Congress(I) leaders allowed Bhindranwale to evade arrest and Zail Singh's presence at a religious ceremony together with Bhindranwale are now an indelible part of the Punjab story. And it seems likely that until the Punjab mess is cleared up, these ghosts of the past cannot be wished away.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

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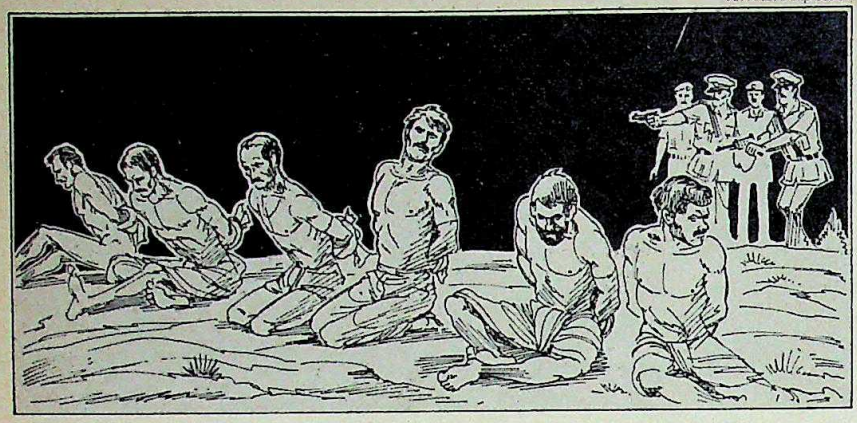
An Artist's Impression



ANDHRA PRADESH

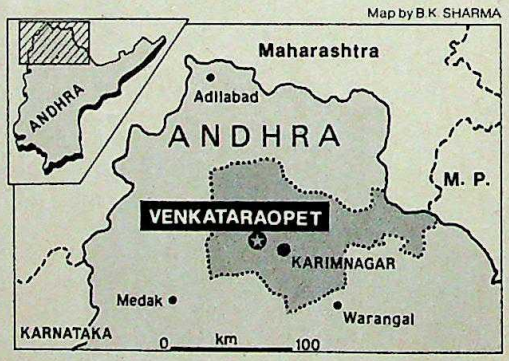
Survivor's Story

ENCOUNTERS sometimes backfire on their perpetrators—the police. Civil rights groups in Andhra Pradesh are demanding a reopening of the whole question of police repression after a patrol gunned down five unarmed naxalites. A sixth member of the group, Ramiah, feigned death and lived to tell the tale revealing, in the process, that the divisions among naxalite factions can even lead them to turn informers against each other.

As Ramiah tells it, the tragic incident took place at night on April 11 on the outskirts of Venkatraopet village in Karimnagar district where the six activists of the Chandra Pulla Reddy group had stopped to spend the night. Worn out, they neglected to post a guard, and rued the mistake when they were woken up by a police patrol and forced to squat in a line with their hands tied behind their backs. Seconds later, the police opened fire with Sten-guns and revolvers at the barked commands of two sub-inspectors. Ramiah, who was shot in the legs, stuck out his tongue in a gross parody of death when the cops shone torches on the faces of the naxalites to make sure they had done a complete job. He made good his escape once their backs were turned and contacted the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC).

The police were not slow in coming out with their own version of the incident, complete with alleged seizures of firearms and country bombs from Venkatraopet. However, they refused permission for an APCLC fact-finding team to visit the spot and carry out investigations on the grounds that the area was "tense". Deputy Superintendent of Police Buchi Reddy, Sircilla, even claimed that over 50 activists had surrendered in the wake of the incident and agreed never to associate with naxalite groups.

Map by B K SHARMA



However, APCLC Secretary K. Balagopal, challenged the police version, pointing out that their refusal to let the team visit the spot and talk to the villagers "only deepens our suspicions". His information also led him to bluntly state that the "tense" situation the police cited as reason for keeping the village out-of-bounds to outsiders was their own creation. Dozens of activists and sympathisers of the Pulla Reddy faction had been beaten up in police stations and intimidated into silence.

K. Rajanna, state committee secretary of the Chandra Pulla Reddy group, said the latest killing was the first since the days of the Emergency when activists of his faction were prominent targets for the police. "My analysis leads me to believe that the police strategy is to eliminate key activists of one group and then pass on to the next. They began with groups lacking a mass base and then move on to groups with considerable popular backing—ours."

Politically, the Chandra Pulla Reddy faction has always had a large measure of support from educated youth and farm workers, thereby causing concern to the police. But this question of mass backing has drawn fire from other groups which claim that after Pulla Reddy's death in November last, a sizeable number broke away under Paila Vasudeva Rao. The split generated its own bitter divisions that took a peculiar turn—one faction informing on another faction to the police.

This was confirmed by a junior police officer who refused to be identified. He said that the tip-off about the Venkatraopet group came from the rival People's War Group led by Kondapalli Seetharamiah. Similarly, the arrest of four naxalites of the People's War Group near Rampachodavaram in East Godavari district shortly after the Venkatraopet incident was a result of information supplied by the Paila Vasudeva Rao group. Not surprisingly, the police have been quick in exploiting these internecine rivalries with deadly results.

Coming in the wake of the denial of permission to Professor Manoranjan Mohanty of Delhi University to speak at Indervalli on April 20 to mark the fourth anniversary of the massacre of Gond tribals in 1981, Balagopal believes there is a renewed campaign against civil rights groups under way. "Continued atrocities on unarmed villagers and impediments put in the way of our functioning point to the fact that the state Government is behind this. Petitions to the Lok Ayukt by the APCLC for indicting police officers have evoked little response."

The affair took on a comic opera get-up when Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao called the naxalites "true nationalists". In a manner reminiscent of one of his block-busters, he went on to declaim: "We cannot direct the police to shoot naxalites. We can only appeal to them to shed the path of violence and wait for a mental transformation."

But if the growing police "encounters" are any indication, Balagopal and his like-minded activists have ample reason to feel that it is the state police who are in urgent need of a "mental transformation".

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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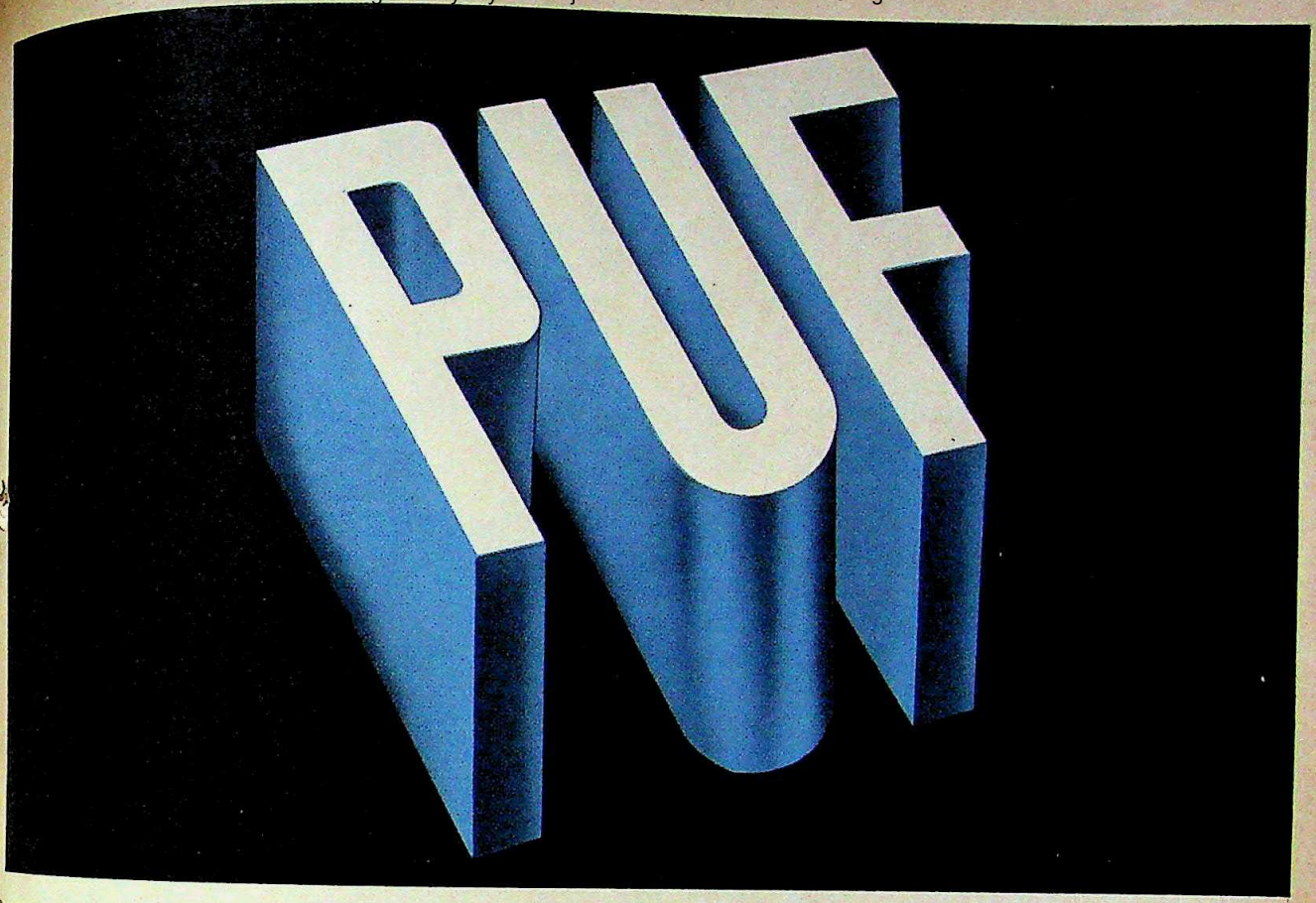

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MANAGERIAL EXCELLENCE

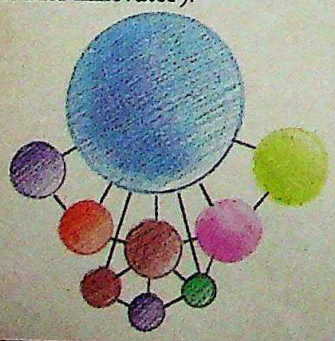
HOW TO DO IT — THE PI WAY.

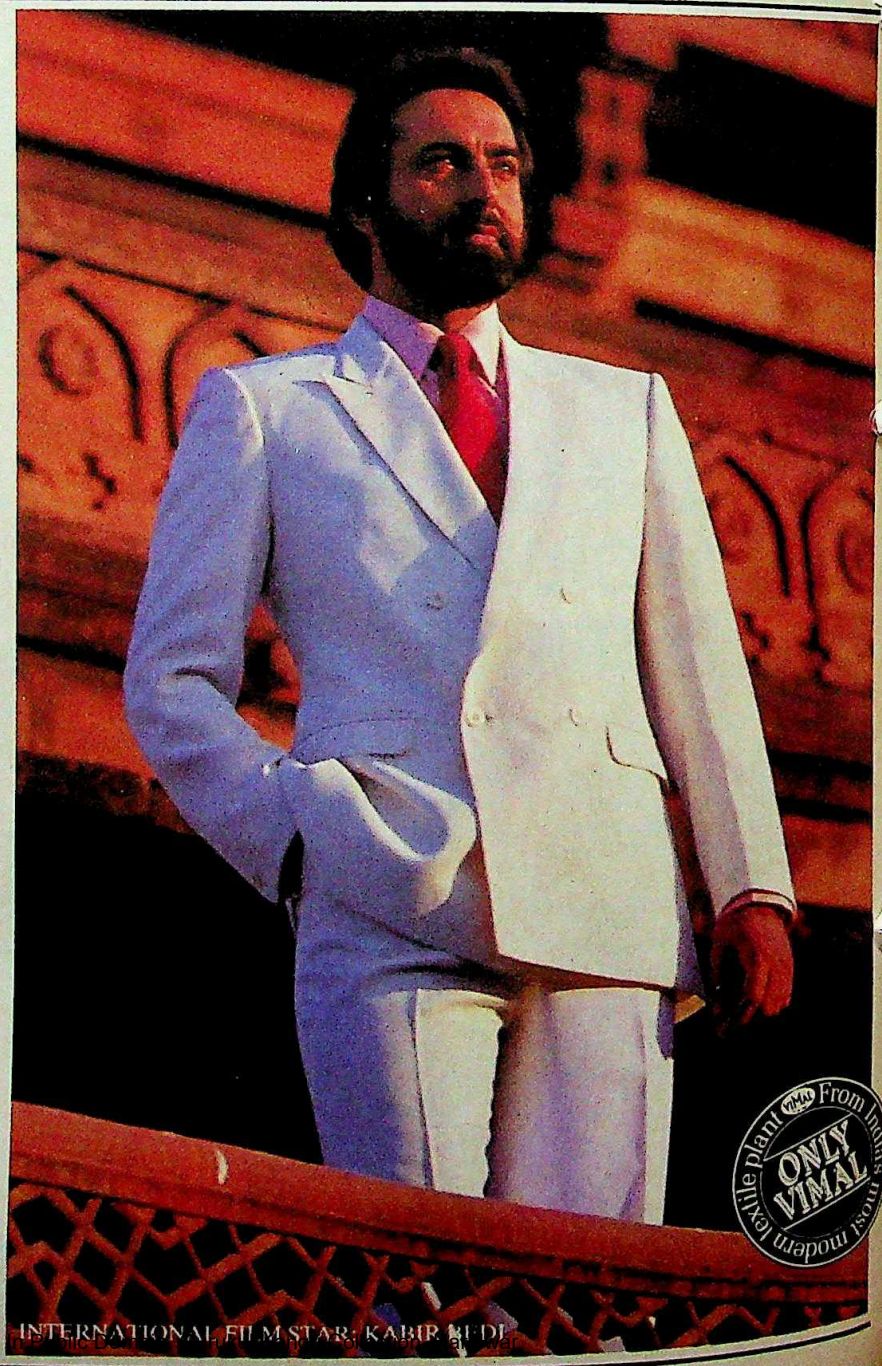
By Dr. Pradip N. Khandwalla, Professor IIMA, and author of "Fourth Eye: Excellence through Creativity."

"ORGANIZATION VS. PI MAN

Ever met the Organization Man? This creature not only works for the organization, but also belongs to it. The man of persuasion techniques, group work, committees, and conference tables. Gets along well. Has no disturbingly exceptional traits. The "well-rounded" mediocrity. William H. Whyte first identified the species in the mid-fifties. More recently Zaleznik and Kets de Vries described a mutant: the man of procedures, precedents, and rules, the steady climber; the inhabiter of ruts; the Minimum Man. Most managers, by the time they are forty, closely resemble the Organization Man. And the Minimum Man. They exist. Merely.

Then there is another man. Not much better off than the Organization Man. Not at least earnings and perks and position-wise. Sometimes reviled. Dismissed at times as an impractical visionary or a crank. Even considered a troublemaker. The man who likes to challenge the God given order. Toys with fresh ideas. Takes risks. Stands up for what he thinks is right. Endlessly asks questions. Seeks out people with bright ideas. Wants to leave a mark on the world. Likes to be a pioneer. And an innovator. Let us call him the PI Man (P for pioneer and I for innovator).





INTERNATIONAL FILM STAR: KABIR BEDI

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WHERE ARE THE PI MEN THESE DAYS?

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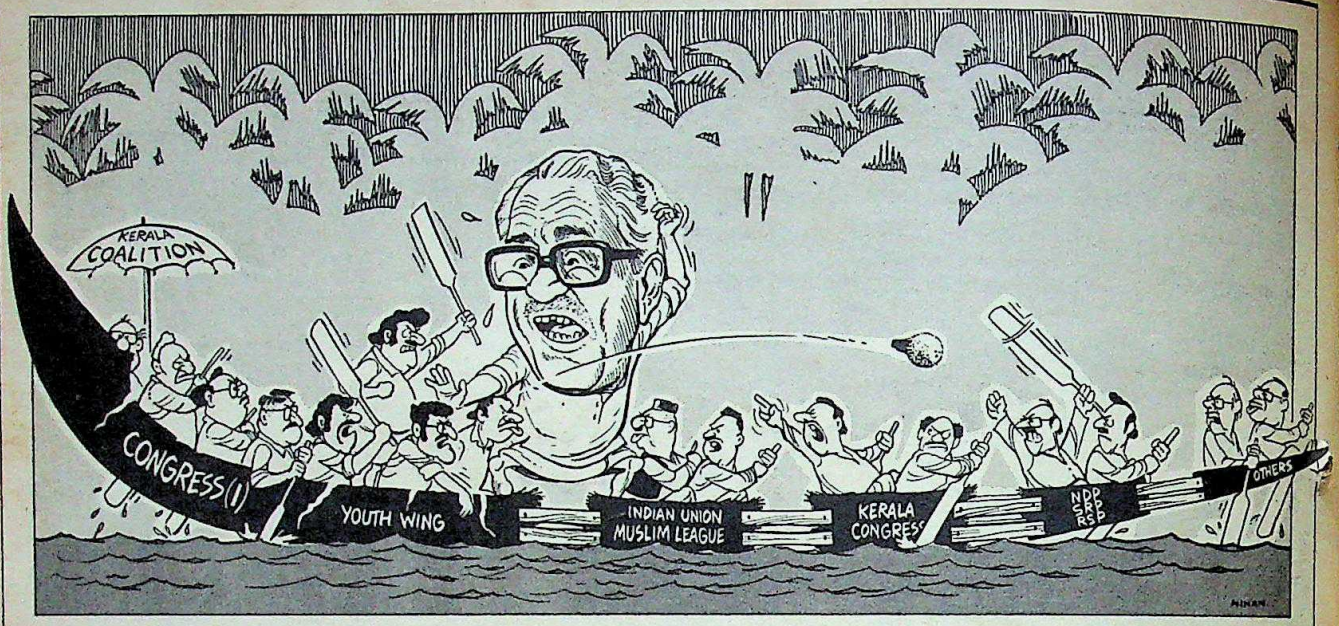

KERALA

Shaking the Coalition

KERALA's politics takes peculiar twists and turns. Chief Minister K. Karunakaran's balancing act in keeping together his fractious partners in the United Democratic Front seemed to hang in the balance when his own Youth Congress(I) President and MLA, G. Karthikeyan, called upon his party to jettison its coalition partners and singly manage the reins of government to ensure a corruption-free administration.

Speaking during the budget session of the Assembly, Karthikeyan charged that the Congress(I) was being "bullied by communal parties whose mismanagement of sensitive portfolios had cast a shadow on the image of the Congress(I) in Kerala". Calling the coalition the "most corrupt government in the history of the state", he asserted that constant pandering to sectarian sentiment had made a complete hash of administrative programmes and policies. Adding fuel to the fire was the Youth Congress(I) General Secretary, C. Philip, who dubbed the Kerala Congress as having a "district outlook" and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) with being extremely communal.

Things began to happen when the Kerala Congress questioned the propriety and motives of Karthikeyan and Philip. Dejos Kappan and George Sebastian, both general secretaries, pointed out that the Youth Congress(I), being a part of the Congress(I) and dominant partner in the coalition, had no "moral" right to criticise its partners. Implicit in this mild statement was the threat that the Congress (I) with just 34 seats in the 140-member house was in no position to point the finger at its partners whose support it needed to stay on in power.

They turned the heat on Chief Minister Karunakaran claiming that the corruption allegations levelled against them were a smokescreen intended to cover up the charges of improper conduct directed time and again against the chief minister. Matters reached a critical stage when the KPCC(I) President, C.V. Padmarajan, came out in support of his youthful proteges, leading Karthikeyan to believe that he had Karunakaran's blessing if not open support.

This persuaded Karthikeyan that he was on the right track. Ambitiously, he went on to outline a plan that would enable the Congress(I) to take over the reins of government based on motivating grassroots workers to intensify their efforts at building up the party's base. But Karthikeyan was guilty of overestimating his reach. In the elections to the student unions of three state universities, the Youth Congress was humbled by the student wings of the Kerala Congress, IUML and CPI(M), prompting Congress(S) MLA A.C. Shanmughadas to challenge them to win a single seat south or north of Guruvayoor without support from either the Kerala Congress or the IUML.

Silence from Karunakaran led influential Kerala Congress leader K.C. Joseph to indulge in some loud thinking. "It is the Kerala Congress with its roots deep in the countryside that could best handle Kerala's interests and not the Congress(I)", he said. He was at pains to point out that in spite of having a Congress(I) Government at the Centre, Kerala could not secure the required Rs 3,360-odd crore that it had asked for as budgetary appropriations for the seventh plan. "All we got was a paltry Rs 1,600 crore. The Kerala Congress would be able to secure a better financial deal from the Centre," he claimed.

Perceiving that matters had gone too far and the safety of the coalition was at stake, Karunakaran moved into action. A meeting with his partners in the UDF brought out a ringing declaration that the coalition would stand firm —disbanding it would be suicidal to the future of Kerala. At the same time he quietly impressed upon his Youth Congress firebrands that the time for public criticism was not quite appropriate and that they should wait for better times.

But the polemics had served one purpose—they had ignited a public debate in politics-conscious Kerala about the virtues or otherwise of one-party rule. And what forms this consciousness will take only time can tell.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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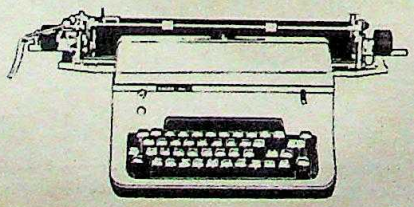

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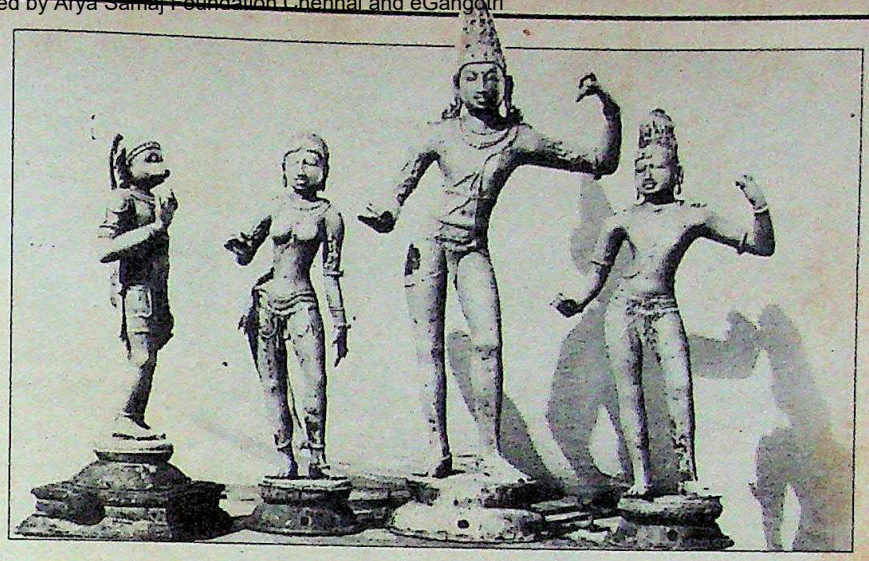
TAMIL NADU

Idol Furore

EVEN the most studious candidate for the civil services would not be expected to know where Paruthiyur is on the map of India. But last fortnight the spotlight was on this small village in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu when K.P. Unnikrishnan of the Congress(S) and S. Jaipal Reddi of the Janata Party raised a storm in the Lok Sabha by alleging that the Indian Government had sought to ship priceless idols from a Paruthiyur temple to the United States for exhibition in the Festival of India there. "This was done," said Unnikrishnan, "despite protests by local Hindus and there is public resentment in Tamil Nadu over the removal of idols under worship."



The Paruthiyur idols and Sastrigal (left): resented export

Nearly 365 idols, icons, images, and art treasures from all over the country were picked by the Government of India for exhibition in the festival. These included a number of precious *panchaloha* (a five-metal alloy) idols from different Thanjavur temples: the Kalyanavaradarajaperumal temple in Paruthiyur, the Sikkal village temple and the Chidambareeswarar temple of Vadakulathur. Then there were priceless bronze images from the Thanjavur Art Gallery which were also taken out, not to speak of the small wood carvings and limestone sculptures from the Government museum in Madras city. It all added up to 10 priceless large pieces, besides many smaller ones.

No eyebrows would have been raised had all this not been done under a cloak of official silence. When Union Minister of State for Culture K.P. Singh Deo replied to the charges in the Lok Sabha 70 idols had already been shipped to the US and, said Deo, the rest were on their way. Journalists had to seek out the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Minister R.M. Veerappan for details on when and how the idols were sent to Delhi.

And then some more uncomfortable facts emerged. It now transpired that the state Government had initially refused the Centre's request for the idols in deference to local sentiment. It had even ordered that replicas be made immediately of all the idols that the Central Government sought so that duplicates, instead of the priceless originals, could be sent for the Festival of India. The replicas were even readied in record time. But then the state Government suddenly sent the originals to Delhi.

Explained Veerappan: "The Central Government got in touch with Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran a second time and pressed again for the original Paruthiyur idols and impressed on MGR that the art exhibits from Tamil Nadu had greatly appealed to the foreign participants at the 1983 Non-Aligned Meet (NAM) in New Delhi. This time the US Government had assured full protection for the exhibits. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was going to personally participate in the festival, and the art treasures would be sent and brought back very safely, insured for very large sums."

But Veerappan caused a few flutters when he tried to argue that the most important reason why the original temple idols were sent was because they were not being worshipped. Said he: "These Paruthiyur temple idols have not been under worship for the last five years or more, and certainly not when we sent them to Delhi. In fact 63 temple icons not under worship had been sent from Tamil Nadu for NAM. At that time no objection had been raised. The icons and idols which have been sent now had all been sent for NAM." The minister gave a categorical assurance that "we will never allow removal from temples of idols which are worshipped as deities".

But 64-year-old P.K. Ramanatha Sastrigal, a Brahmin who was a teacher of Sanskrit in the Paruthiyur Kalyanavaradarajaperumal temple for several decades, has openly challenged Veerappan's contention. Sastrigal told INDIA TODAY that "the four idols of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, and Anjaneya were very much under regular worship in the temple till 1979 when they were stolen."

An obvious question that arises is why the idols, if they were under regular worship till they were stolen, were not restored to the temple after they were recovered in 1983. Says Sastrigal: "The Government did not return the idols to the temple. Neither were the Brahmins of Paruthiyur conscious enough to ask for the idols back. There are only about eight Brahmin families in the village, and nobody was really interested in 1983 to know what was happening to their recovered idols."

But if the Brahmins of Paruthiyur were sleeping in 1983, they had certainly woken up in 1985. They asked the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department for the idols to celebrate the Sri Rama Navami festival which fell in end-March. Sorry, said the officials, the work of reconstruction and renovation of the temple was not yet over, and it would be against prescribed religious codes to bring idols into an unfinished temple. What the officials did not say, but Veerappan did, was that the idols had been sent to Delhi.

Even Swami Jayendra Saraswati, the Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt, went on record to say "it is not right to remove idols under worship from temples". The Sankaracharya particularly cautioned against sending our priceless icons abroad, because of the excellent counterfeiting techniques avail-

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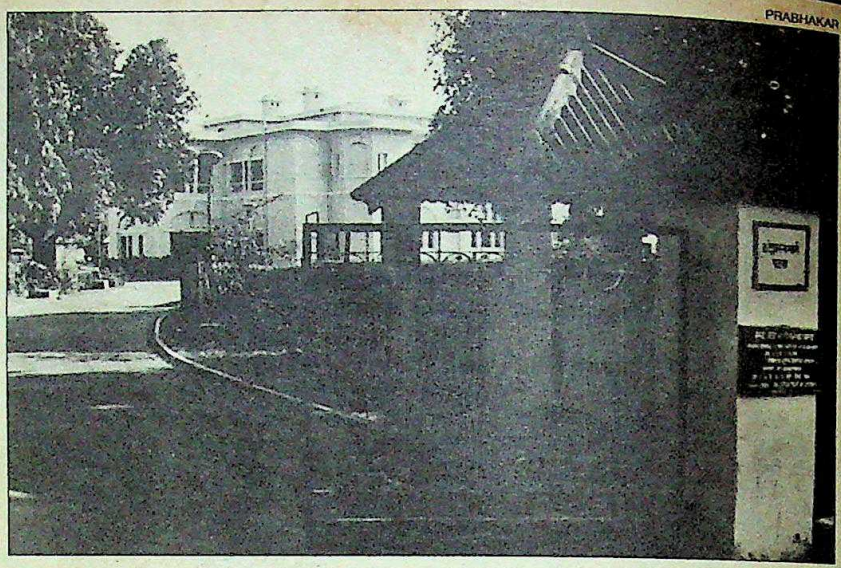
able in foreign countries. The President of the Hindu Mission in Madras, N.V. Swami, even took the issue to the Madras High Court in a writ petition seeking to forbid the authorities from taking the idols either to America or to any other country. The petition pointed out that "idols of worship could not be made articles of exhibition" and that "no other person of any other religious faith would allow similar things to happen". The court ordered issue of notice to both the Central and state governments. So as the battle raged over a fait accompli, it was evident that the Central and state governments offended religious sentiments while appearing to cater to cultural sensibilities.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI


PRABHAKAR

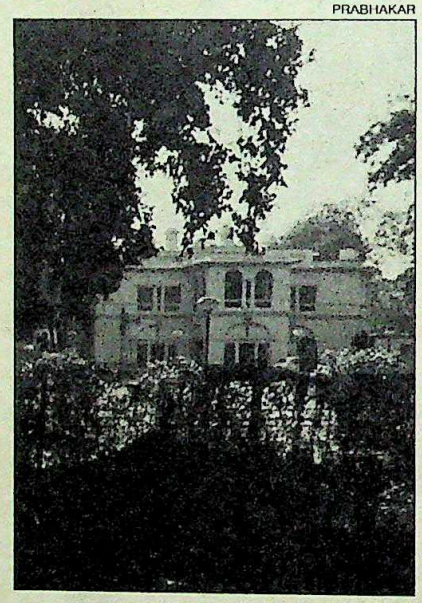
BIHAR

Homing In

SUCCESSIVE Bihar chief ministers have played their own version of musical chairs with their official residences. With few exceptions, they have changed their hearth, necessitating massive and costly renovations every time. Last fortnight the state's newly-elected Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey decided to uphold this tradition when he decided to convert the state guest-house into his official residence while the 'official' residence, the bungalow at 4, King George Road, lacks an occupant.

Knowledgeable circles in Patna believe that astrological advice was behind the change in Dubey's earlier decision to move to King George Road. Some even say that Dubey changed his mind when he was told that the earlier occupant, previous chief minister Chandrashekhar Singh, had organised some kind of a puja at King George Road which would have augured ill for his successor. Discounting all this, a Dubey aide said the simple reason was that the residence was considered too big for Dubey's family. It was difficult, however, to find many takers for this explanation.

Opposition leaders were, predictably, incensed at this waste of "public funds". They estimate that something like Rs 5 crore has been spent on renovations alone of various chief ministers' residences in the last 10 years. Fumed Lok Dal General Secretary Prabhat Kumar Sinha: "These chief ministers show utter disregard for public money and spend it on decorating their houses as if they are not people's representatives but old time nawabs."


PRABHAKAR

The King George bungalow (top) and the guest house: allegations of waste

The charge was not far off the mark. The King George bungalow, across the Raj Bhavan, has just housed three chief ministers—S.K. Sinha, Mahamaya Prasad Sinha and C.S. Singh— even though after recent innovations which cost Rs 15 lakh it would do any leader proud. Improvements in the electrical wiring and fixtures alone cost Rs 4 lakh. Singh had even got a huge "Durbar Hall" constructed to hold his "Janata Durbar" but went out of office before it could be used.

The first to spurn the King George Road bungalow was Binodanand Jha, who succeeded S.K. Sinha. K.B. Sahay, who followed, preferred to stay in his Chajjubagh residence after, of course, the usual renovations. As Kedar Pandey and Abdul Ghafoor also preferred to stay in their private residences, the King George house was converted, partly, into a guest-house.

With Dr Jagannath Mishra in 1975 came the turn of the astrologers. Guided by the stars, his ministerial bungalow at 12, Bailey Road was given a face-lift worthy of a chief minister. When those stars dimmed two years later, successors Karpoori Thakur and Ram Sunder Das shone in glory from Bailey Road. Mishra stormed back in 1980 but continued to stay at 2, Circular Road while the Bailey Road residence was converted into a Janata Durbar, again after generous allotments from the exchequer.

When C.S. Singh finally decided to restore the King George bungalow to its rightful status, he found it wasn't that simple. L.P. Sahi, a powerful dissident in the Mishra days, was the new occupant there and he was clearly not inclined to shift to Mishra's Bailey Road residence as Singh wanted him to. It was around that time that some 'human skeletons' were found in the Bailey Road residence and displayed by Sahi's men as evidence of tantric rites by the previous occupant. The 'skeletons' proved to be a hoax and Sahi was persuaded to move after Rs 6 lakh was spent on renovating the house.

What erosion the Dubey decision will cause to the public exchequer is as yet unknown. Officials of the buildings construction departments who, for no fault of theirs keep getting into the limelight, were tightlipped on the figure.

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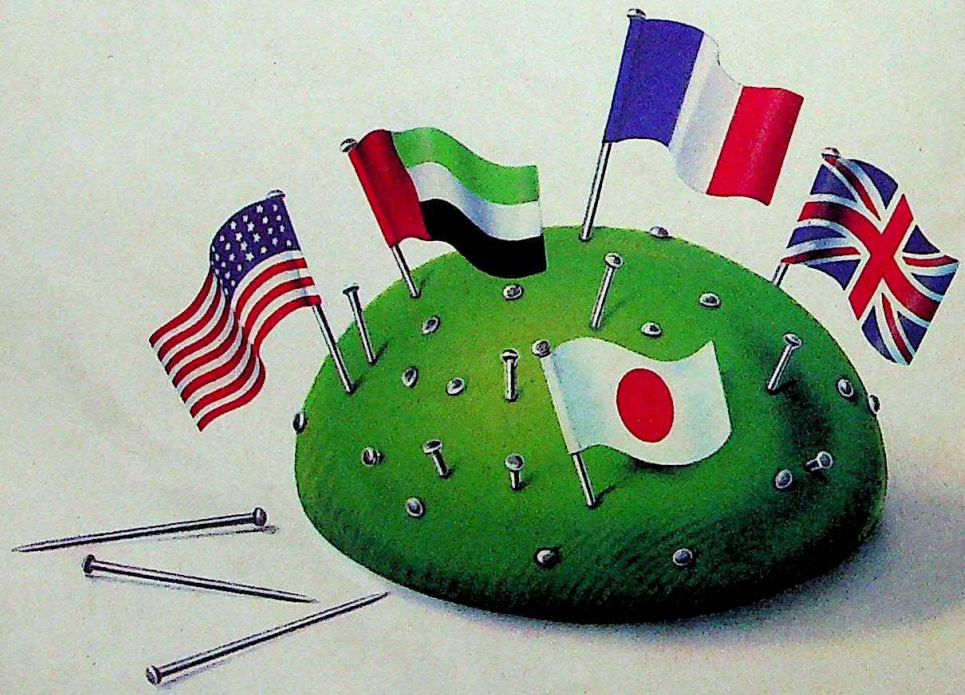

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Department Commissioner D.P. Maheswari would merely say, "We, the officials, will do whatever the Government decides."

One decision the Government shows no inclination of taking pertains to Thakur's proposal to put an end to this game. As chief minister, Thakur had proposed that the Raj Bhavan be made into the headquarters of the police department, the King George bungalow be made the Raj Bhavan and the Bailey Road house into the chief minister's official residence. The then governor Jagannath Kaushal had also agreed to the proposal but before it could be implemented. Thakur lost his job. Dubey's star-gazer will no doubt brief him on how to manage a longer lease on the job than any of his predecessors but does even he know when the music of the masons will stop at the chief minister's 'official' residence?

—FARZAND AHMED

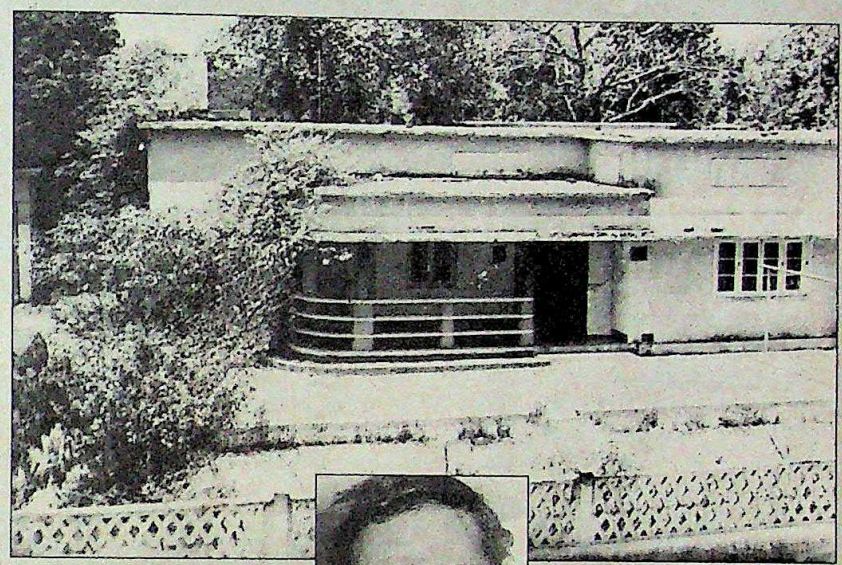
PROPERTY

House Grouse

HAVING promised to fight for the property rights of hutment dwellers in Jamshedpur if elected to the state assembly, Dramesh Nariman the local Congress(I) MLA seemingly decided last month to begin this crusade by staking a claim to a bungalow he coveted for himself in one of the poshest localities in the city. According to an official working with the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company Ltd (TELCO), Nariman had tried to pressurise the management to allot bungalow number D-18 on Dalma Road in Nildih, a senior TELCO officers' colony, to him. Failing in his attempts to get the house, Nariman allegedly hired the services of some of the city's known toughs who forcibly entered and occupied the bungalow on the night of April 11. The management immediately protested and last fortnight Nariman was named the second accused and charged with criminal trespass and illegal occupation.

Until the March assembly elections Nariman was a political non-entity in a lucrative Delhi-based leather garment export business. He was unexpectedly given the Congress(I) ticket to the Jamshedpur (East) seat, which he won.

According to the FIR lodged by R.B. Jha, TELCO's town control security in-charge, the bungalow which had been temporarily turned into a store, was allegedly broken into by 15 men armed with guns and other lethal weapons, and led by Paras Singh who was working in connivance with Nariman. The two security guards keeping a watch on the bungalow were "manhandled" and restrained from putting up any resistance. "I too was rebuked and threatened with dire consequences by Paras Singh and his henchmen. They also told me that they had occupied the quarters under instructions from Nariman MLA," Jha who had rushed to the scene stated in his FIR. The FIR also alleges that Paras Singh and his associates removed articles worth Rs 59,000 from the bungalow including 30 fans, 10 geysers and other costly electrical fittings.



The Dalma Road residence and (inset) Nariman: in and out

The TELCO police station at first refused to entertain the FIR and accepted it only when the management complained to higher officials. Officials of the company recalled that the police, despite written complaints remained immobilised and Jha, three days later was forced to file a criminal case against Paras Singh, Nariman and others in the court of additional chief judicial magistrate at Jamshedpur. As Jha stated in his complaint: "The matter was immediately reported to the local police but as Nariman (accused no 2) is an influential personality, no tangible action has been taken by the police. The superintendent of police, Jamshedpur, was also informed but up till now no action has been taken."

However, Amar Pratap Singh, the superintendent of police said that the administration had informed Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey and assembly Speaker Shiv Chandra Jha about Nariman's activities. He also asserted that the local police was waiting for Nariman to return to the city to interrogate him.

The attitude of the police prompted the additional chief judicial magistrate to order last week that the police get the house vacated and help the TELCO authorities in occupying it. The court also asked the police to continue its efforts to prevent any further breach of peace.

Nariman returned to Jamshedpur on the day this order was passed and announced that he was no longer interested in staying in the bungalow. He also claimed that the house had been allotted to him but showed no papers to substantiate this. Charging that some TELCO officials were out to "malign" him, he also alleged that some local Congress(I) trade union leaders were a party to the campaign against him. For the time being tranquility seems to have returned to the steel town.

—FARZAND AHMED

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HIMACHAL PRADESH

Clean Sweep

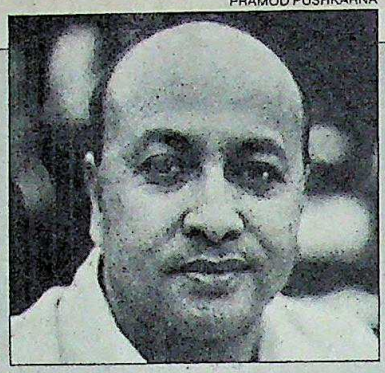
IT WAS time for spring-cleaning in the hilly state of Himachal Pradesh—and last fortnight, Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh was wielding the broom like never before. In a dramatic move that startled the little state, Singh ordered the filing of over a dozen criminal cases against former state ministers and senior government officials allegedly involved in corruption cases. Singh's action came after six months of preliminary enquiries indicted these people guilty of either abetting corruption directly or for being involved in allegedly illegal business dealings. The big names included: former ministers Shiv Kumar and Hans Raj Akhrot, former Pradesh Congress Committee general secretary Vidyadhar, and leading timber tycoon Kewal Ram Chauhan. Said Singh: "My party is committed to give a clean administration and we will not spare anyone who is found guilty, irrespective of his party affiliations."

Singh swung into action soon after his party's massive victory in the March assembly elections in which the Congress(I) won 55 of the 65 seats polled. With the triumph came fresh confidence and once safe in his saddle, Singh directed his enforcement authorities to reopen all corruption cases against politicians and, where necessary, to go ahead and launch criminal proceedings.

Soon, state officials began closing in on rebel Congressmen, especially those who had contested against official candidates and lost. Last month, Vimla Mahajan, widow of former minister Desraj Mahajan, was charged under the Prevention of Hoarding and Profiteering Act. Mahajan, who runs a cooking gas agency in Shimla, was charged with selling cooking gas refills in the black market.

Then came the turn of former industry minister Shiv Kumar who was also denied a Congress(I) ticket. The case against Shiv Kumar relates to the illegal sale of coal outside the state. Official sources reveal that the coal quota of the state was first allowed to lapse by the Industry Department—in which Shiv Kumar's brother was a senior official—and later sold to some Delhi-based private traders without the prior approval of the Cabinet. As a result, the state suffered a coal shortage and private dealers in Delhi made a whopping profit of over Rs 20 lakh. Last month, the Himachal Government arrested two Delhi traders and proceeded with the enquiry against Shiv Kumar. Said a senior state Home Ministry official: "This particular case is just a tip of the iceberg. We are looking into the entire purchases worth over Rs 20 crore made by the state Government between 1980-84."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



If he can resist pressure, it'll be a spring-clean that should keep Singh's administration sparkling.

Shiv Kumar

Next, the Government zeroed in on the illegal smuggling and sale of timber in the state—and the man against whom over a dozen complaints have been filed: timber tycoon and former Congress(I) MLA Kewal Ram Chauhan. A report submitted by the state's Enforcement Department last month clearly established that a few important Congress(I) MLA's were running benami timber-selling agencies through which timber was being smuggled out of the state. Chauhan was denied a ticket because of the complaints against him. He later contested as an independent and lost his deposit.

Another criminal case has been launched against Vidyadhar for allegedly selling timber allotted to him for hotel construction in the market. Reportedly, Vidyadhar and his sons had also cut trees on the hotel site without permission of the Government, a fact that was brought to Singh's notice three months ago. But before the state Government could register the case this month, Vidyadhar sought anticipatory bail.

Since the Himachal Government has chosen to start its criminal proceedings with Congress(I) rebels, its Operation Clean-up is being labelled as political vendetta. Said Vidyadhar: "These cases are meant only to silence and harass those who fought against official candidates." Former Congressmen argue that the operation is hardly fair since Singh's government is very reluctant to charge its own sitting MLA's and ministers who may also have been involved in corruption cases.

Singh, however, denies the charge. He insists that his government has decided to launch criminal cases against officials involved in the famous pipe scandal where the public works and health engineering department bought pipes worth over Rs 10 crore in excess of the requirements. The pipes, bought between 1980-82, are still lying unused. Last year, Singh ordered a probe in this deal in which the name of the husband of a sitting Rajya Sabha member, Usha Malhotra, figured prominently.

The enforcement and vigilance departments have prepared a list of over 100 officials involved in corruption. According to a secret report, a large number of government officials—including secretary-level officials—influenced their political bosses and junior staff to allot residential and industrial space to their relatives. In over a dozen cases at least, plots were allotted in the names of wives, sons and other relatives without following the proper procedure. Then in January this year, Singh began scrutinising the returns filed by the bureaucrats. He discovered that most were not declaring their assets completely. He transferred 20 officials from sensitive departments and asked his enforcement and vigilance departments to initiate disciplinary proceedings against them.

The wholesale launching of criminal cases against high profile officials has created an unprecedented scare in the state. Those with connections have started using them. Last fortnight, over 20 MLA's and senior officials camped in New Delhi to get Congress(I) leaders to intervene on their behalf. Slowly and surely the pressure is being put on Virbhadra Singh. If he can resist, it'll be a spring-clean that should keep his administration sparkling all year round.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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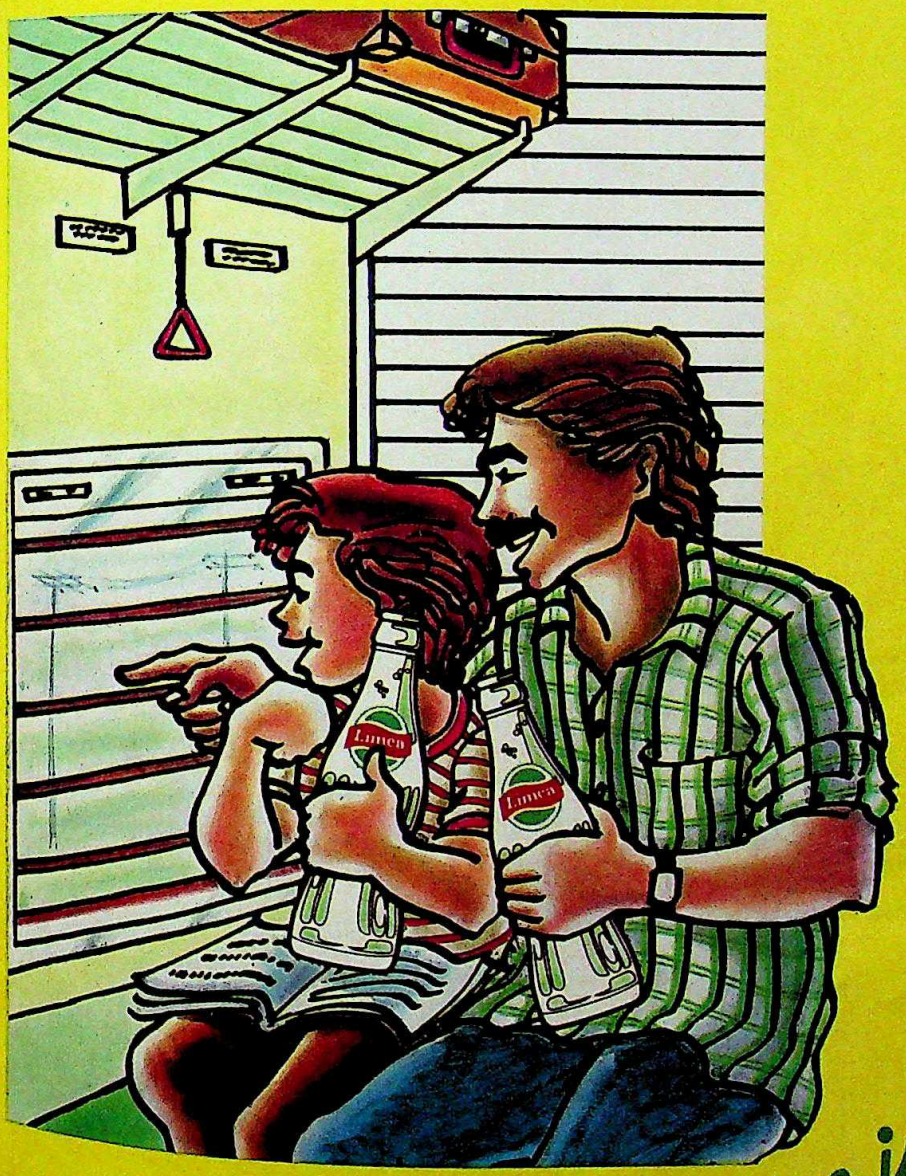

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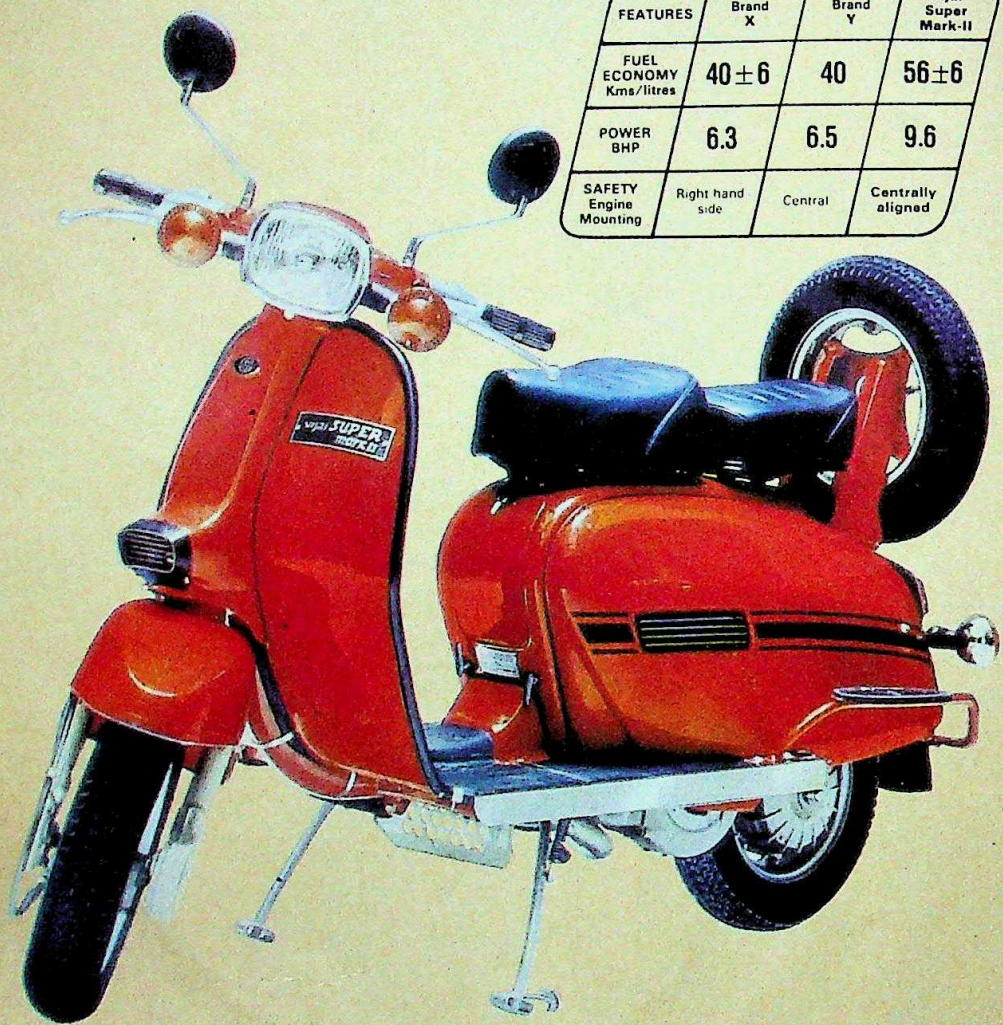

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EASTERN MEDIA SERVICE

Students demonstrating outside *Sambad* office: violent rage

ORISSA

The Students' Stir

IT WAS unlike any student demonstration that Bhubaneswar had witnessed before: a sudden and violent outpouring of rage. When the smoke finally cleared the press of a local newspaper was in ashes, the credibility of Bhubaneswar's journalists was being questioned and the once-proud reputation of Utkal University had been seriously tarnished. Worse yet was the surfacing of an unhealthy tendency among academics, the police and even the general public to condone the students' taking of the law into their own hands.

The student ire was first provoked on April 3 by *Sambad*, an Oriya morninger, which carried a front page survey of the drug culture it alleged was sweeping the Utkal campus. The report said 44 per cent of the students were taking drugs—and 27 per cent of them were addicts. Then *Tuesday*, a weekly tabloid, published a report on April 9 implicating women students of the university hostel in a call-girl racket.

The *Tuesday* report was the proverbial straw that broke the student body's back. Enraged by what they called the "irresponsible and scurrilous" reports, over 300 students—most of them women—collected on April 11 to demonstrate in the streets. Even Vice-Chancellor M.N. Das was provoked enough to say to the students before they marched out of the campus: "You (the women students) are like my daughters. I will protect your honour as I am not at the mercy of any politician."

The implications of the vice-chancellor's statement were clear. Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, managing director of Eastern Media Limited which publishes *Sambad* is the son-in-law of Orissa Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik. As the students wound their way through the streets they shouted slogans against the chief minister and demanded a public apology from Soumya Ranjan. Vice-Chancellor Das meanwhile led a delegation of three women students to the chief minister to lodge a complaint against the newspaper reports.

Before he could return, however, the students had already raided the offices of the Khabar-Kagaj group, publishers of *Tuesday* and caused widespread damage. By now there was no stopping the student tide which swept into the industrial area of the town and burnt the Trimurti Press which publishes *Tuesday*. "The tragedy," lamented Dhiren Patnaik, editor of *Tuesday*, "was that the police and the magistracy took sadistic pleasure in the violence. Instead of trying to prevent the damage an official told me to go and face the students." *Sambad* and Soumya Ranjan were more fortunate. By the time the students reached the Sambad complex and tried to storm it police and civil officials had reached there and were joined by the vice-chancellor. Soumya Ranjan, who was constrained to come out of his office, refused to apologise but did promise to verify the story on drug addiction.

But Soumya Ranjan feels there is more to the scenario than meets the eye. "Everybody tends to condemn me and my paper because I happen to be the son-in-law of the chief minister," he says. Rabindranath Bahera, assistant general secretary of the university students union refutes that charge and says *Sambad* ignored the rejoinder sent by the hostel superintendent and the secretary of the hostel's union. Nonetheless three days after the demonstration *Sambad* in an editorial regretted that the students had "misunderstood" the report and tendered an apology.

The role of the police has also left many dissatisfied. Allegations that they allowed the students a free hand were indirectly confirmed by SP Kulamani Deo, who said: "Students have taken a vow to destroy the newspapers which publish dirty stories. We are not going to protect any journalist if he writes such things. All these stories in *Sambad* and *Tuesday* are lies."

Vandalised news office: danger signs

Few deny that the students, especially the women, had cause to resent the articles. "But the way the students have expressed their anger has set a new precedent," warned an editorial in the newspaper *Pratigivadi*. "Any organised group will now be encouraged to terrorise and pressurise a newspaper under cover of protesting against irresponsible reporting." Both students and the press will be the losers if that warning is not heeded.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

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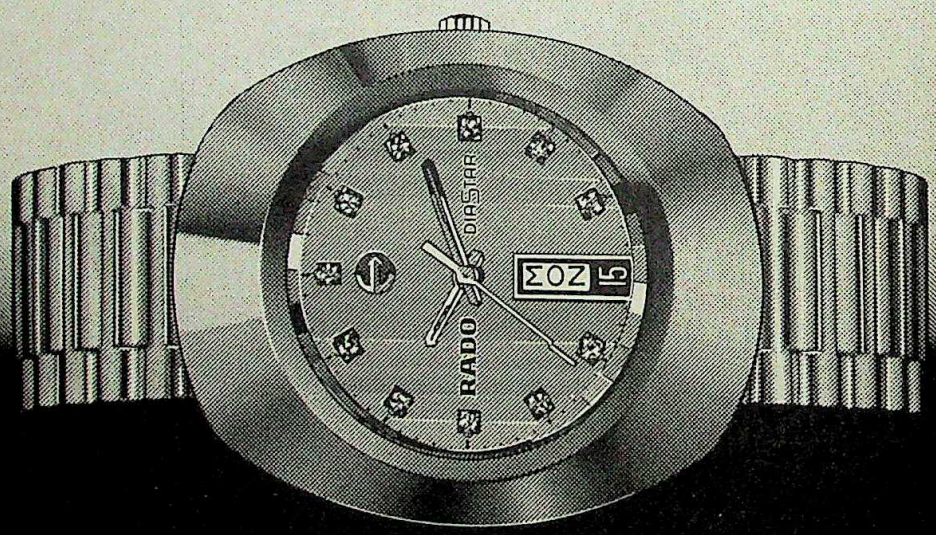

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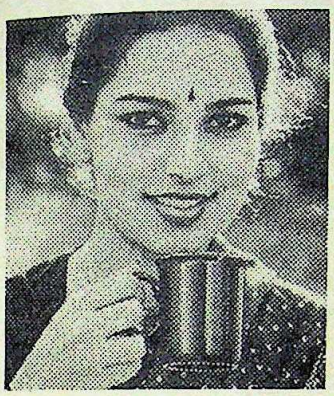

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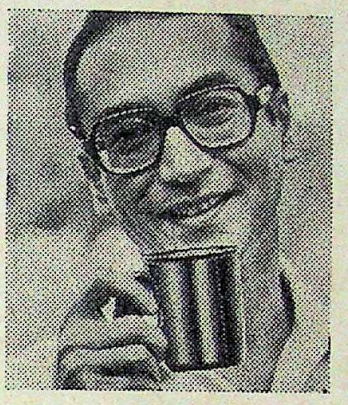

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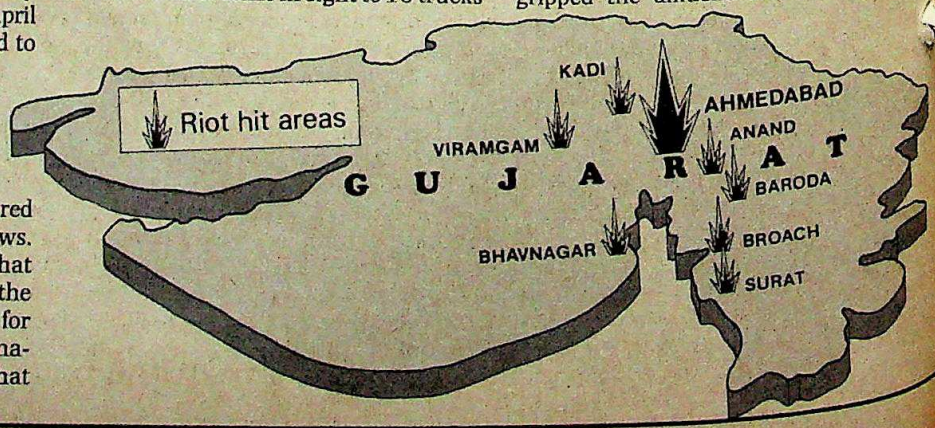
GUJARAT STATE

EVERYBODY, it seemed, was fighting everybody in Gujarat last fortnight. The upper castes were fighting the lower castes, the working class had turned against the middle class, Hindus were fighting with Muslims, the police were battling both the people and the press and the Government was fighting the Opposition. What had started off 11 weeks ago as a students' agitation against the state Government's reservation policy had metamorphosed into a bloody cauldron in which the catalytic conflict between the upper caste anti-reservationists and a government bent on pushing through with the concessions granted to the majority lower castes was subsumed by other collective angers that exploded simultaneously across the state and shattered even the basic social contract that exists between the police and the citizenry. Gujarat has lived through many bloody episodes: the 1969 communal carnage, for one, and the 1981 anti-reservation riots, for another. But Jehangir Cama, hotelier and auto garage owner, was right when he said: "I have lived all my life here but I have never seen or felt the kind of terror I see all around."

Just when it was thought that there could not possibly be any recrudescence of the communal clashes which left several dead in the walled city last month, there was a fresh outbreak of communal clashes both within the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the walled city and in the outlying areas where the fabric of communal amity had not been ruptured till then. Just when it was thought that the police would not repeat the strong-arm tactics that they displayed in the Asarwa locality in Ahmedabad in the first week of April, the 9,000-strong police force showed the city's three million residents that Asarwa was not even a faithful trailer. They repeated their Asarwa excesses in the Khadia and Gomtipur areas on April 17 and 18 and then went on to write one of the most shameful chapters in the history of India's police forces by going on a seven-hour rampage on April 22 after one of their own was hacked to death by a mob.

When they finished, the offices and press of Gujarat's largest-selling newspaper, *Gujarat Samachar* (circulation: 300,000) had been gutted and the city's streets were littered with burnt scooters and autorickshaws. The state Government later claimed that after their "emotional outburst" the police were persuaded to report back for duty but the Muslim residents of Bapunagar, a labour colony, are convinced that many policemen led gangs of "Hindu goondas" in night-long attacks on them which left over 55 dead. Resident J.J.Sheikh, an employee of the telephone department and a social worker, claimed that the rioters came in eight to 10 trucks led by an assistant superintendent of police, an inspector and two sub-inspectors whom he could identify even easily though they were not in uniform.

The fear of rampaging mobs even gripped the affluent areas of the city,



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Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Army pickets in Ahmedabad: fear and frustration

E OF SIEGE

whose traditional distrust of the have-nots was now supplemented by a new fear: attack by ununiformed policemen. As Sandra Long, a resident of Ruby Park in the well-to-do Vadaj locality, said: "People were awake all night fearing that policemen would come and attack us." In other similarly upper middle and middle class areas like Satellite Road, Ambawadi, Paldi, Sarkhej and Navrangpura, it became standard practice to leave lights on all night as groups of vigilantes lounged around outside the gates of co-operative societies, armed with lathis, iron rods and knives.

Asked Dr Gourang Shah, spokesman of the students' Navrachna Samiti: "The state Government says we lost control of the agitation but is the Government in control of its forces?" The question was valid as the trouble spread to Baroda, Surat and elsewhere, and the Madhavsinh Solanki Government felt compelled to call the army in for the second time in five weeks to impose a curfew that its forces had failed to enforce. But the army, unlike the police, cannot be omnipresent and killings continued through the week, taking the toll to around 100—more than double the count in the 100-day anti-reservation agitation of 1981. Solanki had managed to ride that tiger and dismount but there were two essential differences: he had not then become the focal point of the anger of so many castes and classes and neither had his handling of the situation been widely perceived as being inept.

Solanki's reaction, as that of the Union Government and the Congress(I) high command, was a predictable mixture of belligerence and stonewalling tactics. Taking the cue from Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's blaming the Opposition for the communal riots in March, Solanki alleged that only the Opposition was behind the continued non-withdrawal of the agitation even after he had conceded the concessions they had sought from his government. As for the police's misdeeds, the chief minister admitted in a confidential three-page note on the Gujarat happenings to Rajiv Gandhi that it was a revolt. But in public he would decline comment on the plea that the matter was sub judice.

THE UNION Government's stand was even odder. Home Minister S.B. Chavan gave graphic details to Parliament of the havoc wrought by the police in Ahmedabad but concluded by almost condoning their action. He blamed the high court for allegedly preventing the police from entering the trouble-spots (only five controversial officers have in fact been debarred), and then took the press to task for inflaming passions. Reacting also to persistent demands from opposition benches for Solanki's removal, Chavan said there was no question of this since it was a "duly elected" government. The refrain was repeated by Rajiv Gandhi at a meeting with opposition leaders but it was left to AICC(I) General Secretary Rajendra Kumari Bajpai to give the party reasoning more clearly when she countered the question with one of her own: should every Congress(I) chief minister be asked to resign every time opposition parties launched an agitation?

Solanki himself sounded confident of riding this tiger as well (*see interview*). In his note to the prime minister, scheduled to be sent late last week, he held out the assurance that the situation would become normal in a week, and pointed out that after the seven-hour police revolt everyone "including the Patels and Hindu businessmen" had realised that police protection was necessary. Accusing the opposition parties of resorting to "street politics" as a way of getting their own back after the mauling they received at the polls, he also accused the press of building up the Opposition. Finally, he drew the prime minister's attention to the report of the Editors' Guild indicting the *Gujarat Samachar* for its role in the 1981 agitation. Elsewhere he is reported to

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MADHAVSINH SOLANKI

"I'm confident I'll stay on"

FATE has been playing strange tricks with Madhavsinh Solanki, the 58-year-old chief minister of Gujarat. Barely two months ago his political fortunes were at a unique high: he had become the first Gujarat chief minister to complete a full term and then be elected for a second term; he had led the Congress(I) to a resounding victory in the Assembly poll. His word had carried unhindered sway in the allotment of tickets and all his detractors in the party had been denied them. There was a small cloud on the horizon in the shape of an anti-reservation movement which had been going on for three weeks, but it was expected that a man of his political and administrative acumen would prove more than equal to the task.

But last fortnight it seemed as if his carefully nurtured world had come crashing around him. Gujarat was in turmoil as the anti-reservation agitation had unexpected spin-offs into violence that cut across caste, class and community, the army was out on the streets of Ahmedabad, the police and the people had lost faith in each other and his government had not been able to curb the violence let alone end it.

Worse still for Solanki, there was a mounting campaign for his removal and both Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and party general secretary, Rajendra Kumari Bajpai had been called upon to state categorically that Solanki would not be removed. He sounded confident that he would ride this crisis when he met Assistant Editor AJAY KUMAR *and Correspondent* RAMESH MENON *for an interview. Excerpts:*

Q. *Wasn't your January decision increasing reservations for the backward castes a pre-poll gift?*

A. Not at all. There was hardly any delay between the submission of the Rane Commission report, its evaluation, acceptance by an empowered committee and the Cabinet's decision on it.

Q. *But wasn't the committee's report submitted in October 1983 while your decision came 15 months later?*

A. The report was indeed submitted in October 1983. It was then translated and printed, which was finished by mid-1984. Then it was reviewed by the departments of general affairs, medical services and social welfare. Then it went to the empowered committee of secretaries which had a note for the cabinet ready by December but we couldn't take a decision because of the Election Commission's stipulation that policy matters cannot be decided once the elections are announced. Our decision came almost immediately after the Lok Sabha elections finished.

Q. *Wasn't your decision to ignore the commission's recommendation that caste should not be the sole criterion for reservations based on political considerations only?*

Solanki: under attack

A. We decided to accept only those recommendations of the Rane Commission which were within its frame of reference. Whether economic backwardness should also be the criterion was beyond its purview. In fact, economic backwardness cannot be the sole criterion considering that utilisation of the quota has not been good enough. Reservations by themselves are not enough. We will have to create better facilities so they can take full advantage of the reservations. Here also we accepted the recommendations of the Rane Commission which went into the issue of how to help the backward classes identified by the 1978 Baxi Commission whose utilisation was a poor 5.6 per cent out of their 10 per cent quota.

The Rane Commission suggested that instead of giving only a small handicap of 5 per cent grace marks to the Baxi Panch classes, as is the present system, we should consider them for admission if they get 55 per cent marks as is presently done for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. We accepted this.

Q. *Why then did you back out and postpone the increased reservation by a year?*

A. Several reasons. We felt that the backward classes should not be in any hurry because even now their full quota is not being utilised. We could also see that if we did not compromise slightly, five lakh children would lose a year because their exams would not be held. We met the representatives of the students and parents heading the anti-reservation agitation and they assured us that they would call off the agitation if we postponed the implementation. We decided to have faith in them.

Q. *The anti-reservationists say that while their agitation is non-political and want only that merit should count, the pro-reservationists are really not concerned and whatever counter agitation they have started has been at the instigation of the ruling party.*

A. Is it possible for the Government to instigate the Harijans at a time like this? And do you think it is possible that they should not be upset about losing something they have? I also do not understand why the *savarnas* (high caste) keep saying that merit and efficiency are impaired by the reservations. What about the 'non-reserved' students who go off to Karnataka and get admissions in private colleges by paying huge capitation fees and then come back as doctors with very low marks? Is their merit ever doubted?

Q. *Today the violence has escalated to engulf all castes and classes. How do you account for the several turns that the violence has taken?*

A. Basically this agitation is a politically inspired attempt to discredit the Government which has only been given the cover of being anti-reservations. It is these political forces which are not allowing the anti-reservationists to call off the agitation.

Q. *Why did you condone the police indiscipline and violence in Ahmedabad?*

A. I do not want to say anything on this as the matter is subjudice. I did not condone their behaviour but only said that the police were under a lot of pressure because of the media reports on them. I can only say that the matter will be thoroughly examined.

Q. *Do you feel shaky about continuing in office?*

A. Not at all. I am absolutely confident that I will stay on.

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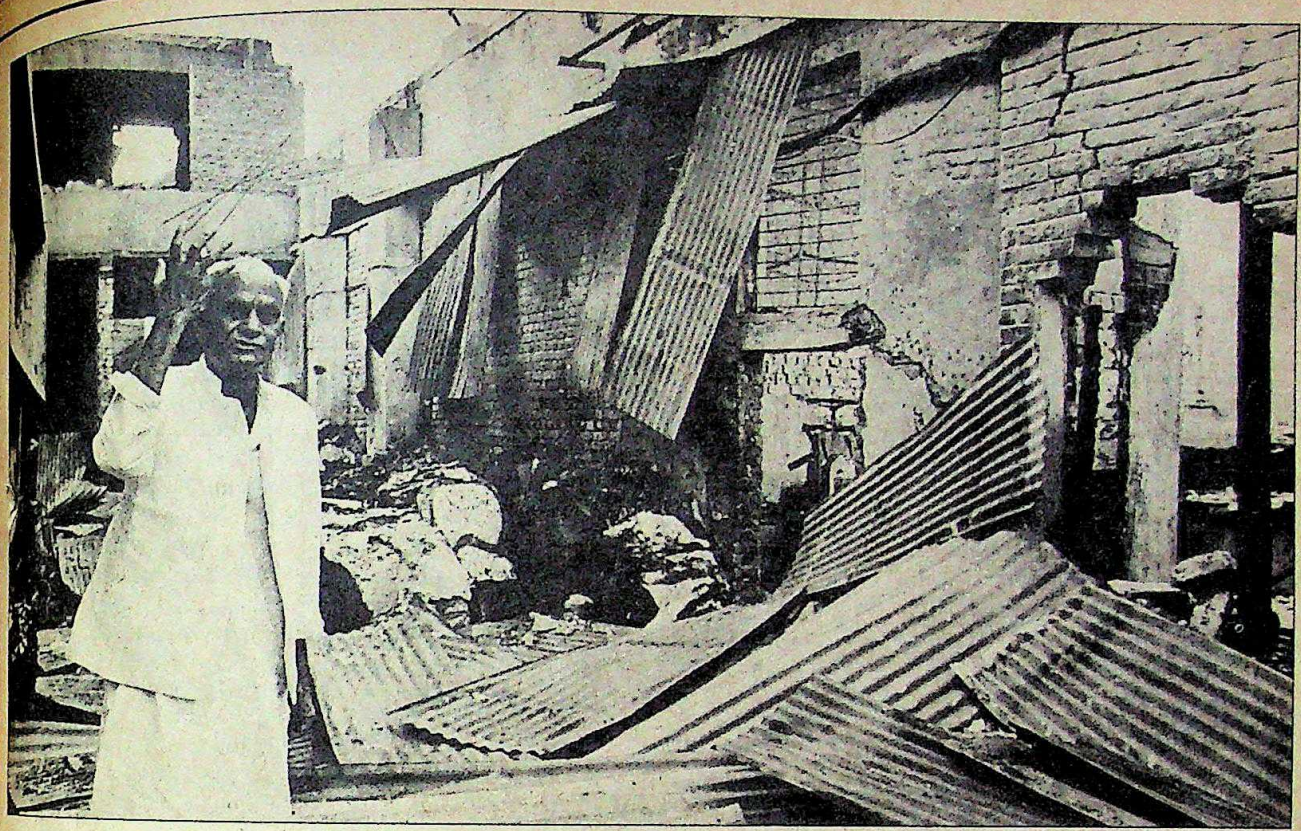

Shantibhai Shah inside gutted office of his *Gujarat Samachar*: singled out

have said: "Since our government is not corrupt, the Opposition has to find some way to discredit us. Their strategy is to create a law and order situation and then say that the Government has failed."

Such charges and counter charges by the Opposition were to come well after the sequence of events that culminated in the police revolt of April 22 and its tragic aftermath. A little before 6 a.m. on April 17, two groups of policemen under the overall charge of Deputy Commissioner of Police J. Mohapatra were asked to bring peace to the walled city areas of Gomtipur and Astodia, where the police had been subjected to severe stoning for more than a week. Helpless in the narrow *poles* (lanes) of these tinder-box areas (*see box*) the police were unable to deal with the barrage of stones and broken tiles that invariably blocked their path. The odd police party that did make some headway would be stopped by a phalanx of women and children, behind whom the men would hide. Rarely, if ever, had these impregnable fortresses, where the BJP holds undisputed sway, been penetrated.

Over the next 40 hours they were assaulted as never before. According to the residents, the police were absolutely ruthless in their attack; beating up women, abusing and, allegedly even molesting them. Sobbed Manguben Thakore, a resident of Gomtipur: "Policemen had taken off their trousers and were calling out to women to take off their clothes and come into the streets." Wailed an old woman: "We do not even want to talk of what happened." Asked Maniben Modi of Ambaji *Mata Ki Pole* in Gomtipur: "The police tore off blouses of self-respecting girls. How can we tolerate this?"

WOMEN, of course, were not the only targets. At Patwa Sheri in Gomtipur the telephone lines were allegedly cut by the police. Kanubhai Patel and his family watched in utter helplessness as their rickshaw was sat upon a pile of handcarts and set ablaze by the police. In Pakhalia Pole in Raipur, tell-tale signs of police perversity remained even several days later. The police had broken off the water pipes to most houses and municipality workers had had to plug the pipes to stem the street flooding. Ashwin Balkrishna Bhatt, a salesman, had a few bones broken after policemen assaulted him with iron pipes. In Raipur, the house of Yashwant Jagirdar, a poor clerk, had been broken into by the police and his TV set smashed. Told that the police was saying that many people had broken their own possessions, Jagirdar retorted: "Will I destroy something I have sweated to buy?"

The police deny the allegations of atrocities even though they admit that they did indeed scale the houses. But one of the officers involved claimed that the steps taken were "precise, no more than the situation demanded and all within the law". Irate policemen had also smashed a "martyrs" memorial erected in Astodia in memory of those who died in the Navnirman agitation of 1974. The operation there was led by R.K. Vasisht, a controversial but tough commandant of the State Reserve Police, whose lack of tact has proved costly to his career. He justified the police action at the memorial by asking: "Has any memorial ever been erected in the memory of policemen who died in trying to establish peace?" Vasisht's notoriety was brought out by slogans which appeared on the Gandhi Road leading to Khadia, demanding his "capture", "dead or alive", and promising a "reward" of Rs 60,000.

It was at this point that the judiciary stepped in, an intervention that Chavan decried in his Lok Sabha statement. Police officers claim that this thoroughly demoralised the rank and file. Following a petition by MLA Ashok Bhatt of the BJP, the Gujarat High Court directed that Vasisht and another officer be debarred from entering the Astodia police station area. A senior police officer described the serving of the order as the "turning point". The court order emboldened the militant residents of Khadia while policemen, instead

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KHADIA

Tinder Box

THERE is never a dull moment in Khadia. And that is more true than ever today, when tension stalks this Ahmedabad locality in the wake of the anti-reservation stir. The worst communal clashes and the worst police versus anti-reservationist battles took place here. Khadia has invariably been at the centre of any popular movement or controversy, and a well-known saying is that agitations and issues are born here. Long before the freedom struggle it was famed for those who questioned the existing state of affairs. Even in the 18th century it was the cultural capital of Ahmedabad, and in ensuing years did much to influence the city through men like educationist Dewan Ballubhai, the intellectual Uma Shankar Joshi and the poet Sunderam.

Khadia came to the forefront to lead and inspire with the advent of the freedom struggle. Though Ahmedabad was a conservative city where women usually lived in seclusion, Khadia blazed a new trail when its women began stepping out after sunrise to sing patriotic songs and bhajans. Even today the women of Khadia remain different, taking the lead in grappling with the police and not hesitating to pelt them with a barrage of stones.

The locality was in the vanguard of the freedom struggle in Gujarat in another way too. The only underground paper in Gujarat exhorting the people to fight for freedom at any cost came out from here. This was the *Gujarat Satyagraha Patrika*—merely a sheet of cyclostyled paper but packing a powerful message. *Gujarat Samachar* which was recently reduced to ashes during the police revolt was also greatly influenced by the people of Khadia as Thakorelal Thakore, the editor of *Prajabandhu* which later became the *Gujarat Samachar*, was a resident. *Sandesh*, another major Gujarati daily, also began its early rumblings in Khadia.

With the passage of time and the erosion of the joint family system, there was a change in the culture of the area. People moved out to the new areas of the city and typical city flats. This was certainly a change from the lanes of their old home, which were extremely difficult for an outsider to navigate as they all look the same. The narrow lanes are hugged on all sides by tall three-storeyed buildings, some of which still have old haveli doors and intricately carved pillars. But though many Khadia residents have shifted to new areas, they have taken along their tendency to oppose the Government.

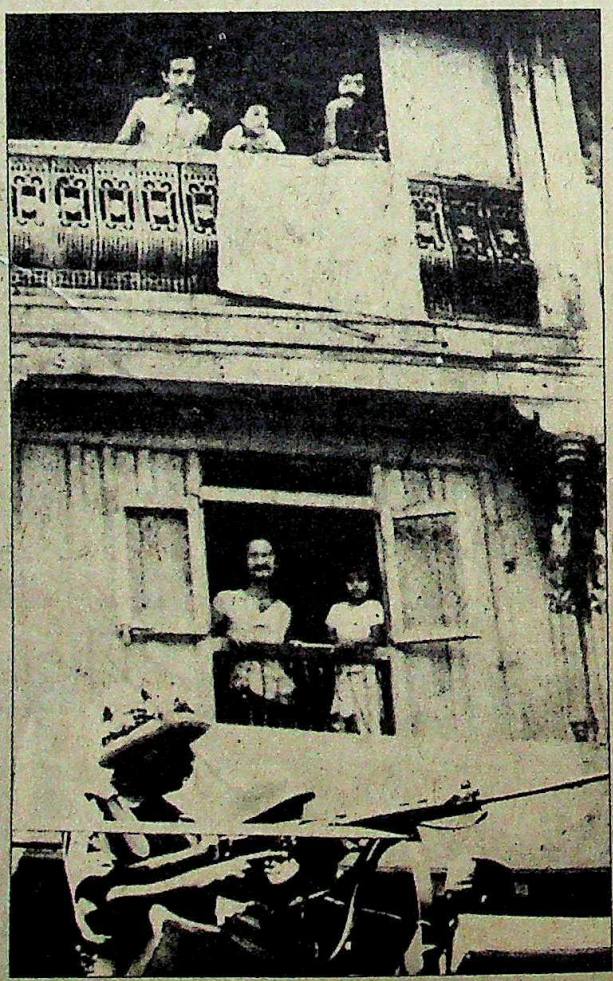
The latest communal violence did not come as a surprise to many either. Khadia has always reacted strongly during communal riots, beginning with a major one in 1926. In fact the area has the dubious distinction of being the battlefield where the soda water bottle first became a dangerous weapon. Politically it is the strongest BJP bastion in the state and only opposition leaders have flourished here. Much of the prominence that Khadia gets today is because of BJP leader Ashok Bhatt, who has never hesitated to embarrass the Government on the floor of the house with his disclosures. Last fortnight Bhatt was underground, fearing he would be arrested in connection with the riots.

The basic political stance of Khadia is anti-establishment, and it has never elected a Congress candidate either to the Lok Sabha or to the Assembly. The present secretary of the Janata Party, Brahmkumar Bhatt, was once idolised in Khadia and returned twice to the Assembly as a Praja Socialist Party candidate. But in 1967 he joined the Congress of Mrs Gandhi. Khadia could not forgive him. While campaigning for the assembly elections he had to be guarded. Predictably, he lost.

The narrow lanes and bylanes are a rioters' dream. The police cannot enter the area in a vehicle, they have to come in on foot, at which time a rain of stones descends on them. The terraces are so built that a troublemaker can hop from one house to another for a good distance and end up far from Khadia. And to escape the police all they need to do is enter any house where they are immediately given shelter.

The residents of Khadia are proud of their notoriety. Says Narhari Logowala, a businessman: "It is said that cats are afraid of Khadia rats. The water we drink here is different and so we stand out." But the controversial SRP Commandant R.K. Vasisht, who has come under fire for the way he dealt with the residents of Ahmedabad, said: "If Khadia is razed to the ground, there will be no agitations in the state for another decade." Perhaps, but though Khadia may be razed to the ground, the spirit of the people cannot be broken.

—RAMESH MENON



Army patrol in Khadia lanes: storm centre

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of enforcing the curfew, sat sulking at street corners.

The fall-out of that was to come some days later even as tensions were building up on other fronts. On most days the front page of the *Gujarat Samachar* was full of graphic accounts, based on interviews, of police atrocities. Liberally illustrated with photographs showing women displaying wound marks, the reports caught the imagination of the people and public participation in protest meetings registered an all-time high. The anti-reservation agitation was now a people's movement against the police. Opposition leaders lost little time in lashing out against the Government. Lamented former chief minister Babubhai Patel: "It is shocking how a democratic government can go to such an extent to cause physical and mental agony to the people."

Pushed into a corner, the Government appointed a two-member commission to inquire into the alleged atrocities. Matters were now approaching a flashpoint, which was reached on April 22 noon when head constable Laxman Desai, accompanying the commission members to Astodia, was stabbed to death even as they watched in shocked horror. The police dam burst and catastrophic events followed in quick succession.

The police wanted to attack the residents of Astodia but the army prevented them. Immediately police wirelesses switched from transmitting instructions to telling policemen to leave their stations and rush to Astodia for a showdown. As policemen rushed in, the troops of the Bihar Regiment drew a white mark across the road to indicate the point beyond which they would shoot any policeman. Frustrated, the policemen trooped off to the V.S. Hospital where Desai's body lay.

It was then that the rampage started. The impunity of the policemen was astounding: they lined up on both sides of the road in front of the commissioner's office and stoned all vehicles including an ambulance driven by a lady. Pedestrians ran for cover as truckloads of policemen went around shouting *"Jho humse takkayega, mitti mein mil jayega"* (Those who clash with us will be reduced to dust). They even gheraoed all major fire stations and prevented the fire brigade from answering 90 per cent of the calls for help.

The most shocking incident was the burning down of *Gujarat Samachar*: every article of any value in the 4,000 sq m complex was in flames in an operation that lasted a bare 15 minutes. The fire was still raging in the basement two days later as property worth Rs 7 crore was gutted. Said a broken Bahubali Shah, the editor: "For the moment, we are finished as a paper. This only goes to show what a vindictive government can do to silence those who are exposing them." Reporters and photographers were singled out by the police and beaten up. The other major city papers closed shutters and the next day five dailies failed to appear. Journalists at Patrakar Colony stayed awake through the night keeping vigil.

OFFICIALLY, the state Government and the police top brass would not admit that the police had revolted, but unofficially police officers lost no opportunity to say how they prevented a worse holocaust. Police Commissioner B.K. Jha, who has yet to distinguish himself, reportedly threatened that he would resign if the policemen did not rejoin duty. Another senior officer went around the police stations applying the balm. Insisting on anonymity, he told INDIA TODAY that when he had gone to Navrangpura he saw armed policemen in mufti all ready to go in two trucks and burn the Patrakar Colony. He succeeded in persuading them to attend Desai's funeral instead.

Policemen started filtering back on duty in the evening but anti-social elements, along with the more militant section of the police, went on a rampage in several areas. Bapunagar was the worst affected. Here, the killings turned communal. Syed Naunihal, Ahmedabad Jamaat Islami chief and a resident, said slogans were raised asking Muslims to get out of the country. The fury spilled over to the next day, at the end of which 25 people were dead—the bloodiest count since the reservations agitation began.

The embers were still burning at week's-end and panic still ruled: the relief camp at Bapunagar had only 6,000 people till last Thursday but in two days the numbers had swelled to 8,000 as people realised that the camp was the safest haven. It did not help restore public confidence that senior officials continued to bury their heads in the sand. "The law and order situation never broke down," claimed Jha. Home Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary, when asked if he was contemplating action against the erring policemen, said: "They did not err."

Such comments are typical of the manner in which the state Government has handled the entire issue, from its first containable stage to the subsequent escalation that led to the repeated flashpoints. Solanki himself provided the spark for the students' agitation by announcing an increase in the reservations for the backward castes when there was no groundswell of demand for it. The existing 10 per cent quota for the socially and educationally backward castes (SEBC's) was rarely more than a third filled. Neither was Solanki facing any political challenge that had to be defused by handing out sops. The Opposition was on the mat after its decimation in the Lok Sabha poll and even his own party detractors were on the defensive. True, Zinabhai Darji, acclaimed to be a leader of the tribals in south Gujarat, was ranged against Solanki, but few in the state would have considered a near trebling of the reserved quota for the SEBC's as necessary to punc-

KALPESH DUDHIA

Congress(I) leader Mankad beaten up by anti-reservationists: continuing violence

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ture Darji's balloon. Besides, the 1981 anti-reservation stir provided ample warning of the dangers involved in arousing caste passions.

Having ignored all this and lit the spark, Solanki then ignored the first flames of the spreading fire and made no attempt to talk to the students before support for them snowballed. Instead, he made aggressive statements on the need for increased reservations and openly chided the agitation leaders, saying they had no credibility.

His capitulation soon after the assembly elections, when he announced that the increase in reserved quotas would be postponed by a year while the whole issue would be reviewed, made matters worse. Not merely did this show him as weak, it also lent credence to the charge that the move had in the first place been aimed at winning the assembly elections.

Once violence erupted in mid-March, his administrative handling of the situation was sloppy. The army was not called out in time, even when it was clear that the situation could not be controlled by the police, and many lives were lost. Even when the police revolted last fortnight, Solanki did not ask the army to take charge though Ahmedabad suffered a power vacuum for several hours and the police took their time in rejoining duty.

He also failed to direct the police to set up a steady communication channel with the media, and the Government's version of the happenings at Asarwa came more than a fortnight after the incident. Compounding his blunders, Solanki then made holding of the examinations a test case of the Government's prerogative to decide on such matters of public concern, and stated that they would be held at any cost. But he had to eat his words soon enough: more than a month after the examinations were supposed to be held the Government had to concede defeat and allow the schools to declare vacations.

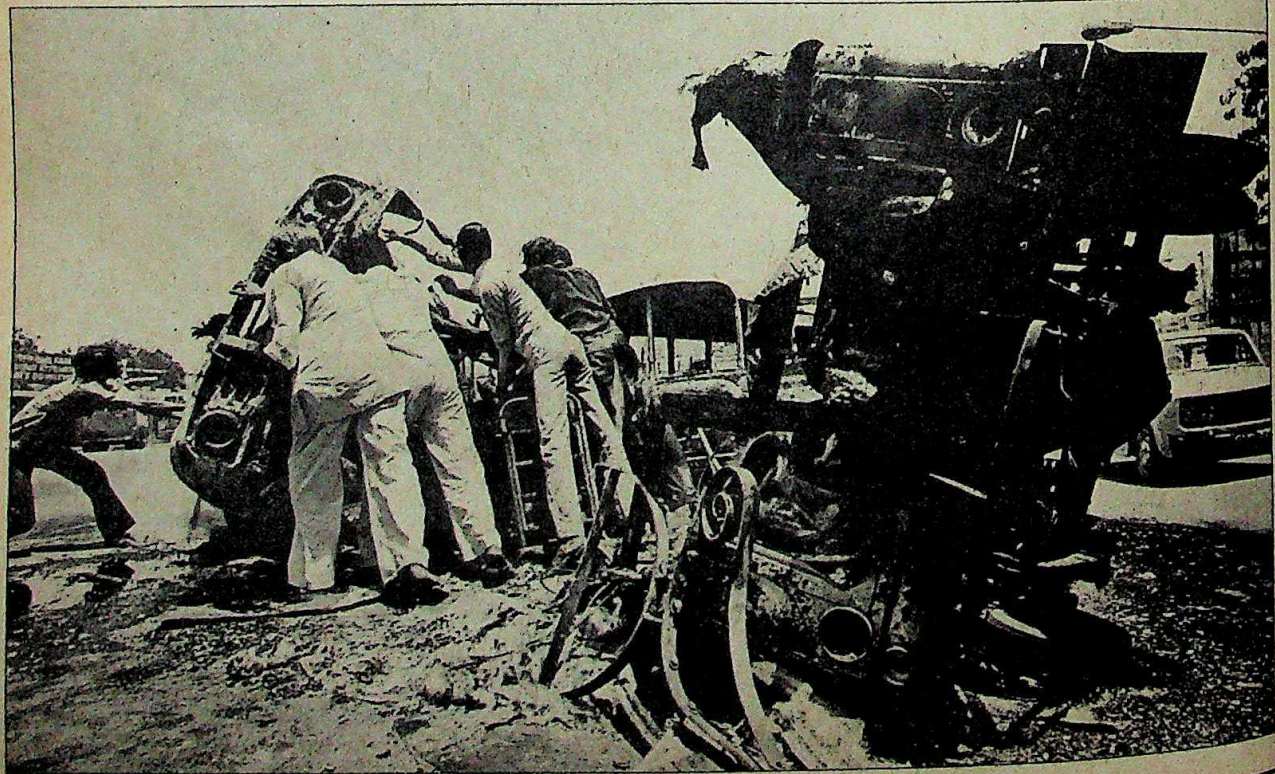
IN THE midst of this crisis, Solanki is a lonely man. He has either discarded the more competent among his aides (like Sanat Mehta and Manoharsinh Jadeja) or has had them taken away from him (like ex-home minister Prabodhbhai Raval, an experienced if controversial hand). The result is he has few men around him who are both trustworthy and competent. The feeling is widespread that this has impaired his efficiency. Parthiv Adhyaru, a leader of the Parents' Association that is ranged alongside the student agitators, voiced this when he said: "In the five years that he has been in power, this is the first time that Solanki has lost his ability to keep everything in balance. That is why we feel that he is being wrongly advised." Without saying it in so many words, Adhyaru was pointing the finger at the controversial role supposed to have been played by Raval.

Parlour talk across Ahmedabad, whether in affluent sections like Adhyaru's or that of V.P. Vora, an employee of the SLM Maneklal group and a resident of the famous Khadia locality (*see box*), maintains that Raval not only continues to call the shots in the Home Ministry but also that the communal twist to the conflict and the inter-class conflict that has also erupted are both the brainchildren of Raval. Said Vora: "The police atrocities in Khadia have been part of a political retaliation by Congress(I) elements denied tickets, led by Raval and two others. Once Khadia elected Ashok Bhatt of the BJP it was decided that these people should be taught a lesson."

Raval hotly denies the charge. Arguing that he would be foolish to sully his image when he has been promised that he will be called to Delhi, he maintains that he is currently only a "senior Congress worker" and that all the canards being spread about him arise from the Opposition's fear of him.

The Congress(I)'s counter allegations about the role played by the oppo-

Removing burnt vehicles: result of sloppy handling



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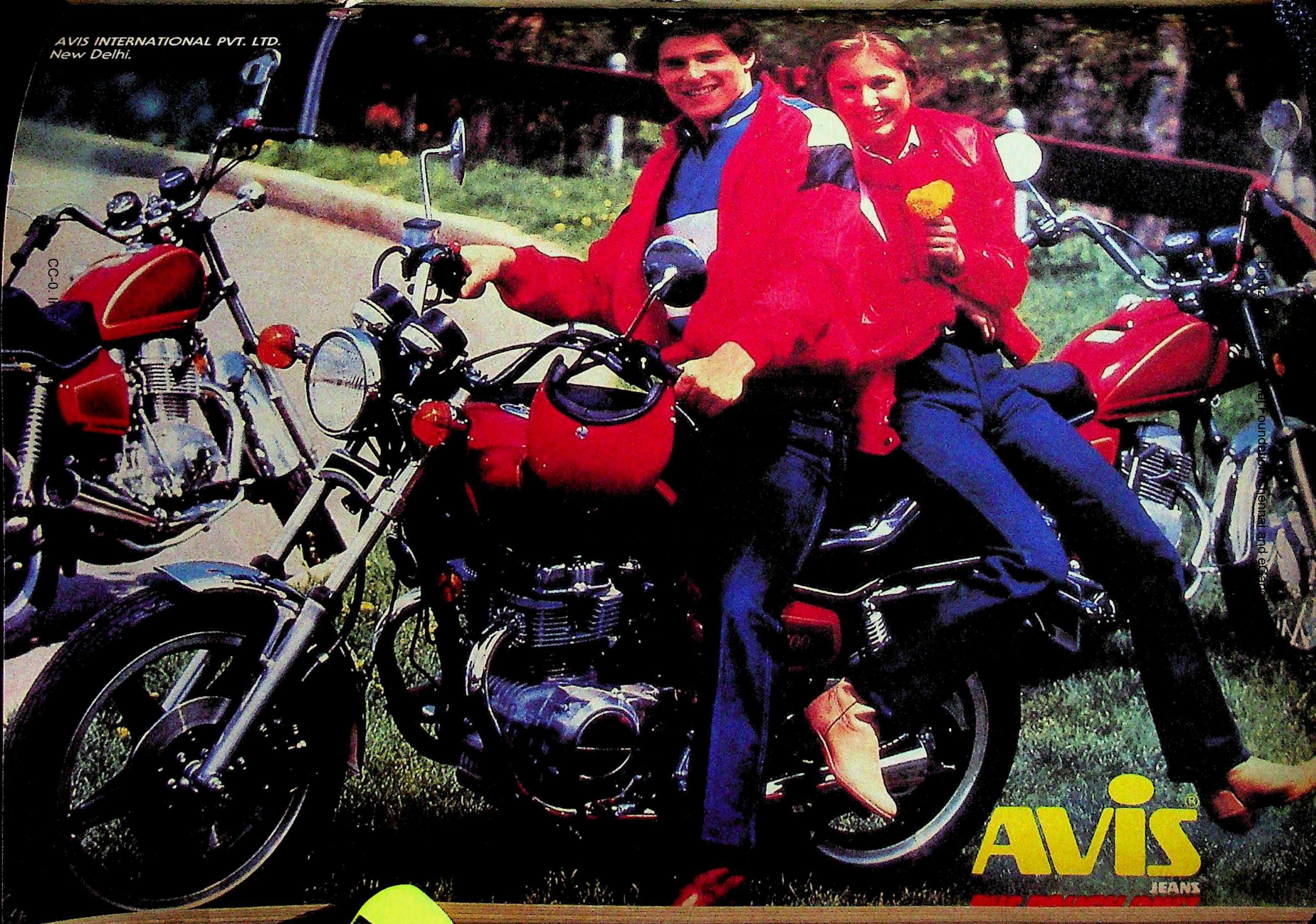

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For hours they had waited behind the pillar.

Which of them would get the best shot of the day?

She entered. Every inch the superstar. The cameras went up. The flashes went off.

The poses were perfect. She had all her best camera angles all beautifully worked out.

Would she now grant them an interview? A smile said everything. And revealed nothing. Except a playful dimple to the camera.

The questions were shot at her from all sides.

"Who's the leading man in your life?" asked one.

"I'm interviewing several candidates for the role" she quipped.

"Tell us about the diamond on your finger" implored another.

"I'd rather talk about the camera in your hand" she countered. "What's your camera? And yours? And yours?"

"Hot Shot" they said, in unison.

"Now, now" she said, observing how different the cameras looked "which of you isn't telling the truth."

"The camera never lies" they answered, holding up the evidence.

"Quite a range" she marvelled "and I'm told they're quite the rage too!"

"So are you" said one of them to her, with smooth flattery. "In fact put the two of you together — and it's dynamite."

"Some like it hot" she joked.

"All like it Hot Shot" was another quick retort, "whether they want a 110 or a 35 mm camera. With a flash or without it. With a normal lens or a telephoto lens. With automatic features. Or..."

"Each camera is very different" she observed.

"Sure" the talkative one said, "and they're all the same. No hassles about focussing. No worrying about exposures..."

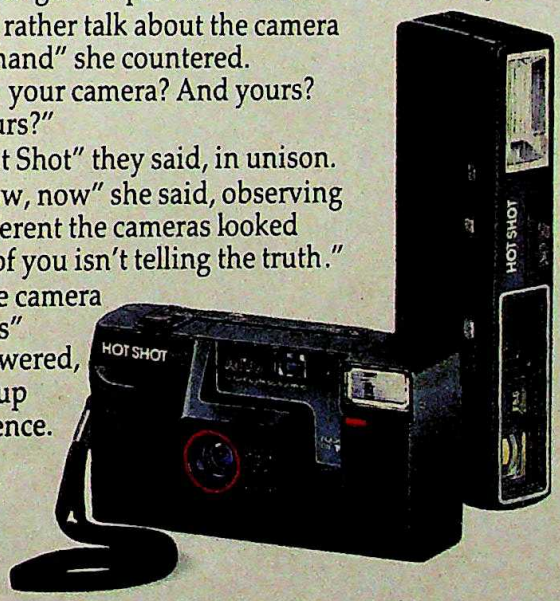
"That's what the director insists in all my films!" said she.

"Everything's so simple about the camera..."

"Then I've got to have Hot Shot" she said. "I'm just a simple country girl at heart."

Three Hot Shot cameras were offered to her instantly. With one small condition.

The photographer went with each!



HOT SHOT 35&110

Just aim. And shoot!

PHOTOPHONE INDUSTRIES INDIA LIMITED
7, Saki Vihar Road, Bombay 400 072

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sition parties, specifically the BJP, were meanwhile being aired privately. Solanki alleged to a journalist that the state unit of the BJP had called a meeting of its top leaders on April 7 where it was decided that the party would openly support the agitation. But BJP MP Jaswant Singh countered: "The allegation is baseless and criminally motivated. It is meant to transfer the responsibility of misgovernance on the Opposition." Solanki also alleged that three former chief ministers, Chimanbhai Patel, Babubhai Patel and Ghanshyam Oza, were active in the agitation behind the scenes and that at least four members of the Navrachna Samiti belonged to the ABVP and one to the Yuva Janata.

Dr Gouranga Shah, spokesman of the Samiti, is genuinely concerned that their movement should not fall into the hands of politicians, reserving his ire, however, for Shankerbhai Patel, the president of the Vali Mahamandal (Parents' Association) who he says functions at the behest of Chimanbhai Patel. While Shankerbhai flatly denies that he has any political affiliations, Shah's statement is nonetheless revealing in its admission of fissures between the Samiti and the Mahamandal. The statement is also ironic because, as Adhyaru said, Shankerbhai was the best man to be the president of the Parents' Association as he was not known to have political affiliations.

Whatever the allegations and counter-allegations, there is little doubt that the communal twist to the conflagration was not spontaneous. A visit to the troublespots by the Institute of Islamic Studies, Bombay, showed no prior build-up of communal tension. Instead, on the night following the Ahmedabad bandh of March 18, two shops each belonging to Muslims and Hindus were set on fire in the Fernandes Bridge area. There was a similar secular quality to the shops burnt that night in Manik Chowk, Gandhi Road and other areas. If the communalism had been genuine, the first acts of arson would have been against either only Hindu or only Muslim shops, not both.

So was the communal twist deliberately planned? If so, by whom? Ahmedabad was not short of theories last fortnight on the identity of the culprits, but nothing can be said with any certainty. The truth may never be known, as Solanki has refused to order a judicial inquiry.

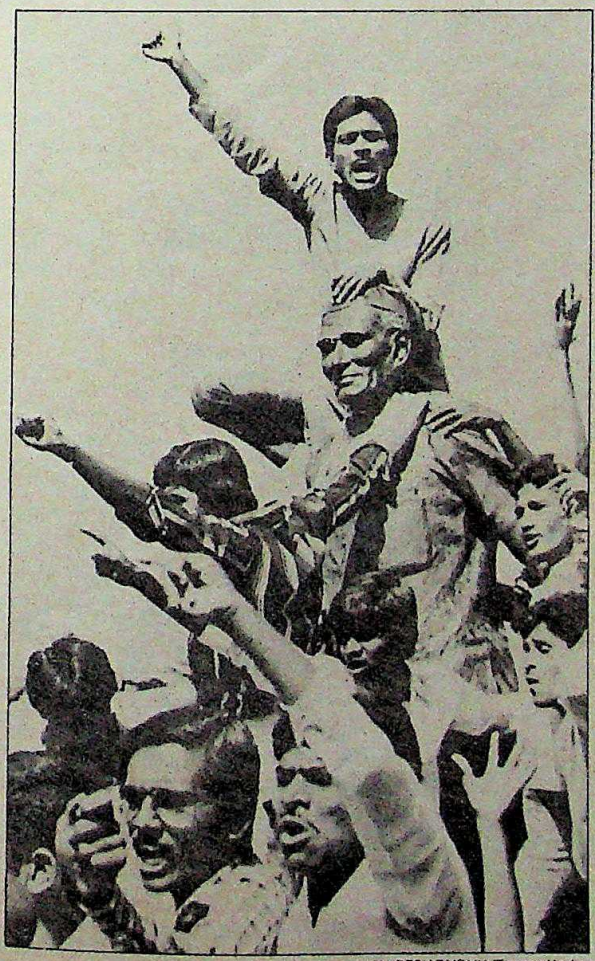
THAT wasn't the only conundrum needing an answer. The bigger question that had to be addressed was: why did such an emotional explosion occur among a people noted for their gentleness and astute business sense? The question has been worrying saner elements in Gujarat's increasingly fractured society. Pravin Sheth, head of the department of political science at the Gujarat University feels that caste-based violence can be explained as a fusion of two contradictory social trends. The Patels, Gujarat's once overridingly powerful landed communities, have been losing their traditional hold on the affairs of the Gujarati society. Running up against this has been the fast rising sense of political and social awareness of their rights among all the other castes.

The Patels have many reasons to be dissatisfied with their present lot. A landed class, they first lost their financial clout when land reforms and ceilings cut into their property. The creation of panchayats then chipped away at their political power but they at least held the reins at the state level. But by the mid-1970s even their political influence had been considerably whittled by the rising Kshatriyas, mostly small farmers and strictly second on the social scale. The Patels were then delivered the coup de grace in 1980 when the Congress(I) romped home on support drawn from the Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims.

The changed equation between the Patels and the Kshatriyas was reflected in the composition of the Assembly. In 1976 one out of four MLA's was a Patel; four years later only 18 per cent of the MLA's were Patels. In 1976, one out of six MLA's was a Kshatriya; four years later their representation had gone up to one out of five. Most important, the Chief Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki, is a Kshatriya. In Solanki's first ministry there wasn't a single Patel in the Cabinet. The ministry had just two Patels, both of whom are lightweights in the community. It is the same now. Yet they comprise around 22 per cent of the population. The Kshatriyas, who are an amorphous caste comprising various sub-groups, are 40 per cent of the population. The fact that these castes, making up almost two-thirds of the population, are ranged against each other is a source of perpetual social tension.

To this incendiary situation has been added the latest decision to increase the reservations for the backward castes which, says Sheth, has made Gujarat the first state which has run the full circle in social mobilisation. In layman's terms that means all castes and communities have become conscious of their rights by being coopted into the power structure. Sheth explains his hypothesis in the following terms: till 1965 power was shared by the PAKSH castes (Patels and Kshatriyas); a decade later the Patels were on the way out while the Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims had joined the Kshatriyas on the power wagon. The January decision gave the marginal backward castes, hitherto left out, a

Anti-reservationists atop statue of Gandhian Indulal Yagnik: passionate protest



KALPESH DUDHIA/Times of India

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RESERVATION

Loaded Views

PARTHIV Adhyaru is a 43-year-old Ph.D. in electronics who hadn't given serious thought to the inequities of the reservations system till Solanki's increase for the backward castes last January. "It occurred to me then that this was a political stunt," said the bespectacled and fresh-faced entrepreneur as he explained how he got involved with the anti-reservation movement. A reasonable man (he didn't protest when the Government nationalised his father's hosiery mill even though it wasn't sick), he became a convinced anti-reservationist after hearing an activist's views at the Sharda Mandir School, where his eldest daughter, Parthivi, studies in class VIII.

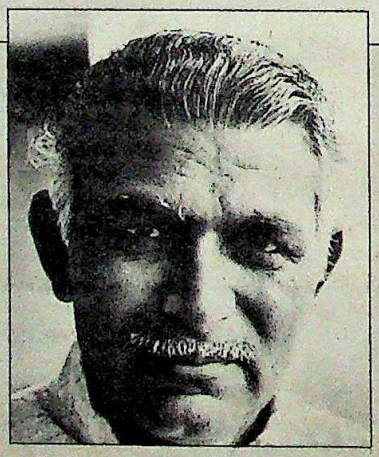
Today, Adhyaru is one of the brains behind the Parents' Association. He explains: "Reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes is all right but ultimately the Government saw reservations as creating a vote bank and went on expanding it." The January increase quite clearly came as the last straw and, he says: "I decided that somebody should raise his voice."

Adhyaru's deeply-felt indignation is shared by Dr Gouranga Shah, 26, spokesman of the students' Navrachna Samiti. Adhyaru and Shah share several characteristics. Both have no personal axe to grind: the eldest of Adhyaru's four children is only 13 and Shah is doing his M.D. in radiology so cannot now be denied the chance of becoming a doctor by somebody from the reserved quota. They represent the voice of reason in a movement which has its share of hawks and political stooges. Says Shah: "We are even prepared to call off the agitation if the Government gives us a time-bound assurance that the additional reservations will be phased out."

Shankerbhai Ishwarbhai Patel, 48-year-old professor of sociology at the L.D.Arts College and president of Gujarat Vali Mahamandal (Parents' Association), holds much stronger views. Patel, who believes that reservations should be abolished in toto, says: "Reservations violate the constitutional guarantee of equality to all citizens. They have not helped the lower classes who continue to live in poverty with all their bad habits. We should create better educational facilities for them and teach them good habits, not just give them seats and promotions out of pity. How can we have a strong nation if we do not let merit prevail?"

Patel's views are probably more representative of most anti-reservationists. But it doesn't still explain why these middle class parents have taken to the streets even though many of them do not have anything at stake personally. Pravin Sheth, 52-year-old head of the department of political science at Gujarat University, feels: "Even though they do not have any real deprivation it is their imagined deprivation which explains why they feel an injustice is being done to them." Sheth also believes that the reaction against the January announcement was so decisive because the enhanced reservations gave the backward castes an opportunity they weren't equipped to take. He points out that if they cannot fully utilise the 10 per cent quota, they are unlikely to use up the enhanced 28 per cent. The resentment is heightened by the knowledge that the Rane Commission had clearly said that caste should not be made the criterion.

Gouranga Shah: indignant



"Gujaratis think the Government should also run like a business. Appointments and promotions cannot be a matter of charity."

SHANKERBHAI PATEL
president, Gujarat Vali Mahamandal

Interestingly, Harijans disagree just as strongly with the Rane Commission's views. At a meeting organised by a Sarvodaya organisation, Lok Samiti, to discuss the issue of reservations, several speakers spoke with feeling about the need to base reservations on economic basis. But a Harijan bank officer got up and asked: "I earn over Rs 3,000 but will any high caste Hindu here allow me to marry his daughter?" Nobody spoke for quite a while. Explains Sheth: "Harijans feel the need for reservations. In the 1981 agitation the Harijan backlash against a similar movement was strongest in Ahmedabad and the districts of Kheda and Mehsana where the majority of the educated Harijans live."

Sheth and Patel share the assessment that the backward castes identified by the Baxi Commission, who currently enjoy 10 per cent reservation and were granted 18 per cent more, do not feel as intensely about reservations as the Harijans. Patel thinks this is because they do not need them; Sheth thinks it is because there is no "felt need" among them. But Sheth adds, in the manner of a careful academic, that his conclusions are tentative and based only on the absence of strong reactions from the backward castes in media reports and 'letters to the editor'.

But why is it that the Gujaratis, are more sensitive on the reservations issue? If the amount of reservations were to decide the scale of opposition to it, the upper caste Tamilians should be most upset because Tamil Nadu has 68 per cent reservations. Again the articulate Shankerbhai Patel had the most definitive word: "The Gujaratis know the value of efficiency. They know how to do business and they always mean business. And they think the Government should also run like a business where merit is appreciated. Appointments and promotions cannot be a matter of charity." Perhaps he is right about the Gujaratis but clearly then it doesn't reflect a charitable disposition towards the backward castes. It's hardly surprising that the reservations issue refuses to die down.

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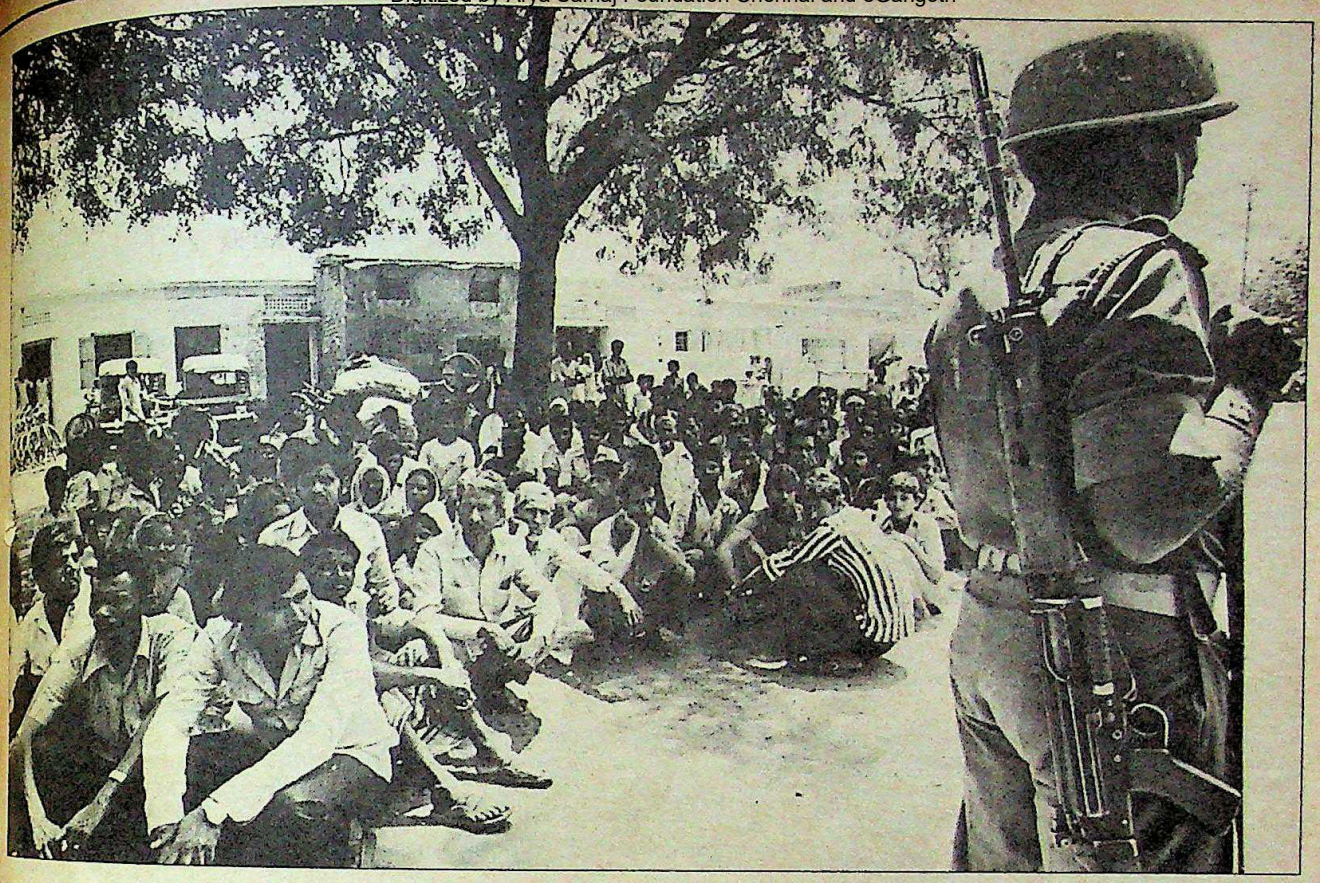

Curfew violaters: incendiary situation

stake in the power structure by extending reservations to them. The stage was thus set for the wide-ranging conflict.

THE IGNITING of these underlying social tensions would have precipitated enough major conflicts for any society; Gujarat had the misfortune of getting concurrently embroiled in communal clashes, a class conflict and a people vs the police war. As *The Times of India* noted: "Seldom before have so many kinds of antagonisms exploded at one time in one place... similarly, while we have not been unfamiliar either with police revolts or with police excesses, the two have seldom gone together. In Ahmedabad they have." Add to that a government which was seen variously as barbaric, weak-kneed or just plain ineptand it was easy to understand the mistrust and panic that prevailed in Gujarat.

Examples of distrust and unnatural fears abounded. Responsible people spoke of "hit lists" being prepared. There was such a sudden spurt in the demand for illegal arms that the police started a drive to seize all private arms. They were only being pragmatic: they knew the weapons were being stockpiled for a showdown with them. Hundreds of caste Hindus living around Harijan localities migrated to other areas fearing a backlash.

The sheer financial loss was staggering. Industry was strapped for funds as banks stopped clearing cheques. Inventories piled up as truck-owners refused to take risks. The secretary of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I.N. Kania, said the state had already suffered a loss of Rs 200 crore. The state Government and municipal corporations are estimated to have lost half as much in unpaid sales tax and octroi duty. A desperate Chamber took the unprecedented step of requesting that the Government hand over Ahmedabad to the army.

The social cost of the caste war was not so easily counted, partly because it was still too early to say where it would end. Even as organisations of Dalits and Muslims got together to work out a combined strategy against attacks by caste Hindus, some Dalits were seriously thinking of converting to Islam. One such was Neerav Patel, a Dalit poet, who spoke bitterly about how he changed his surname to escape humiliation but was still treated like a Harijan. Dalit bodies came out with pamphlets detailing the backward castes eligible for reservations under the aborted proposal. Said Kanti Rathod of the Bank Employees' Association: "There is no way out. We have to fight for our rights."

In spite of this mass of apprehensions, there was still considerable interest in the fate of one individual: Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki. Journalists who milled around Ahmedabad's circuit house annexe, where Solanki was spending virtually all his waking hours, were quick in answering what the people were asking: Is Solanki's time up? The consensus was that it indeed was, but he was not going to be asked to go just now. That would seem too much like capitulating under pressure from the Opposition.

Similarly uncertain but considerably more sorrowful was the fate of many who had lost their near ones. Huddled in one corner of the steadily expanding relief camp at Bapunagar was a gaggle of six children who had lost their parents in the holocaust of the night of April 22. Lonely and tragic, they were too numb to express any anger. But others were not so mute. When Solanki went to meet the refugees three days after their world had come crashing around them, he was soundly booed and hooted. Elsewhere, he was shouted at by textile workers. On at least one occasion, Solanki was forced to beat a hasty retreat. It was an experience that was bound to haunt him for a long time. But Gujarat's own tragedy is infinitely greater.

—AJAY KUMAR with RAMESH MENON

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CRIME

Crackdown in Bombay

AMONG the dense thicket of billboards sprouting along Bombay's bustling Marine Drive is the inevitable offering from the Amul butter people. With their usual flair for tailoring catchy copywriting to issues of topical interest, the blurb reads: "What do cops and criminals have in common?" Shorn of its commercial message, the inference was explicit. Once again, though in a decidely more dramatic fashion, the long-suspected nexus between the city's ubiquitous underworld and the sentinels of law and order was, quite literally, exposed for public viewing.

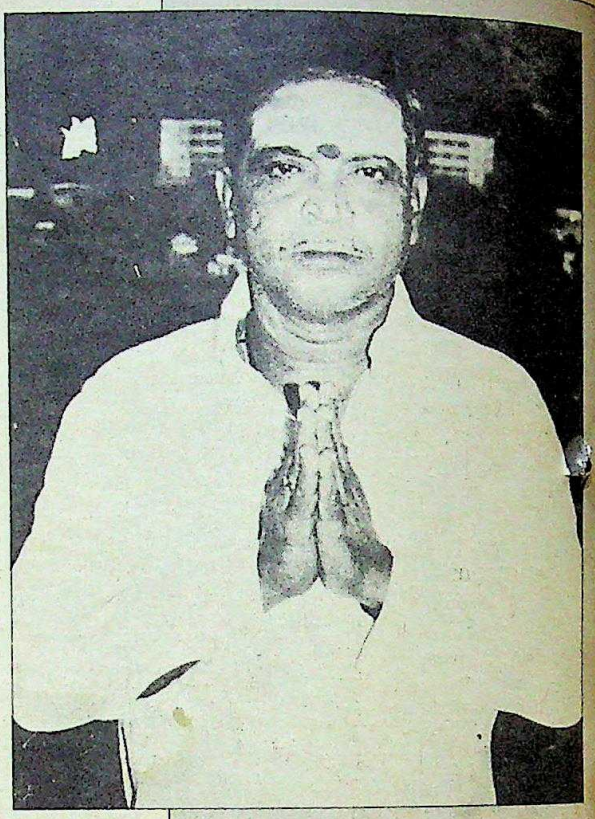
The exposure came in the form of two cassette tapes—one audio and the other visual—leaked recently, and deliberately, to the more dubious elements in the Bombay media. The objective was obvious:to undermine the city's disunited police force and, more precisely, its nonsense police commissioner, Julio Ribeiro. The audio cassette contained a recorded conversation between two senior inspectors of the Bombay police and the reigning king of the city's underworld, Varadharajan Mudaliar, better known as Vardha in police circles and Vardhabhai to those who pay him timely tribute (*see box*).

The cassette, laced with expletives and suggestive sniggers, was targetted at DCP Y.C. Pawar, the one man apart from Ribeiro who has single-handedly challenged Vardha's all-pervasive writ. The recording portrays the two policemen as emissaries of Pawar, come to plead on his behalf for the withdrawal of three cases filed against him by some of Vardha's henchmen.

Hardly had the resultant hullabaloo abated when a second cassette surfaced. The video cassette, also deliberately fed to the press, was taken at a party held in Bombay's Palm Grove Hotel last December. The guests included many senior police officers, some of whom are known to be close to Ribeiro, and serving and retired members of the judiciary. Also present were a number of known criminals including the host, Alok Kriplani Khira alias Baboo.

The party was evidently of bacchanalian proportions. Later, the police officers claimed that they had no idea of the guest list and thought their host was a doctor. However, the fact that

Ribeiro: leaving a vacuum



VARADHARAJAN

Don's Domain

RAMA Shetty, the villainous mafia don in Gobind Nihalani's film *Ardh Satya*, was a compelling celluloid character. A lungi-clad and deeply religious Tamilian, Shetty's rule over a slum empire in which every vice racket from extortion to prostitution thrived unchecked was unquestioned. Half the local police force, senior police officials and politicians paid him obeisance.

To residents of Bombay's south Indian dominated localities of Sion, Koliwada and Wadala, Shetty bore an uncanny resemblance to Varadharajan Mudaliar popularly known as "Vardhabhai", the uncrowned overlord of the area. In essence, however, Vardha's rags-to-riches rise did resemble a film script. The son of a railway fitter in Kalyan, Vardha came to Bombay in 1949 to live with an aunt after he was orphaned when he was nine. He quit attending the local Tamil school when he was in the seventh standard and started work as a motor mechanic earning Rs 1.25 a day.

Police records are unclear about Vardha's entry into the underworld but

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Varadharajan: pious posturing

his rise through the ranks was unusually rapid and unobtrusive. He worked as a railway porter and then graduated to small-time traffic in illicit hooch, hitching his wagon to Chellamuthu, one of the two big-time bootleggers in the Sion Koliwada area. Vardha's rise as a bootlegger coincided with the imposition of prohibition in the state by the then chief minister Morarji Desai as well as the semi-retirement of Muthu. Vardha took over Muthu's operations and then ousted his main rival in the area by wooing away Thomas Kurien who became his right-hand man.

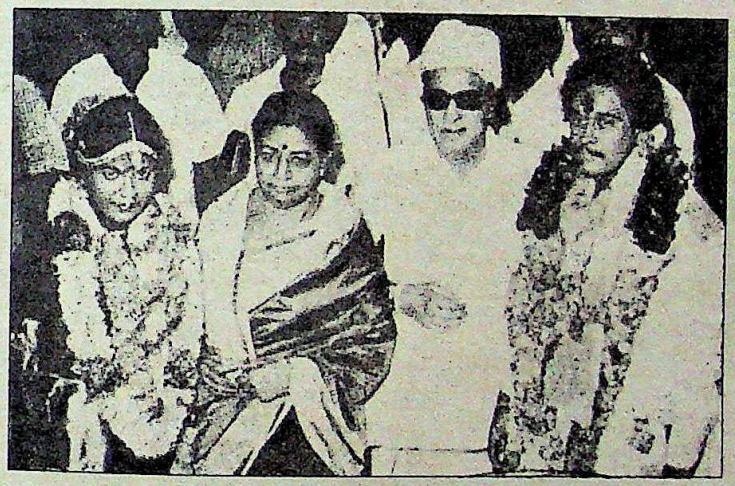
By the '70s, Vardha's name figured prominently in the police files as an up-and-coming boss of the underworld with extensive interests in illicit distillation, prostitution, gambling, *tod pani* (settlement of disputes for a fee), dock thefts and smuggling. He was jailed between 1974 and 1977 under the Defence of India Rules (DIR) but since then the police have been unable to pin him down to any concrete criminal case largely through the clout he wields in political circles and the fear he instills in any prospective witnesses or informers.

Though officially Vardha's monthly income is declared as an unimpressive Rs 5,000 from four garages and some rentals, his clout is enormous. The state chief minister's wife inaugurated one of the many temples he has erected on public land at Sion Koliwada. When Vardha's daughter got married in Madras in May 1983, MGR and his wife were among the prominent guests. Vardha even had the photograph of MGR with the bridal couple published in the *Indian Express* as a paid advertisement. Shortly after, when he led a march to the state Assembly in Bombay to protest against Sri Lankan atrocities against Tamils, a special train was requisitioned to transport the protestors from Dadar to VT. Several Tamil Nadu MP's had flown down for the event.

Like his fellow-dons, Vardha has plunged headlong into social and religious activity to acquire a veneer of respectability. He holds the biggest and flashiest Ganapati procession in Bombay every year, complete with brass bands, revolving idols and strobe lights. Shopkeepers and businessmen in his "territory" contribute liberally to his charitable activities and leading film personalities gladly offer their services for the musical evenings he arranges.

His social welfare organisations include the Tamil Peravai, which he founded. The organisation owns six ambulances and arranges blood donation camps and claims to provide free food for the needy. Vardha also recommends jobs for the unemployed to the General Seamans Crew Union and is chairman of the Jai Bhavani Mitra Mandal, a social body for Punjabis in the Sion area, run by one of his close lieutenants.

In one interview, Vardha claimed that "I get nearly Rs 18,000 per month as rent and that is enough for my expenses. The money I save from this amount I give away to needy people. I am a social worker. The slum dwellers adore me and as a mark of respect they have named their colony Varadarajannagar." Says Ahilya Rangnekar, former CPI(M) MP and Vardha's neighbour in Matunga: "He is the most powerful man in this area and it is amazing the number of people who jump to do his bidding."



MGR at Vardha's daughter's wedding

Vardha indignantly refutes allegations of his criminal connections as being "all nonsense. People write things about me to sell more copies." But the police files tell quite a different story. Last year, the COFEPOSA board recommended his detention for his involvement in a smuggling case in which Rs 47.66 lakh worth of contraband was seized in Dhamankol in Ratnagiri district.

Two of his known lieutenants, Thomas Kurien alias Khajabhai and Mohinder Singh Vig alias Soma were caught in the net as was Dilawarkhan Asadulakhan, a driver of the association's ambulance. In all 136 packages of contraband, mainly textiles and electronic items, were seized. Investigations established that the two lieutenants had made six lightning calls to Vardha's residence from the Vihar Deluxe hotel at Dhamankol during the three days before the landing of the contraband.

However, the state Home Ministry vetoed the COFEPOSA board's recommendations for Vardha's detention on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence. Similarly, in 1983, Vardha was again let off, this time with a fine of Rs 10 lakh, for his involvement in another contraband case in which the coast guard caught a Polish ship, *Portoroz*, unloading contraband into two fishing boats. Again, customs and revenue intelligence investigators were convinced that the boats had been hired by Vardha but were unable to detain him.

In August this year, Vardha was once more brought in for questioning in the *Maguli* smuggling case but emerged unscathed. Though intelligence reports suggested that Vardha was the "landing agent" for contraband contained in *Maguli*, once again there was lack of concrete evidence. Vardha, in fact, produced witnesses who swore he was being treated for diabetes in Madras at the time.

The controversial tape-recording of his alleged conversation with two police officers has obviously established his connections with the police but Vardha denies all knowledge, claiming that the tape is doctored and a professional mimic used to imitate his pronounced Tamil accent. However, Ribeiro, says: "I have no doubt that the tape is authentic, I can recognise the voices of Vardha and the police officials." But Vardha is too slippery a customer to be caught so easily. Underground after the recent crack-down, police believe that he has gone into hiding in Tamil Nadu. Says a senior revenue intelligence official: "I will bet a year's salary that he is ensconced in some posh clinic in Madras, laughing his head off."

—COOMI KAPOOR

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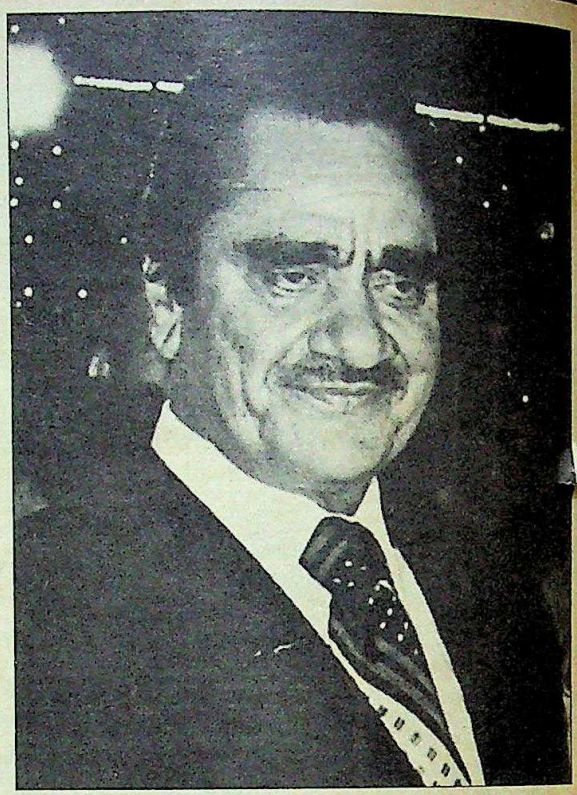
such a large number of policemen were present would indicate that they were being set up for a scam with the sole purpose of embarrassing Ribeiro and his trusted aides.

The provocation for the sudden appearance of the cassettes was undoubtedly serious enough. On March 11, the state's new Chief Secretary B.G. Deshmukh convened a meeting with all police officers above the rank of deputy commissioners of police (DCP's). Deshmukh made it clear that there was going to be a major crack-down on crime which would concentrate on the so-called Dons of Bombay's many-tentacled mafia. "He made it clear that he wanted the big guys," recalls Ribeiro. The message that went home was that he would back Ribeiro to the proverbial hilt in the latter's crusade to curb the growing influence and activities of the underworld in the city.

The tapes were obviously timed to checkmate the proposed crack-down but it also succeeded in revealing the kind of external forces that have a role in the sordid drama. The video cassette was handed over to a free-lance Marathi journalist who has underworld access. He in turn passed on the tape to Home Secretary B.K. Chowgule who gave it to a cub reporter with the United News of India (UNI). UNI put out a modified version of the tape and the storm broke. Ribeiro was rightly upset that Chowgule had seen fit to release the cassette without showing it to him since it was his officers that were involved. The home secretary, however, issued a statement denying that he had received the tape or passed it on to anybody.

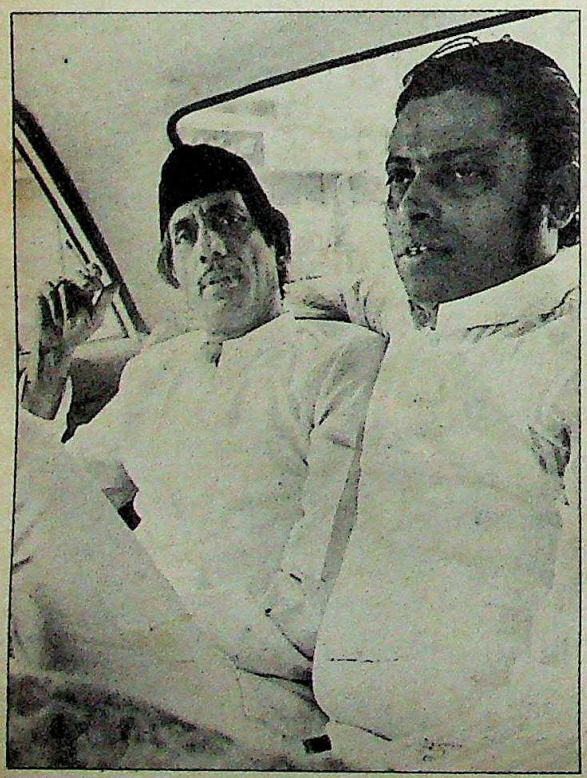
Curiously, the Chief Minister, Vasantdada Patil, who is close to Chowgule—both come from Sangli—came out in support of Chowgule and stated that the tape was actually with him. The chief minister claimed that the tape had been given to him three days earlier by a "private person". He added that he had not seen the tape since it was badly cut and needed splicing.



Karim Lala: back behind bars

Meanwhile, Chief Secretary Deshmukh reiterated that the crack-down on the underworld would proceed as planned and no political pressure or interference would be tolerated. To show that the Government meant business, a hit list of 48 people was drawn up for detention under the National Security Act (NSA). The list was imposing enough, being a veritable Who's Who of the city's overlords of crime. Topping the list was Varadharajan who had gone underground with the first sniff of trouble. Three of his trusted lieutenants, Khaja, Soma and Tillu also figured on the list as did Dawood Ibrahim and Abdul Kunju who have been on the run ever since their involvement in the internecine gang war that suddenly erupted in 1983. Also included were Arvind and Mahesh Dholakia, former foreign exchange racketeers and owners of Caesar's Palace hotel in Khar.

Haji Mastan (left) and Yusuf Patel: riding high



Till last week, only 12 of the 48 had been arrested, including Karim Lala who was already in judicial custody for a separate offence. The others have gone underground and the kingpin, Vardha, is rumoured to be hiding out somewhere in Madras where he has powerful political connections.

Political connections are, of course, the name of the game. "It's a three-legged stool," says Ribeiro resignedly, referring to the long-standing link between the city's underworld, sections of the police force and politicians which is fairly common cocktail gossip in the city's concentric social circles. Ribeiro should know. His crusade against crime has time and again come up against a blank wall erected by political elements or the bureaucracy. The most glaring example was the release last year of 18 known smugglers and employees of the All India People's Secretariat (AIPS) founded by Haji Mastan.

Yusuf Patel is a director of AIPS and Karim Lala provided a major portion of the finance. Together, the three comprise the troika that ruled the city's underworld for decades before going into semi-retirement. The AIPS was accused of involvement in the May riots in Bombay last year. Police files record that crates of Molotov cocktails were stored at the AIPS offices. Dr Ibrahim Merchant, secretary of

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MOHUDDIN TAYAB SONI

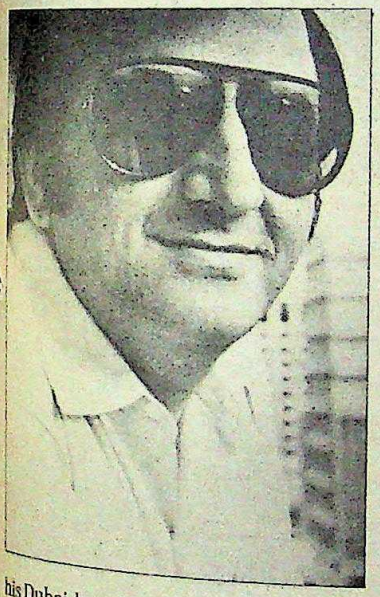
Low Profile

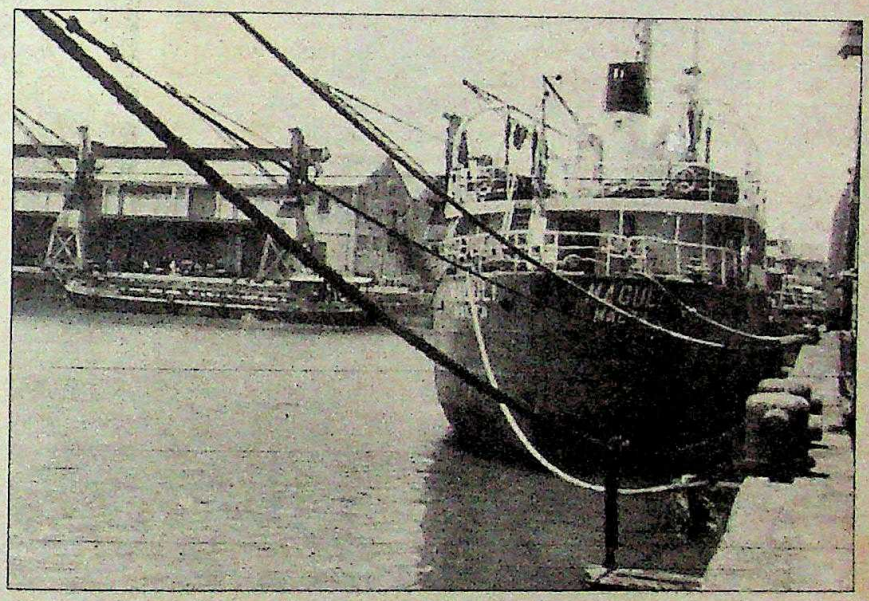
THE SMUGGLERS' Hall of Fame contains such illustrious names as Haji Mastan, Yusuf Patel, Manu Narang and Sukur Narain Bakhia. But there is—or was till last fortnight—one glaring omission—Mohuddin Tayab Soni. Soni was released by the Bombay High Court on a technicality after spending seven months in detention under COFEPOSA. The court ruled that the procedure followed in his detention was faulty even if the grounds on which he had been detained were adequate.

Though he has escaped the attention of the media so far, Soni along with his Dubai-based brother Taher, has not had the same success with Indian authorities. Judging by the scope and magnitude of their operations as described in his COFEPOSA orders, the Soni brothers rank in a league by themselves. Mohuddin was detained last September on the charge that he along with Taher owned the *Maguli*, a ship engaged in smuggling which was deliberately sunk by its crew off the Bombay coast when challenged by the coast guard. On paper, the *Maguli* is owned by the Zeta Shipping Company and is registered in Malta. The Zeta Company is owned by H.R. Shah who happens to be a low-level employee of Taher. The COFEPOSA order states that Shah is merely a "benami owner", the real owner being Mohuddin who made several trips to Greece to inspect and purchase the ship in July, 1983. His passport was renewed by the Indian consulate in Athens during that period.

Revenue intelligence officials believe that the ship made three trips to India carrying contraband and on the third occasion mounted an elaborate operation to track it down. A naval helicopter took pictures of the ship and radioed its position and direction to revenue intelligence officials lying in wait. When surrounded by coast guard vessels, the crew jumped overboard after setting fire to the ship. The *Maguli* was carrying 442 packets of contraband that customs officers value at around Rs 3 crore.

Mohuddin was arrested and taken to Arthur Road jail and then to Nasik.





Soni and the *Maguli*: eluding trouble

But he proved a difficult man to keep in custody. He hired the best lawyers available: a writ was filed in the Delhi High Court where his legal advisor was Asoke Sen, now law minister. In the Bombay High Court, his senior counsel was Ram Jethmalani who had the detention order squashed on technical grounds. Under COFEPOSA rules a fresh order cannot be made out for the same offence which leaves Mohuddin free to resume his interrupted business career which is an eye-opener.

The Soni brothers (legally it is in the name of Taher) own the firm G & M International in Dubai which has a monthly turnover of 20 million Dirhams (Rs 7 crore). They also own Gaylan Contracting and Trading Company which is involved in construction projects among other things. The former firm has 100 employees and is the sole agent in the UAE for almost all the major watch manufacturers as well as leading electronic companies. The list includes Hitachi, Maxell, Aiwa, Girard, Masushista, Kenwood, Seiko, Rolex, Fuji and Citizen.

Frederic Robello, the firm's Hong Kong purchase executive, in his statement to revenue intelligence, estimated that every month the firm sold 3,000 watches through outlets in the UAE and another 6,000 to 7,000 through "other outlets". Revenue intelligence sleuths are convinced that the "other outlets" referred to means India.

The suave 40-year-old Mohuddin belongs to an Indian Muslim family which originally hails from Saurashtra. He owns a house in the congested commercial area of Agripada and has also acquired a bungalow in Bandra. He is a partner in Milan cinema and Astana hotel while his wife is part owner of Kismet cinema. During a recent raid, a search of his house unearthed 64 watches. The authorities suspect that the watches were meant as samples for prospective bulk customers but Mohuddin coolly informed them that he was an avid collector of watches and liked giving watches to people as presents. Meanwhile, after his release, it is the police who are now keeping a close watch on him.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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the secretariat and six other AIPS employees were arrested. The police commissioner had announced during the arrests that "we have clear evidence to link the arrested men with some of the disturbances in central Bombay during the riots." Amazingly, 24 days after their detention under NSA, they were released at the intervention of Chowgule, a decision that surprised even the then chief secretary R.D. Pradhan. Equally intrigueing was the fact that none of the 18 smugglers had formally challenged the detention order.

Similar extraneous pressure was used in the famous floor space index (FSI) scandal.The officials responsible for filing the case, Arun Bhatia, collector of Bombay and D.M. Sukthankar, were summarily transferred. Three of the cases involved Yusuf Patel. In fact, in one of his interviews, Haji Mastan virtually admitted the existence of political patronage when he stated:·"Politicians who criticise me by day come to me at night with a begging bowl."

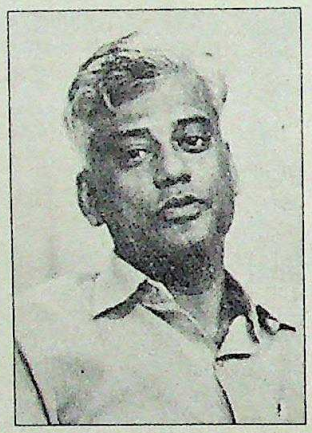
In a more recent case, the state Home Ministry overruled the police which had recommended against granting the renewal of licences to restaurants which flouted municipal and safety rules or were owned by people with known gangster links. The ministry also overturned the refusal by the police to grant a bar licence to Khaja,Varadarajan's right-hand man, in the Sion-Koliwada area.

But the most revealing incidents in the recent past involve the tortuous efforts by DCP Pawar and a municipal ward officer, G.K. Khairnar, to tackle the underworld dons on their own terms. Both men, in their own way, went gunning for Vardha, often at great personal risk and with no support from their colleagues.Within a month of his arrival in Bombay, Pawar made his intentions clear by arresting Khaja for illicit liquor operations and assault. To add insult to injury, Pawar paraded Khaja in handcuffs through Khaja creek, the area which he held undisputed sway over and is in fact named after him.

In the crack-down, Pawar ordered the destruction of over 200 illegal stills in the area that had earlier operated with impunity. Pawar next went after the other rackets thriving in the area including brothels, blue movie parlours and unlicensed hotels, all operating under the patronage of Vardha. The sudden decline in Vardha's influence—his famous open air courts where he was judge, jury and executioner came to an abrupt end—meant a serious loss of face for him.

Immediately, pressure was brought to bear on the state Government to transfer Pawar and Ribeiro. A group of Tamil Nadu MP's led by Congress (I) General Secretary G.K. Moopanar petitioned the chief minister for their transfer. The state Home Ministry even circulated Pawar's bio data recommending that both he and Ribeiro would be more effective in Delhi or Punjab.

Meanwhile, Vardha adopted the tactic employed by most underworld dons against overenthusiastic policemen. He had four of his lieutenants file cases of assault against Pawar, cases that have dragged on in the lower courts for almost three years without any charges being framed. Pawar is forced to attend court almost every week where he is greeted by toughs who pass derisive or threatening comments. "Its pure psychological torture and a lesser man would give up rather than fight," says Ribeiro.One indication of the pressure is the fact that the controversial cassette indicates that Pawar is willing to arrive at a compromise to get the cases dropped by Vardha but all the same he has not let up on his crack-down.



Pawar and Khairnar: dogged crusade

Another man in the same boat as Pawar is Khairnar. Last February, Khairnar demolished three temples, one masjid and a church in the Shivaji Park area which were on municipal land even though he had been warned that they were erected by Vardha. Prior to the demolition, Vardha had met Khairnar and urged him not to go ahead with his plans.He also told him that he would be visiting the chief minister.

The next day, Khairnar learnt that the chief minister had ordered his transfer. The transfer, however, was stalled because his superiors dared not move him in the wake of the enormous public support Khairnar received for his dogged crusade which he continued (his next move was to pull down another temple in Mahim which is patronised by Manohar Phalke, brother-in-law of the chief minister).In recent days, Khairnar has been stoned by gangs of hawkers and once had to fire his pistol in the air after police took their time in coming to his rescue. "Life has become very difficult," he says in what is an obvious understatement.

Tragically, Pawar and Khairnar are in a minute minority. Ribeiro jokes that if he wants to send a message to the underworld, all he has to do is call a meeting of his senior officers and within five minutes of the meeting breaking up the underworld will know every word that was uttered. But it is in reality no laughing matter. The tapes have proved just how incestuous is the relationship between the police and the city's crime lords. In that context, the current crack-down is really a make or break effort. "They have felt this kind of squeeze," says Ribeiro. But there lies the rub. Last fortnight, it was announced that Ribeiro is being transfered as Delhi's police commissioner and whether the momentum gained by the crack-down will continue is now debatable.

More crucial is the fact that there is a simultaneous effort on to clean up the city's discredited police force. A list of 15 police officials suspected of having links with the underworld, including an assistant commissioner, has been prepared and the number is likely to increase. The two officers on the Vardarajan tape, Inspectors Samson and Deshmukh, who were suspended after the story broke, also figure on the list. But obviously what is also required is the political will and backing, a factor that has so far frustrated all attempts to break the mafia. Patil has been making appropriate noises about the state government's backing for the current crack-down. But if the past is any indication, it is more than likely that the dons will be back, perhaps more powerful than ever before. —DILIP BOBB with COOMI KAPOOR

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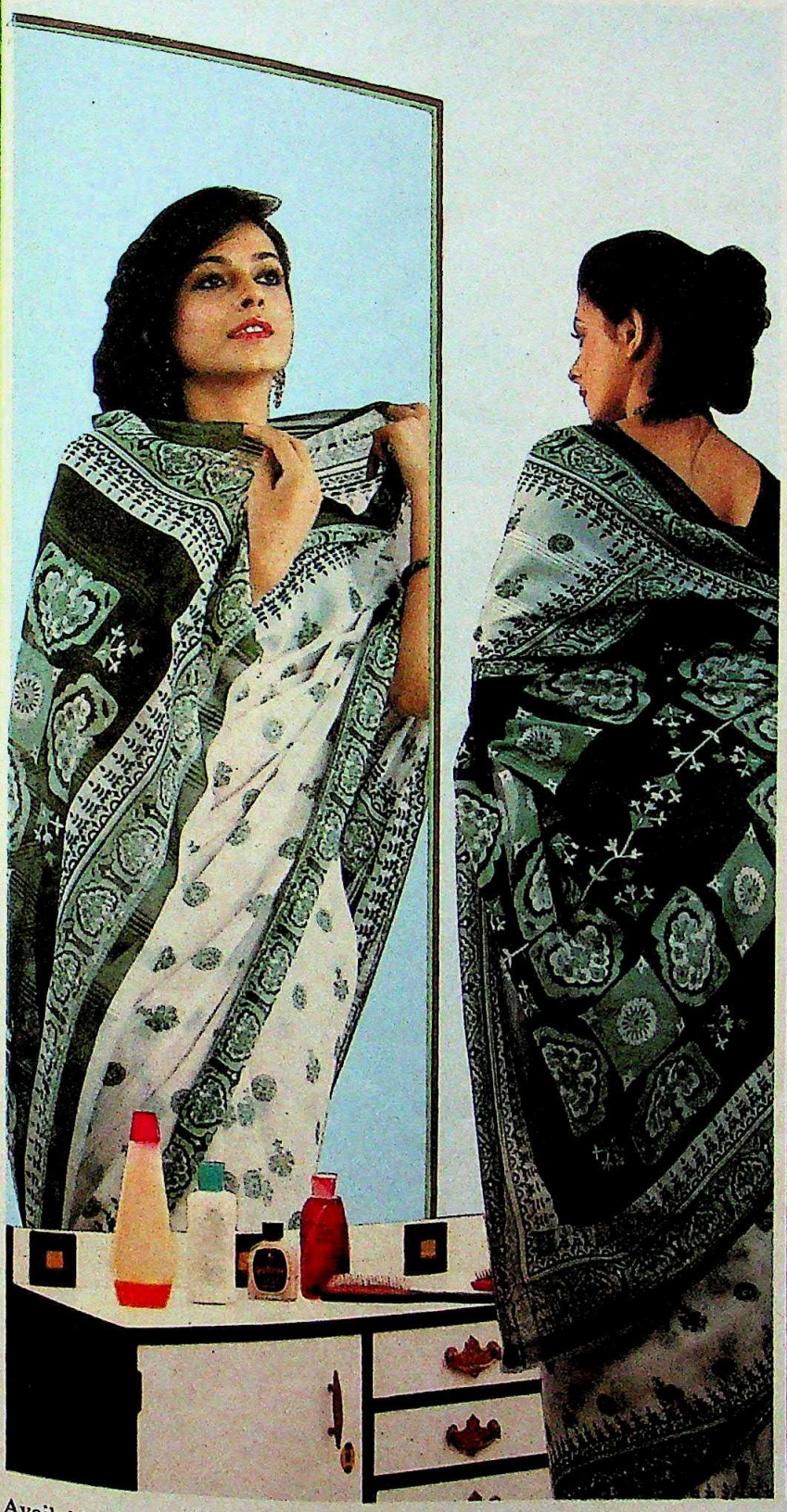

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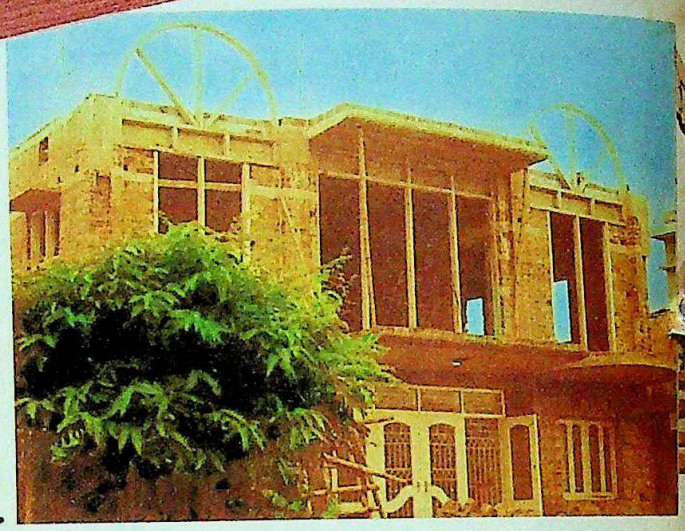

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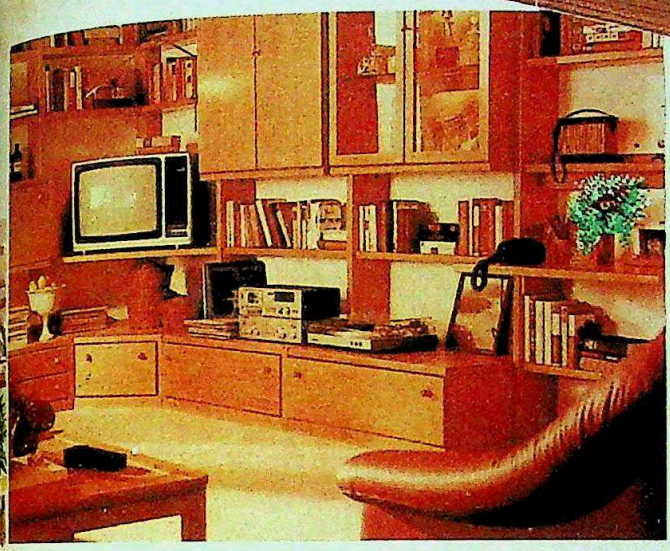

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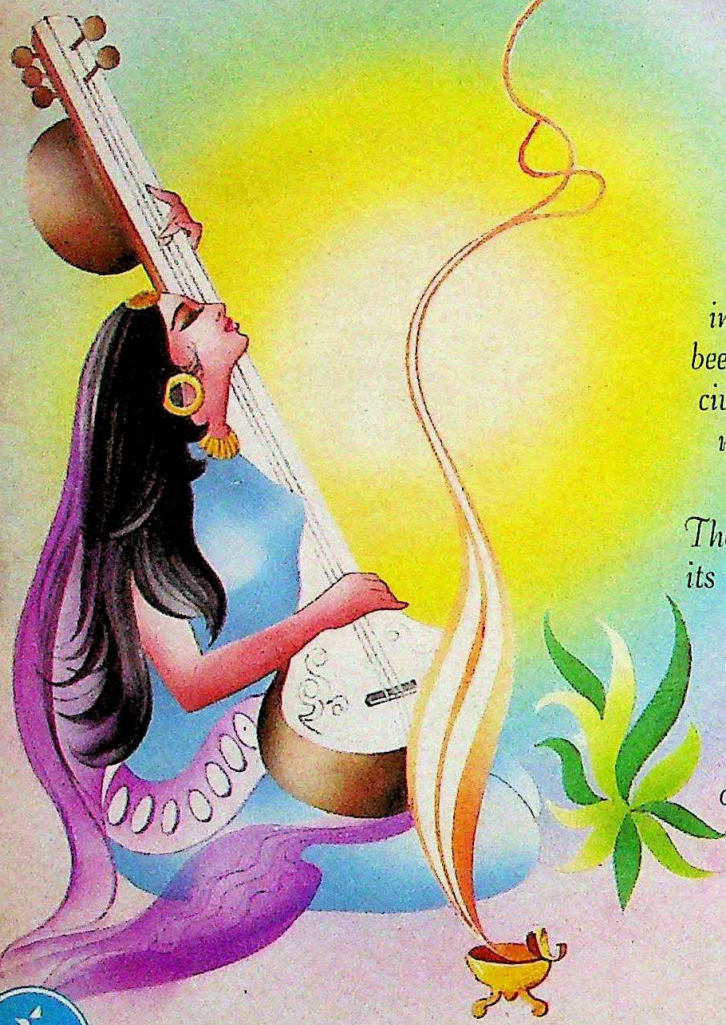

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INDO-US RELATIONS

Distorted Images

THE INDIAN press and members of Parliament have reacted with typical alacrity to a scarcely-noted non-event in Washington on April 11. This was a discussion on human rights in India that included, among other topics, the plight of the Sikh community. The debate that raged in Parliament on the issue would have led an observer to conclude that the Government and Congress had engaged in extreme interference in the internal politics of India and had given Sikh extremists an official platform from which to sound the clarion call of treasonous secession.

But the event was nothing of the kind. Not a single member of Congress attended the small meeting—it was neither an official nor semi-official gathering—and except for a Voice of America radio correspondent who attended the conference and filed a brief report, no other member of the press was present. And the story that made headlines in India on the basis of a (UNI) report did not appear in any section of the US press.

There was precious little the Indian mission in Washington could have done to influence or prevent the gathering. In a society like America which seems to suffer from a terminal case of public candor, open and robust debate occurs in innumerable forums on every conceivable subject on earth, be it embarrassing to America itself or to a foreign government or institution.

Even if a formal committee of Congress decides to hold a sensitive hearing affecting another country the Administration—the executive branch—is powerless to stop it because in the US where government is based on a separation of powers the legislative body is not answerable to the executive.

The meeting was primarily organised by Human Rights Internet (HRI), a private body whose executive director Laurie Wiseberg says she chose Capitol Hill after a member of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus (CHRC) agreed to loan them a spare room in an office building of the House of Representatives. While members of the CHRC, a non-government body of 160 members were told of it, obtaining an empty room for a meeting in a House office building does not imply congressional sanction or endorsement of the event.

The domestic hullabaloo in India seems to focus on the fact the meeting was organised under the aegis of the CHRC, that it was held on Capitol Hill, and that prominent in the audience were Sikh activists Ganga Singh Dhillon and recent expatriate Maj-Gen J.S. Bhullar, and that there were overtones of political interference in India's affairs. No more than 40 people, mostly Sikhs, attended the meeting, and the perception of what occurred there is far more ominous than the reality. Added Wiseberg: "We decided to have a meeting on the Sikh situation because we felt someone should draw attention to a problem that has not been previously aired. There was never any discussion of separatism during the meeting. It focused largely on the Delhi riots that followed the assassination of Mrs Gandhi."

> **"The domestic hullabaloo in India seems to focus on the fact that the meeting was held on Capitol Hill and that there were overtones of political interference in India's affairs. The perception of what occurred there is far more ominous than the reality."**

She also said that she had invited a representative from the Indian Embassy and had listed the embassy's participation on a notice announcing the briefing. But political counsellor Vijay Kumar declined the invitation in a two-page letter one day before the meeting. "Perhaps I was wrong in listing their participation," Wiseberg said, "before I got final word from them. I had assumed they'd send somebody."

The original idea for the conference came from Ralph Singh, a white American Sikh who is an insurance executive in Syracuse, New York. Singh spent six years in Punjab during the 1970s and was converted to Sikhism in India. Contrary to rumours he is not a member of the World Sikh Organisation, does not believe in Yogi Bhajan, and is not affiliated with any organisation supported by Ganga Singh Dhillon and Bhullar. Singh said that he was surprised to see Dhillon and Bhullar at the human rights meeting. "They were not invited", he said, "but they showed up, much to my chagrin. I didn't even want to prepare a press release on the meeting because I was not trying to launch a media campaign and I didn't want any sloganeering."

The meeting was attended by Leo Rose of the University of Berkley, one of the foremost American experts on India and South Asia, who is serving temporarily as a consultant in the State Department's office of policy and planning. Rose said he attended the briefing in a personal capacity. "It's the kind of meeting I normally would not have attended but I was informed that the Indian Embassy would have a representative there to confront a group of Sikh activists. As a scholar I thought it would be an interesting session. I was amazed when I got there. There were no journalists present and the first thing I heard was a letter from the embassy that was read out saying that no embassy representative would attend." Rose said he spoke at the meeting because he thought it needed "balance". He made the point, he said, that Sikhs here must resist making extremist statements and not do anything to complicate the settlement process now under way in India. "I also made the point that the Sikh situation in India was not a communal issue, not a Hindu versus Sikh issue. Nor was it a political issue in terms of the Congress(I) against the Akali Dal." He added: "It is very easy for the Sikh community in the United States, Britain and Canada to go around shouting about this. They don't have to live in India. They don't have to try and adjust to what is a huge majority population. But there are 15 million Sikhs in India that do, and their future is going to be based on their ability to come to terms with the rest of the Indian society that protects their rights, that gives them their legitimate rights, but still enables them to live peacefully with their neighbours."

A staff assistant for CHRC told INDIA TODAY that in view of the severe reaction in India, members of the caucus have reinvited Ambassador Bajpai to speak to them in a closed session. There will be no other participants. At press time it was not known whether Bajpai would accept the invitation.

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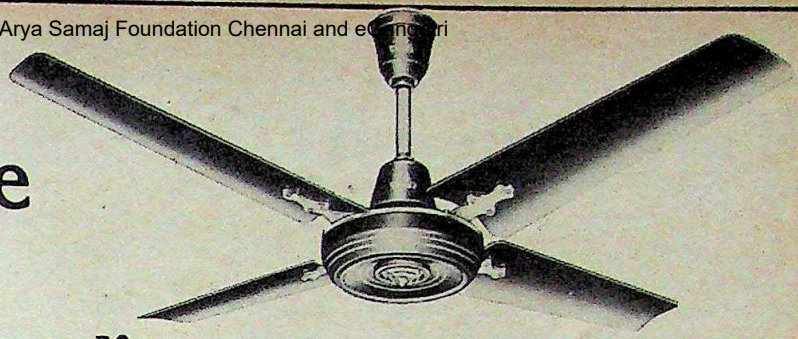

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- **Existing, dividend paying Company.**
- **Well-established product brand name in the market.**
- **Profitable record of operations from the first year of production.**
- **Promoters with 20 years experience in the fan industry.**
- **12% dividend assured to the new Shareholders for the year ending 30th September, 1985.**
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SIKKIM

Ten Years After

TWENTY years ago on a bright April Sunday in Sikkim's capital, Gangtok, trumpets blew away evil spirits, cymbals clanged and prayer wheels turned, while lamas consecrated Palden Thondup Namgyal as the twelfth chogyal or monarch of the mountain kingdom. Almost exactly 10 years later the chogyal was deposed and the Indian tricolour replaced the once proudly fluttering royal standard. Today, the events of April 1975—the hurried referendum, announced and completed within 72 hours—and the subsequent 36th constitutional amendment bill ratified by the Parliament bringing Sikkim into the Indian fold have passed into memory. Calcutta Correspondent INDRANIL BANERJIE *last fortnight toured the tiny state (population: 330,000) to see what changes the last 10 years had brought about and assess the mood of the people. His report:*

THE PEOPLE look the same, the streets haven't changed much, old timers say, except that they're so much more crowded. Ill-designed buildings crawl up the thinly forested hillside in the manner of all newly-expanded hill stations, and there is a recognisable bustle which has replaced the sleepy, hamlet-like existence of the past. Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim from where once the chogyal ruled his diminutive kingdom, is now unmistakably the seat of power of a bureaucracy of babus, a popularly elected government and a state of the Indian Union.

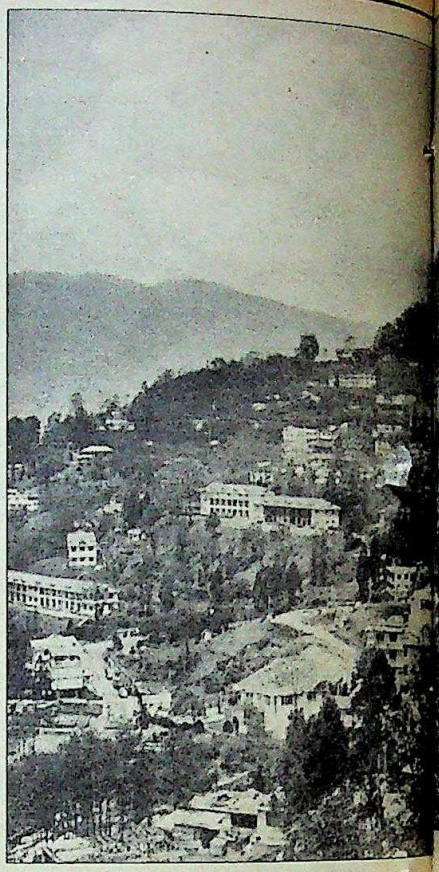
There are other changes, more full of meaning, that have cut through the isolation of the Sikkim of old. Yesterday's opponents of the merger are today's leaders. Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who today considers the merger to be a fait accompli, entered politics more than 10 years ago to rally the Sikkimese against Indian attempts to swallow their kingdom. On the other hand, Kazi Lendhup Dorji, who became Sikkim's first chief minister in 1974 and oversaw the merger, has retired to the relative anonymity of his Kalimpong home after being defeated twice in elections.

Other strident protagonists of the merger, like Bhim Bahadur Gurung, who took Bhandari's place for a mere 13 days after the latter's unceremonious dismissal from chief ministership last year, and B. Khaitiawara, the *enfant terrible* of the Nepal community so prominent during the pre-merger disturbances, have also been consigned to the electoral rubbish heap. Laments Sikkim PCC(I) chief Ram Chandra Pondyal: "Of the 32 MLA's who brought about the merger I am the only one left in politics." The wheel has indeed come full circle: the twelfth chogyal's heir, Prince Jigme Wangchuck, is sequestered in ironic splendour in his lonely palace, officially relegated to being a mere Mr Namgyal. The once elegantly busy royal secretariat, overlooking the new state government secretariat bustling with jeeps and people, lies deserted.

But the sense of a separate Sikkimese identity lingers, as was amply proved by Bhandari's stunning return to power in the March assembly elections when his party, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) won 30 of the state's seats. At work were his election slogan: "Sikkim for the Sikkimese" which touched the latent sentiments against outsiders referred to here as "dhotiwalas", and the popular memory of his blatantly undemocratic ouster last May by former governor Homi J. Talyarkhan. "Bhandari's pro-Sikkimese campaign smashed us," admitted Bhutiya Congress(I) leader Sonam Tshering "but I don't blame the people for being pro-Sikkim."

If this was an assertion of identity, it's clear that it didn't hark back to an era that is long gone. Only the Kazis, hereditary nobles, insist that "history cannot be erased in a decade", but even they recognise that their prince can never return as king. Sikkim's original inhabitants, the Lepchas and Bhutiyas, continue to revere their royalty but few people now shed tears over its deposition. Small wonder. Ten years of education and growing employment opportunities have given commoners like N.D. Chaingapa, West District deputy collector, a chance to be on par with the former Kazis. Son of a small cardamom planter, Chaingapa says: "There are hundreds of young people with a peasant background who are gradually migrating to the towns in search of white-collar jobs." Another commoner, Karma Topden, formerly head of the chogyal's secret service, is today a trusted secretary of Chief Minister Bhandari.

But the bold assertion of Sikkim's identity hides more than it reveals. The Bhutiyas' and Lepchas' real fear is of the ever-rising tide of Nepalis from across the border who now form the majority community in the state and have relegated the original inhabitants to a mere one quarter of the population. By curious twist of fate, the champion of the Nepalis is a man who declares: "If by being for the majority I am called communal, I don't mind being communal." Ram Chandra Poudyal is currently PCC(I) chief of the monolithic nationalist party, the Con-



The slopes of Gangtok: growing forests of buildings

Bhandari: triumphant return

PALJOR TASHI

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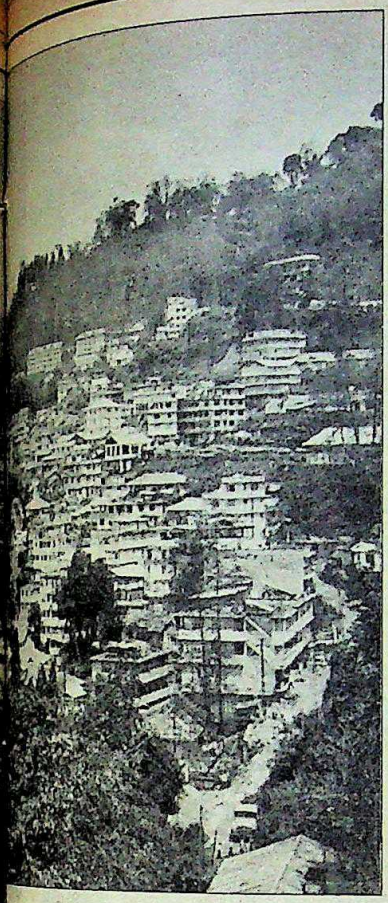
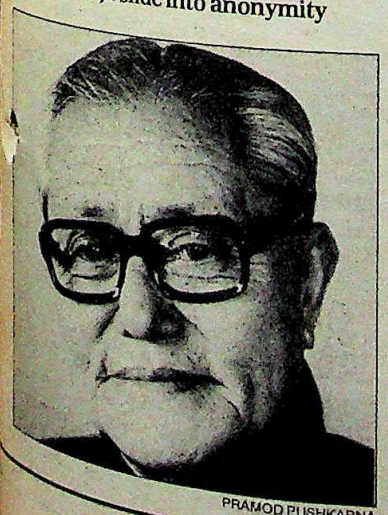


ress(I). Equally strange is the fact that is man, who should have had the unstinting support of his community, should have led his party to a humiliating defeat in the last assembly elections.

The answer possibly lies in Bhandari's non-communal image which obviously appeals to all sections of the population. His secular image has been eroded somewhat because he demands constitutional recognition of the Nepali language and wants the Nepalis and Bhutiya-Lepchas to have 15 seats each reserved for them

Kazi Dorji: slide into anonymity



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

(compared with 13 only for the latter at present) but he manages to correct the balance by declaring that the state Government would eject all "foreigners" who entered that state after 1970.

But stemming the Nepali tide is practically impossible, since Sikkim has traditionally employed cheap Nepali labour to build roads, in construction and for harvesting work. This practice continues and has increased with the spurt in development activity since the merger. Most Nepali settlers are pathetically poor. Pleads Sunmaya Gurung: "We have nowhere else to go." Sunmaya's son-in-law migrated to Sikkim 12 years ago and settled down on a small patch of land he cleared in the mountainside near Pemayangtse in western Sikkim. Her daughter and son-in-law work as casual labour and are also engaged in looking after the adjoining cardamom plantation of a Bhutiya farmer.

Sadly, the influx is proving disastrous for the state's precarious Himalayan ecology. The once thick forests preserving the geologically young and hence unstable mountains have been dangerously thinned. Yet, as Chaingapa maintains, there have been no reports or complaints about encroachment of land by outsiders. This is chiefly because the state still has ample marginal land to be settled on. According to the 1981 census, only 4,887 of the total of 1.47 lakh workers in Sikkim were landless agricultural labour.

Some Bhutiya-Lepchas in the bureaucracy now fear the time is coming when they will be politically and economically obliterated by the Nepali deluge. The state's population has been growing at an unnatural rate in recent years, doubling from 1.62 lakh in 1971 to 3.16 lakh in 1981. Suresh Parmar, editor of a local daily who has conducted a detailed study on the voters list, estimates there has been a 46 per cent increase in the number of Nepali voters between 1979 and 1984, compared to a 22.6 per cent rise in the Bhutiya-Lepcha voters.

Sikkim's social fabric is further warped by the resentment locals have against plainsmen, chiefly the Marwaris who dominate trade and commerce through their extensive marketing network developed both within and outside the state over several decades. Being a tightly-knit community, the Marwaris can successfully dictate prices to local farmers and, at another level, outsmart local businessmen who have few contacts in the principal markets of Calcutta, Lucknow and Kanpur. The result, laments the chief minister, is that unfortunately for them "the people cannot enjoy the fruits of their labour".

But Balchand Sarda, Gangtok's independent MLA and the first plainsman to win an election in the state, vehemently denies that traders are exploiting local agriculture. A scion of Marwaris who first settled here 70 years ago, he argues: "Why can't the Government through its cooperatives build up a monopoly?" In fact the state Government has been trying since 1982 to strengthen the cooperative marketing network and establish rural banks for providing short-term credit. "But it's proving difficult to break the decades-long traditional links between illiterate farmers and the Marwaris," says West District Collector T.N.Barphungha.

IN A MANNER so similar to the practice in other parts of India, farmers find banks and cooperatives alien concepts and prefer direct dealing with the traders. But interest rates are usurious and the gullible farmers almost invariably end up pledging their crops to them. "Farmers in the state would have even lost their land due to indebtedness had it not been for the official ban on outsiders buying land," says Barphungha.

The Marwaris have been quick to cash in on the post-merger boom. In Gangtok, where plainsmen are allowed to own property, they have fuelled a building boom that is paying rich dividends now that both the state and the Central governments are opening new offices every year and an entire generation of young Sikkimese is flocking to the state capital. Gangtok's population has nearly trebled from 13,000 in 1971 to an estimated 40,000 at present. Meanwhile, the former Gangtok of neat little cottages with flower patches has been transformed into a congested collection of multi-storied buildings crammed into every conceivable spot on the mountainside.

"It's easy money, man" says 24-year-old Ugen Tashi, one of the many hundred young Sikkimese who have left their village homes to flock to Gangtok for contracts and white-collar jobs. But for young Tashi the experience has also been sobering. There is money all right, but living costs are high and competing with established contractors difficult. Hope is the eternal motivating factor. Even a local football coach, M. Manglam, who came to Gangtok nine years ago, saved Rs 25,000 by giving extra coaching lessons and doing a bit of trading on the side. Today, thanks to state government-backed bank finance, he is waiting to receive a Premier Padmini taxi.

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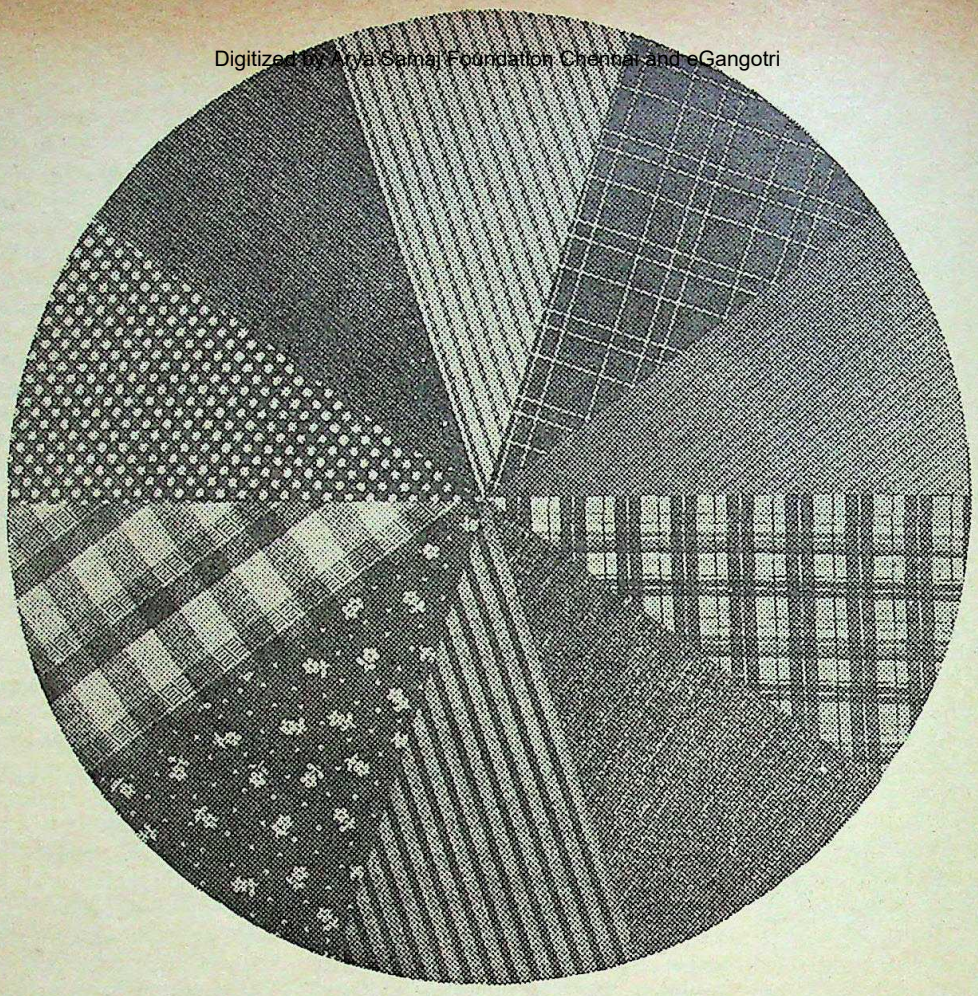

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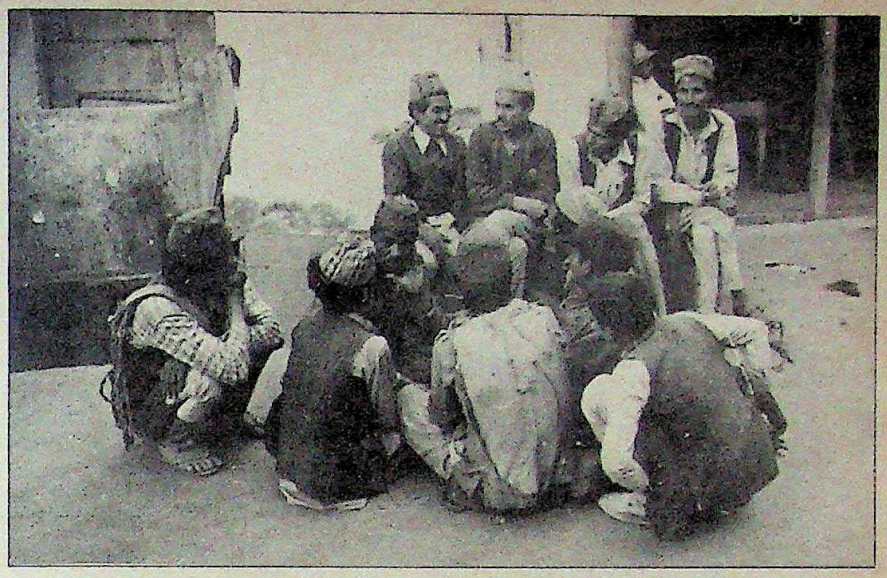
But the strongest push to the local economy has come from Delhi. "The Centre has pumped in so much money that some people here have become millionaires overnight," says Sarda. Plan assistance to Sikkim has sky-rocketed since the merger from about Rs 6 crore annually to Rs 44 crore in the current financial year. During the sixth plan, per capita central assistance to Sikkim amounted to Rs 1,209, which is not just the highest for any state but several times the national average of Rs 80. "Sikkim's own revenue is just about Rs 11 crore annually, whereas this year we have projected a total expenditure of Rs 97 crore," says R. Narayanan, who has been the state's development commissioner since 1976.

Get-rich-quick stories are legion. Some of the profits were made during the brief period when permits were liberally doled out and certain industries in the state were exempted from excise duty. The ultimate in apocryphal stories concerns the businessman who loaned money to the Government to pay salaries. But the pipeline of funds has also had a visible impact on the state's development, as borne out by indicators:

- Ten years ago there were 264 educational institutions in the state; today there are 761. One result: the number of persons employed in agriculture declined;
- power generation has risen more than five times to a capacity of 17 mw compared to 2.5 mw at the time of the merger. Result: Sikkim sells surplus power to neighbouring West Bengal and from a handful, no fewer than 181 villages of a total of 405 have electricity;
- in the sixth plan period, 350 kms of new roads were hewn out of the mountains;
- Irrigated area has doubted to 8,000 hectares;
- Sikkim's gross domestic product, the value of total production in the state, has risen about 50 per cent in five years to Rs 37.4 crore in 1983-84.

Not surprisingly, save for settlements of migrant Nepali labour, Sikkim shows few signs of the crushing poverty that scar so many other parts of India. Says DIG of Police Tashi Namgyal: "Today when I go to the districts I can see the change. The tribals have corrugated sheet roofs, their crops and life in general is better." The remote north district's headquarters are at Nangan. This inconspicuous settlement boasts two video parlours and bars serving Indian beer and Sikkimese liquor.



Nepali workers in Gangtok: disquieting influx

Some Sikkimese are, however, beginning to realise that their honeymoon with New Delhi is not going to last forever. "At the moment we don't have to pay any central income-tax and there are enough contracts, jobs and loans to keep us going," explains M. Sharma, the state's enterprising industries director, but he counterposes this with the grim reminder provided by the short-lived consumer products industry boom between 1981 and the end of 1983 that died the moment the Centre included Sikkim within the purview of the Central Excise Duty Act.

"Our only long term hope is industries and the Centre must help us in concrete terms," says Sharma, pointing out that not a single Central government undertaking has been set up in the state so far. The Sikkim Government made an arrangement with HMT and with its own money set up an ancillary unit for assembling mechanical watches. "We need more units like the watch factory to develop skills and provide a base for diversification," says he, proudly outlining the factory's move into the manufacture of watch crowns and electronic clocks.

Jigme Wangchuck: isolated

With billowing expectations and conflicting sectarian aspirations, the Sikkimese polity today is an unstable raft on which few politicians can balance successfully. Last year, Prince Jigme Wangchuck firmly refused when asked by a group of Bhutiya-Lepcha bureaucrats and politicians to return to public life by contesting the parliamentary elections. Speaking for the reclusive prince, a Kazi bureaucrat explains: "Perhaps the way democracy came to Sikkim was unfortunate but it had to come. Today, our community has no leader so our chogyal must come forward. But our chogyal feels the merger was not constitutional and by contesting he will be accepting the annexation. Also perhaps he is not sure where he will stand as an equal among his former subjects."

But no leader, not even Bhandari, seems to be sure where he stands today. At one end is the rising clamour of the majority Nepalis who feel they are still being suppressed, still being denied opportunities commensurate with their efforts and numbers. On the other are the insecure Bhutiya and Lepcha tribals craving for a leader to protect their interests. And on top is the omnipotent Centre demanding obeisance to national integration and unity. Freed of the monarchical straightjacket but pinned by this trinity, Sikkim 10 years after its merger with India is prospering but still far from being the "happy house" its name implies.

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BREACH OF FORM

MOST businessmen with corporate take-over programmes seem to be paying little attention to the revised guidelines on the subject pushed through by the Government last year. The guidelines, modelled on the London City Code and included as a new clause in the listing agreements between companies and stock exchanges, stipulate that anyone buying 25 per cent of a company's shares should offer the same price to other shareholders, plus disclose their sources of funds and identities. By and large, however, these guidelines have been observed in the breach. The exceptions include M.G. Mittal and Company of Bombay, which has taken over Trade Wings from Nandalal Kilachand Investment, Dodsal and the United Commercial Bank. Another instance when small shareholders were offered a sale option was in the case of the Indian Vegetable Products. Some Calcutta-based concerns have also followed the new guidelines. But stock exchange sources say that in most cases the guidelines are evaded with apparent ease by the deploying of front companies, each of which then buys less than 25 per cent of the equity.

DESI-DARSHAN

TWO MORE television whodunits, *Target* and *Shoestring*, are scheduled to go on the waves in the next few weeks. The launching date has not been decided, but if it does, one of the serials may be run on Friday night. Otherwise, Doordarshan plans to telecast them on Saturday or Sunday. The current crop of foreign programmes is slated to go off the screens by September/October, and Doordarshan will soon be looking seriously for replacements. One virtual certainty is *Star Trek* (13 episodes) or a similar science fiction serial. Six more episodes of the BBC serial *Sorry* will be screened on the second channel. The double meanings were considered unsuitable for the first channel.

POWER TO STEEL

STEEL re-rolling mills and induction furnaces in the states surrounding Delhi have been flocking to the capital in recent months, attracted by the relatively attractive power position in Delhi. Some 150 of these units have already submitted applications to the Delhi Administration, which however has reacted in alarm since these units will mean an additional power demand of 300 mw: 50 per cent of the capital's current electricity requirements. The administration is therefore moving on a proposal to ban the establishment of new steel re-rolling mills and induction furnaces in the capital. However, about 30 of these units have already been provisionally registered with the municipal corporation for power connections. But despite this, a ban order will render this a still born industrial boom.

ANOTHER BITE

THE WORLD of fast food parlours is rapidly becoming crowded: yet another parlour has opened in New Delhi, in collaboration with the Canadian firm Mohawk International. Launched by local entrepreneurs Jagdish Sood and son Ajay (prominent in the cinema theatre and construction business), the new parlour Americano offers the conventional burgers, pizzas plus Indian food. Six more Americano outlets are planned if business picks up, while the Sood combine is also negotiating with the US hotel chain, Ramada Inn, for setting up a hotel in Delhi.

CAPITAL HEIGHTS

PRIVATE equity issues may be doing extraordinarily well on the stock market, but the total paid-up capital of all the 93,294 private sector companies in the country stands at no more than Rs 5,514 crore, according to the *Economic Times*. In comparison, 970 government-owned companies have a paid-up capital of Rs 16,415 crore, providing good evidence of the commanding heights to which the public sector has climbed. This situation is a complete reversal of the situation 30 years ago, when the private sector companies had a paid-up capital (Rs 1,005 crore) that was far more than in the case of the public sector (Rs 73 crore). But the private sector is looking up in one respect: in the early 1960s equity issues floated on the market evoked a response from the public of no more than 60 per cent. In 1983-84, this improved to 98.1 per cent.

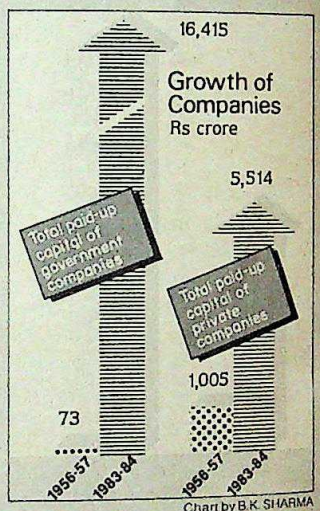

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

SMALL SUCCESS

PRIME Minister Rajiv Gandhi laid out the Government's priorities quite clearly when he told foreign business leaders brought to Delhi by the EMF Foundation that what the country required was foreign investment in core sectors like power. But few of the assembled businessmen qualified on this count: the majority of those present were from companies like Pepsi Cola, the Hinduja Group, Ramada Inn, General Foods and a variety of bankers. There were also representatives present from companies like Alcan, Westinghouse, Rockwell, CGEE Alsthom, Pechiney, Voest Alpine and CIT Alcatel. But most of these are already familiar with India, its economic policies and the Government's priorities. So whether the round-table meet will mark any sort of breakthrough remains to be seen.

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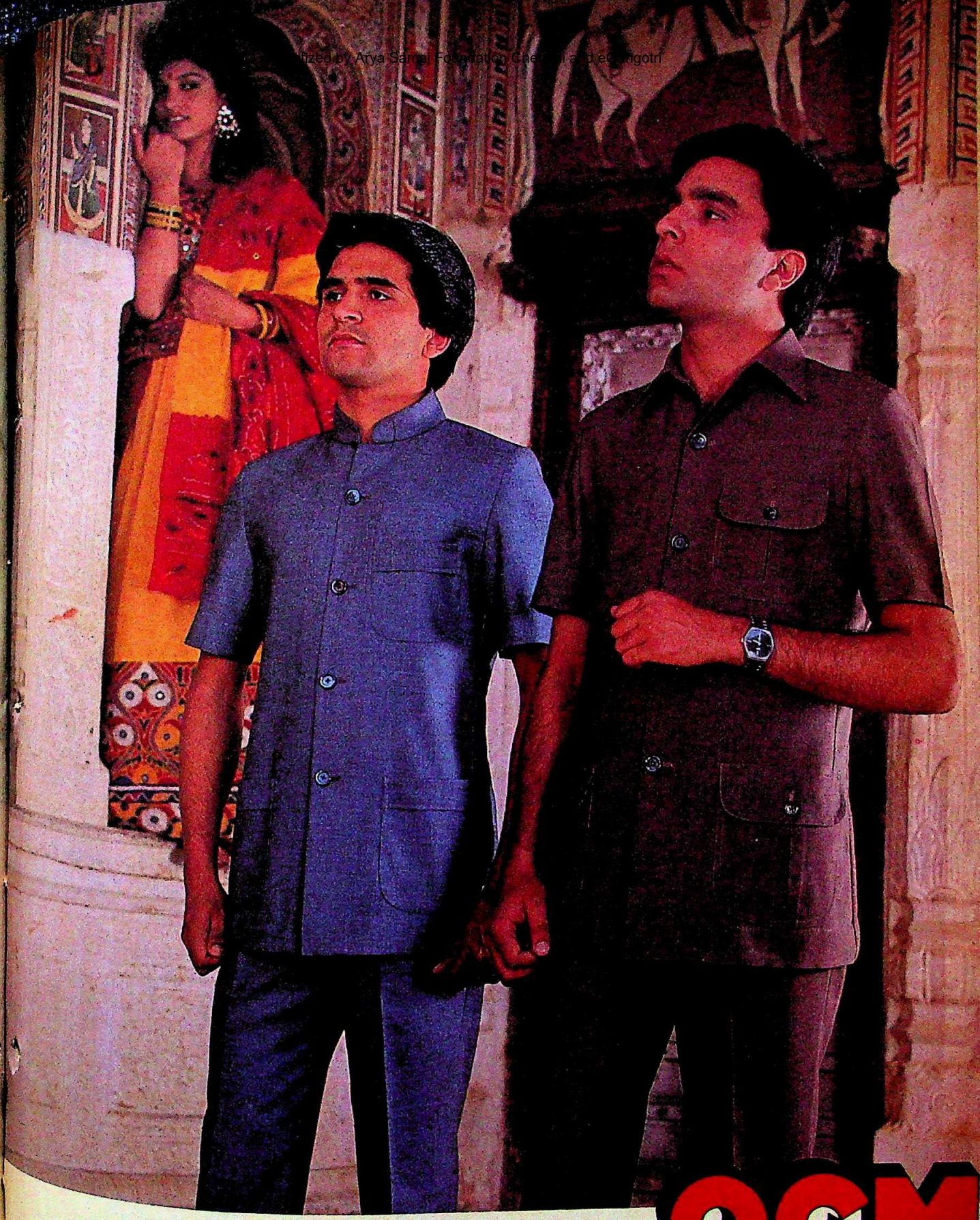

OCM
SUITINGS
THE PERFECT FABRIC
70/30, Silver, SZ,
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The colourful walls of Shekhavati...
The contemporary touch of OCM

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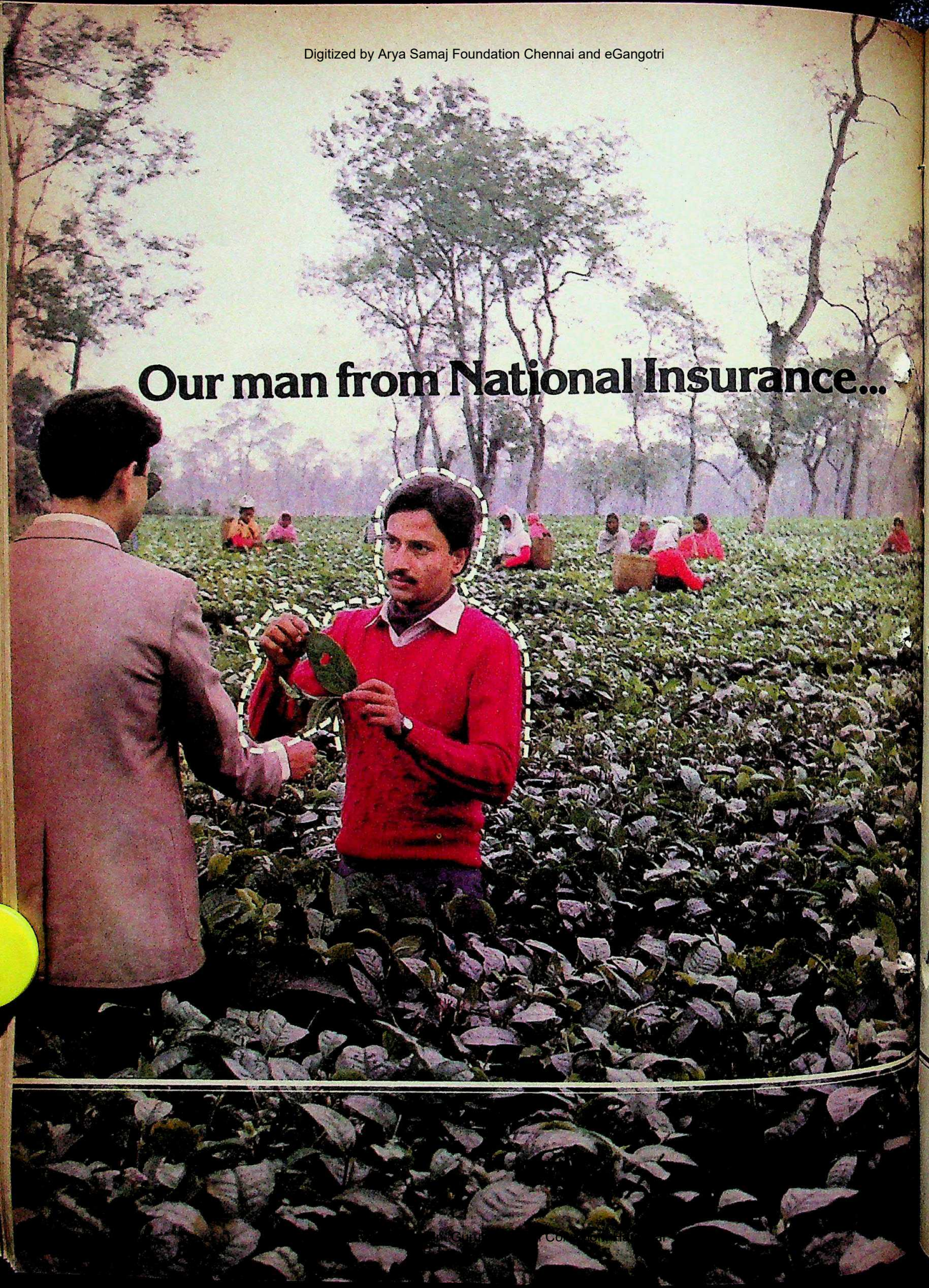

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at home in tea plantations, covering the risks from bush to cup.

Anything that affects the well-being of a Rs. 500 crore foreign exchange earner affects the well-being of the Nation. Excessive rains. Hailstorms. Herd of wild elephants. Pests and insects. Wild bush fire. Anything going wrong during processing. The uncertainties of tea production are simply too many to be left to chance.

That's why people who know, put their trust in National Insurance. While National is, essentially, an insurance company, it has field personnel who know the hazards of producing tea, inside out.

Now, this makes a world of difference when you're looking for insurance that provides comprehensive cover in high-investment, high-risk projects. National does it to your satisfaction.

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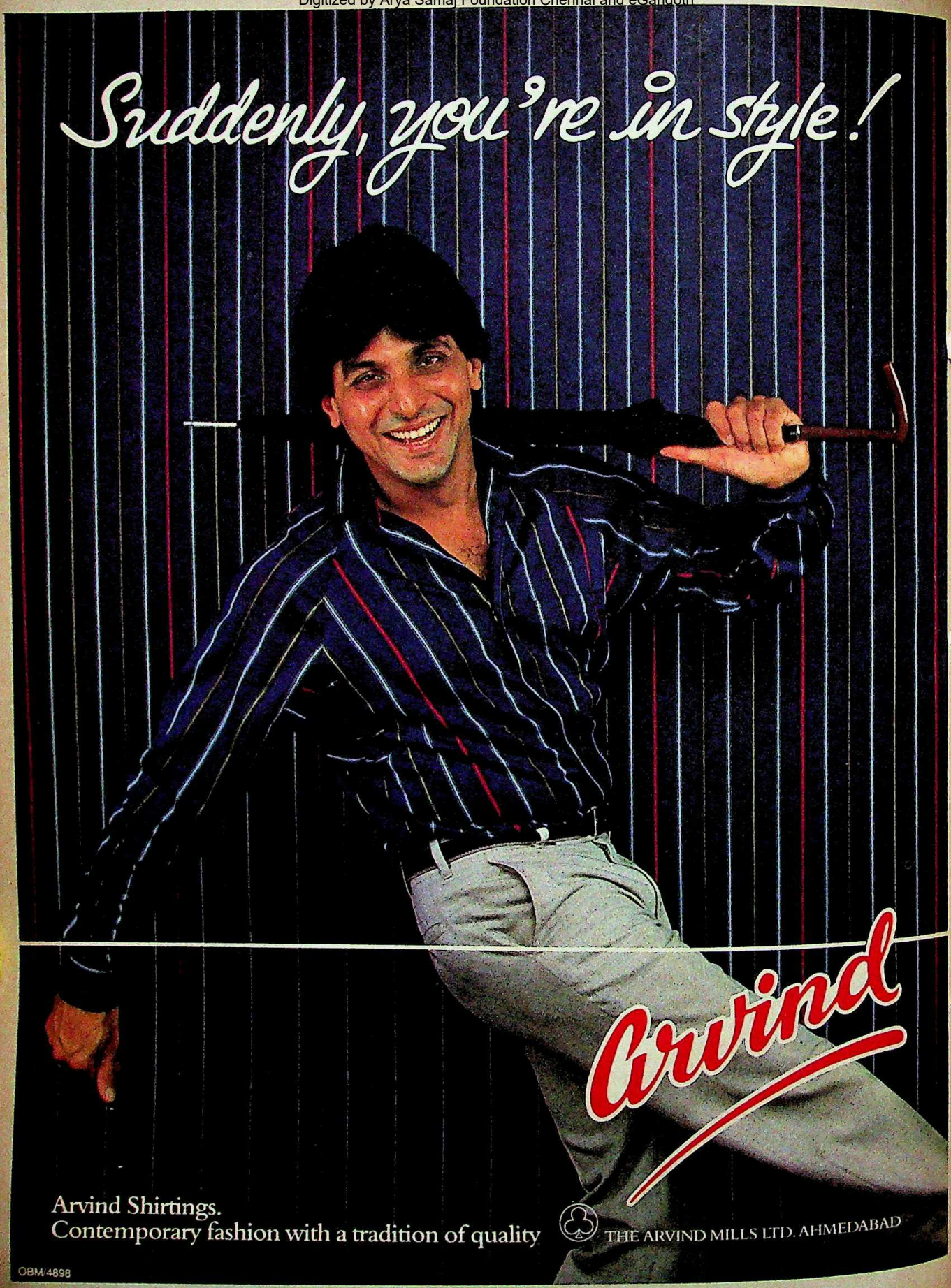

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THE BUDGET

A Balancing Act

FINANCE Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh's budget is being praised for the wrong reasons. A national budget is very much like a household budget —you earn so much, spend so much, and at the end of the year, put away so much in the kitty for a rainy day.

It is a pity that discussion on the budget has centered on income tax cuts and other concessions given to companies but has almost totally ignored the overall financial picture in relation to the national economy. The point is not whether the Government is taking too much out of the economy—which obviously it is—not even whether it makes good use of what it takes away—about which there can be more than one opinion but one would not care much for the other one—but whether it manages to live within its means. The answer to the last question is no, and it is indeed a pity that in the euphoria over tax cuts and other 'liberating' measures, this aspect has been lost sight of.

Charan Singh's disastrous budget of 1979-80 was probably the first budget in which the Centre's revenue disbursements exceeded its revenue receipts. The margin was small, only about 6 per cent, but the signs were ominous. That year, the receipts were Rs 11,000 crore and disbursements slightly over Rs 12,000 crore, leaving a balance of about Rs 1,000 crore to be made up by cooking the books. In the following year, the gap doubled to nearly Rs 2,000 crore, but came down in the year after that.

Since then, the gap has been widening, both in absolute and relative terms, and it now stands at 22 per cent. Singh's budget shows revenue receipts of Rs 26,722 crore and disbursements of Rs 32,717 crore which leaves a gap of Rs 6,000 crore. This will be met partly through borrowings and partly through deficit financing but the fact remains that the Government is not able to do its housekeeping, which is what a revenue budget is, without getting into debt or without cooking its books, which is essentially what deficit financing is.

When you borrow, you have to pay at least a nominal interest, rate, as the Government does. The Government has first charge on the resources of banks and has its hands more or less permanently into their pockets. The banks are consequently forced to charge a much higher rate of interest to make up for the low rate they charge the Government.

We have therefore more or less the same situation as in the United States where the large budget deficits have led to high interest rates. Fortunately for them, high rates of interest attract dollars from Europe and elsewhere, and makes the dollar a strong currency, so strong that the Americans pop over to Paris and London to do their shopping. While the US is cleaning up the world with its strong dollar, the position in India is entirely different. High interest rates lead to high costs, and high costs to high prices. The budget is inflationary on two counts: high deficit coupled with massive borrowings.

The finance minister has received kudos for cutting down personal and company income tax rates. He would have done better if he had wielded his hatchet on government expenditure.

That is not all. The burden of interest on accumulated debt is growing yearly and a stage has reached where the Government has to borrow just to pay off old debts. Total net borrowing this year (1985-86) is estimated at Rs 7,244 crore. As against this, total interest payments during the year are placed around Rs 7,075 crore, which means that the entire borrowings will be used up to pay the interest on accumulated debt. At this rate, time is not very far when the Government will be forced to print currency notes, not to balance its books which it does now in any case, but to pay off its pressing creditors.

The only way to put an end to this state of affairs is to cut down government expenditure ruthlessly, and blue-pencil every other request, particularly from state governments, for funds. The states may be making much of their lack of autonomy but one wonders whether they are as scrupulous as they should be with the cash they receive from the Centre. The telephone bills of some state chief ministers run into lakhs of rupees. Bhajan Lal's telephone bill for calls between April 1, 1984, and February 28, 1985, came to Rs 2,94,831.30 which works out to Rs 36 per hour—hour, not day. A Maharashtra minister took a helicopter from Bombay to visit friends in the interior and ran up a huge bill on government account. Multiply such items a thousand or a million times, and you get a very good idea of the kind of waste that has become almost a routine affair in the name of development. The finance minister has received kudos for cutting down personal and company income tax rates. He would have done better if he had wielded his hatchet, for nothing less than a hatchet would do, on government expenditure and hacked it down by at least Rs 2,000 crore

Rajiv Gandhi has said that his government is going to have a good look at the present activities of the public sector and rationalise them. He has said that he does not want government undertakings to make tomato sauce. Actually, the Government has no business making anything if it cannot make it without making a profit. For the losses come out of the general kitty and are reflected in the budget. If the Centre shuts down state units that have outlived their usefulness it will not have to dip into taxpayers' pockets to balance its books. Ultimately, it is the taxpayer who pays for its rulers' extracurricular activities.

There is no reason why we have to be taxed so heavily to pay Bhajan Lal's telephone bills. And there must be millions of taxpayers—and everyone in India is a taxpayer since even salt is now taxed —wondering why they should not fiddle their accounts if the Government cannot balance its books without fiddling its accounts. If the finance minister does not tighten his belt, the planners will do it for him, for they will have to decide very soon what do with a plan that is so short of resources that its size may have to be cut down by 10 per cent, if not more. After all, there is only so much in the kitty, and if a big slice is eaten up just to keep talkative ministers happy, then something must give. And that something will be the plan which, when everything is said and done, does decide whether we grow or stay put.

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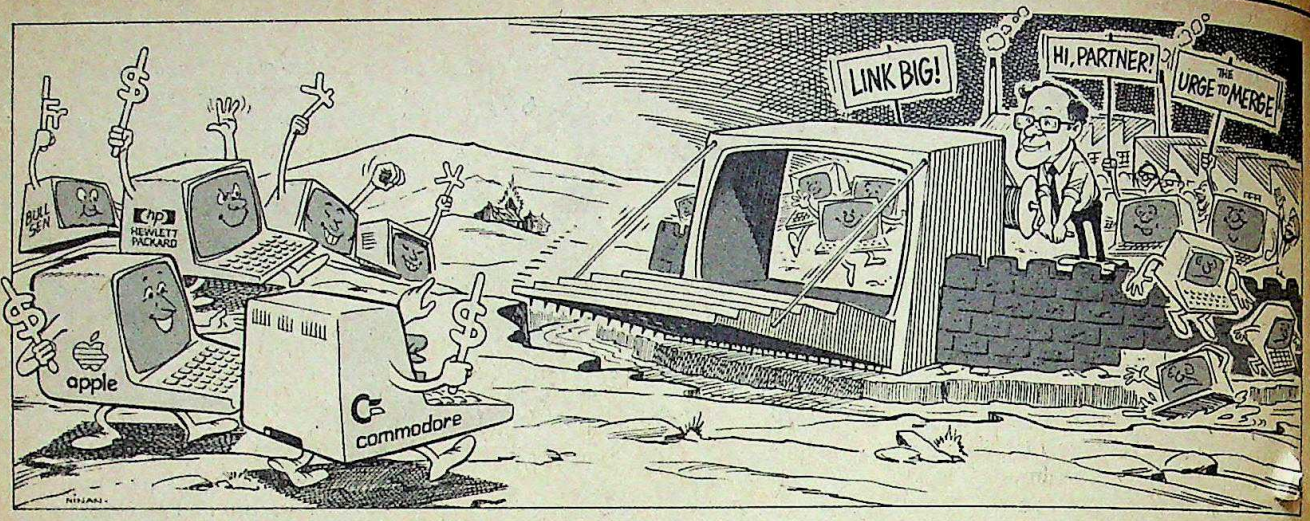

COMPUTERS

Big is Beautiful

THE WORLD of bits and bytes is being buffeted by the first winds of upheaval—and predictably so. Costs are dropping, firms are turning out more computers and sales are picking up. And the market may be growing, though the jury is still out on that. Companies scrambling to protect market shares have gone on a price cutting spree, computer prices have in some cases tumbled to half the levels prevailing a few months ago, and the price wars will get bloodier in the months ahead.

The wars will exact their toll of course: almost everyone connected with computers agrees that some of the smaller firms will be wiped out or will be forced to switch from manufacturing to representing the big boys as agents. And what will inevitably hone the competition is the horde of foreign firms that is poised to enter the Indian market in association with local firms—a far cry from the closed market of yesteryear when International Business Machines (IBM) was forced out of the country.

Readying to enter the country are Apple Computers Ltd, Hewlett Packard, Commodore and Sinclair. Apple is looking for a partner, though it has a local distributor in Raba Contel and could tie up with it, Hewlett Packard is scouting the market, and Sinclair and Macmillan India have joined hands to make some 80,000 home computers a year, half of which may be exported. Commodore will be coming in with a non-resident Indian, the French company Bull Sem is talking to the public sector Instrumentation Ltd, Kota, the Dutch firm Nixdorff has tied up with the Kotharis, Philips of Holland will launch computers with its local counterpart Peico, and other US, Japanese and Dutch companies have gone into a huddle with the Mafatlals, Raunaq Enterprises and the Modis. A sign of the coming production explosion in computers is that, at the low end of the market alone, the Government has issued letters of intent to firms to launch annually four lakh personal computers. All these may not come off the assembly lines, but even if one-hundredth of this number does, that would be more than all the computers turned out in the country last year.

"The industry is crying wolf. The Government had to break the vicious cycle of high prices and low volumes."

N. SESHAGIRI
additional secretary, Department of Electronics

Even firms that are now in are examining new ways of doing things or venturing into associated fields. Texas Instruments, the US firm, proposes to establish an earth station in India and transmit software data through a satellite. Local firms like Usha Microprocess Controls are branching into peripherals manufacture.

If the computer industry is set to take off, much of the impulses at work stem from a series of key customs duty announcements in the budget and the export-import policy. These have rounded off the new policy that was unveiled last November. The November package lifted restraints on output and opened the doors to foreign computer firms—all with the goal of infusing competition into the industry, lowering computer prices to international levels and stepping up annual production from the laughable figure of 3,500 or so last year to a lakh in five years time. Now the 15 per cent excise levied on every computer sold has been scrapped and the customs duty on four electronic components has been lowered to 25 per cent from 75 per cent. (Logically, that should contribute to lower computer prices, but some industry executives argue that the high dollar has offset the concession.) Most important, computers that cost less than Rs 10 lakh can be imported under an open general licence by the end-users (who cannot re-sell downstream) by shelling out 200 per cent duty (60 per cent if import applications are

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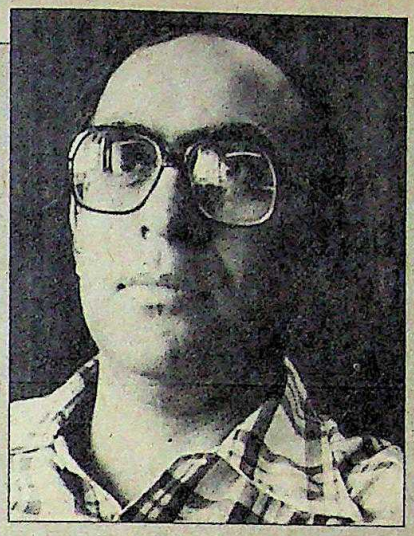
vetted by the Department of Electronics).

The package is broadly welcomed. Elico Computers Managing Director Balbir Singh Bajaj says: "Right now while the international market talks in terms of 50,000s we talk in terms of hundreds. The new policy will produce these kinds of numbers in five years." But the provision for freer imports has ruffled feathers in the industry. Many raise the spectre of local firms going down like ninepins if the market is flooded with imported computers. Says Dilip J. Shah, director, International Data Management (IDM), the firm put together by former IBM employees: "The import policy is disastrous for the industry. It may be almost cheaper to shop for computers abroad since local costs are twice or thrice cost levels in foreign countries." He argues that if the advantage of brand names that foreign computers have, is added to this, and domestic firms will be swamped. Shah's views are echoed by Ashok Soota, president of Wipro Information Technology. He fears that unscrupulous manufacturers won't play by the rules. Says he: "The measures the Government has taken so far will ensure that the computer market will grow by 50 per cent and more. But it must safeguard against growth occurring only in imports".

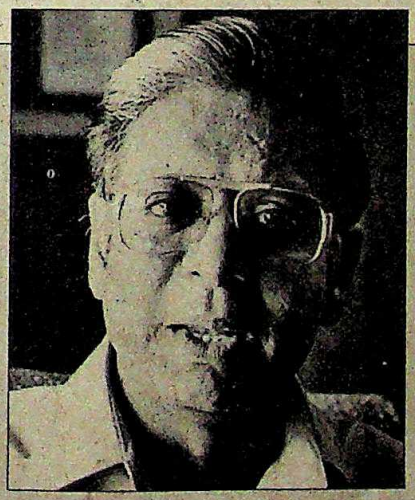
SHAH and Soota's fears may be valid but up to a point. The price-tag for importing a small business computer could range between $ 5,000 and $ 8,000 (about Rs 65,000 and Rs 1.04 lakh), including the 200 per cent duty. Some industry analysts hold that when finally assessed by customs, the bill could cross Rs 1 lakh or more—and buyers may plump for the home-made variety which is half as expensive. While small computer buyers are sensitive to price, the argument goes, those who buy mini computers are far less so. Where foreign products could edge out local ones is in mini computers priced at Rs 2 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. Industry watcher Sunil Agarwal, who edits *Dataquest*, the computer magazine, believes that over a dozen local mini computer manufacturers could be squeezed by imports because buyers may opt for foreign products even if they have to pay more for them.

Not everyone buys this argument. Malin Kohli, chairman of the Delhi chapter of the Computer Society of India, points out that buyers have gone through a learning curve and are aware that local companies alone can provide the maintenance support necessary. And N. Seshagiri, additional secretary in the Department of Electronics and the architect of the computer policy, brushes off the industry's fears: "The industry is crying wolf. The Government had to break the vicious cycle of high prices and low volumes."



"The measures the Government has taken so far will ensure that the computer market will grow. But it must safeguard against growth occurring only in imports."

ASHOK SOOTA
president, Wipro Information Technology



"The import policy is disastrous for the industry. It may be almost cheaper to shop for computers abroad since local costs are twice as much."

DILIP J. SHAH
director, International Data Management

Nevertheless, the Government's latest round of policy liberalisations has left many grey areas. Last fortnight, computer executives were throwing up a number of questions. How will an actual user be defined? Can a corporate heavyweight import 200 personal computers? Vinay Bharat Ram, managing director of DCM, argues that customs officials don't have computer price catalogues and under-invoicing can therefore become rampant. Others suggest that buyers can import two systems that cost less than Rs 10 lakh each and hook them up and that the Department of Electronics does not have a system to monitor what is available in the country, the yardstick by which imports will be allowed.

But Seshagiri says that anyone who wants to will be allowed to import any number of computers. Though the landed cost will act as a deterrent, customs officials have computer price catalogues and imports of personal computer networks will not be permitted. In a major clarification, he adds that imports of computers that cost less than Rs 1 lakh will be banned. Last fortnight, guidelines were being issued to customs officials to this effect.

That should certainly gladden computer manufacturers, most of whom cater to the low end of the market (by the end of last year 4,630 micro computers had been installed in the country). It could also result in firms switching to low market lines in the coming months though many deny that they intend doing so. What is evident is that a restructuring of the industry is in the offing.

First, companies will resort to what one executive calls "smart selling" or repackaging the same products in different ways. The executive confesses that his firm is doing precisely that. Second, only big companies with financial staying power will survive. In computers, as in other areas of electronics, big is beautiful. As a government official puts it: "The name of the game is numbers." Third, the emerging competition will force companies to cut costs—and the only area where the axe can be wielded is product maintenance and user staff training. Unlike firms abroad, Indian computer companies generally provide systems software and training free to customers. (Many in the industry therefore argue that Indian computer prices are not strictly comparable with prices

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abroad.) Says an analyst: "Firms will have to price each and every support service. All the goodies will cost extra." Thus another satellite industry to provide services could grow. Fourth, import duties are scheduled to be phased out over the next three years to cut prices even further. Manufacturers with high overheads who have ties with foreign firms may close down production lines and switch to representing their foreign partners as agents if they cannot face the competition. The alternative is for them to become original equipment makers who sell to systems engineering units which in turn will retail computers. Finally, software exports, now in the region of Rs 20 crore or less, may get a push.

Underpinning the argument that a computer revolution is in the offing is a basic premise—that a huge market exists out there waiting to be tapped. But even the cheapest computer today is too expensive for the lay public to take home and computers come low down on the totem pole, after TV's and VCR's. Where then will the demand come from? Manufacturers are only too aware of the problem. Some like Vinay Rai, president of the Computers, Peripherals and Process Manufacturers' Association, had proposed that a cess be levied on the industry to promote the use of computers. Shah of IDM suggests the industry set up advanced centres in conjunction with government agencies to demonstrate the advantages of using computers, and that the Government permit tax write-offs to computer buyers up to a certain amount. And Eiko is wooing schools and conducting courses for students. It plans on holding a camp in June to train teachers to use computers.

In the short run, however, companies are looking to the Government to provide the big push. The Rangarajan Committee on computerisation in banks has recommended that Rs 300 crore be spent on buying computers, and the Government has already cleared Rs 130 crore of this. But the big spending may not begin quickly enough, leading one industry observer to comment: "Computer manufacture for the next one year will be a bum's game." The era of super profits and of companies taking the consumer for a ride is over, and prices will fall even further, a leaner industry will emerge with half a dozen giants dominating the market, and the inefficient and small will fall by the wayside. The beneficiary can only be the consumer.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI with bureau reports

McDOWELL

Taxing Times

KERALA's fractious politics has taken a rum turn. Liquor giant McDowell and three public sector firms are the centre of a heated dispute over sales tax assessment with the finance minister drawing flak from his industry minister and a Marxist leader for imperilling the industrial future of the state.

The storm broke when the revenue divisional officer in Alleppey attached all movable properties of Mcdowell's Shertally division, which manufactures the hot-selling McDowell's Premium and Diplomat-brand whiskies, for failing to pay taxes amounting to Rs 9.75 crore in 1975-76 and 1979-80. McDowell promptly declared a lock-out putting 600-odd employees out of work. Three public sector undertakings coming under the Industry Ministry also came under pressure to pay back tax arrears.

These were the Civil Supplies Corporation (CSC) which is being asked to pay up Rs 22 crore, the Small Industries Development and Employment Corporation (SIDECO) which had its properties attached for running up Rs 3 crore in arrears and the Cashew Development Corporation (CDC) which had its bank accounts frozen because of its inability to pay Rs 60 lakh in taxes. McDowell and the three companies are convinced that the assessments are "cooked up" since it was made ex parte and they even claim to have paid excess taxes. McDowell has filed a suit in a lower court charging the assistant commissioner, sales tax, with making an ex parte assessment and not giving them enough time for a personal hearing.

Industry Minister E.A. Ahmad came out strongly against the tax department's action and lobbied Chief Minister Karunakaran to get the revenue recovery proceedings stayed. He pointed out that ex parte assessments of this nature "will sound the death-knell of the industries in the state".

His unlikely ally in the affair was a Communist Party of India (Marxist) MLA K.R. Gouri, who was instrumental in bringing the McDowell unit to her constituency. Gouri, who enjoys the support of the largest union in the factory, made it clear where her loyalties lay. "There are 600 workers now on the streets due to the finance minister's action," she said and charged Mani with "gunning for McDowell since he was prejudiced against the liquor firm".

SHERTALLAI VENU

Distillery workers: locked out

Mani refused to call off his tax officers. "Ironically, the very people who are taking pot-shots at me for failing to collect taxes properly are now calling for stay orders on the recovery proceedings I have launched," he said.

But things went against Mani. Chief Minister Karunakaran, bowing to pressure from his partymen, stayed revenue recovery proceedings against the companies involved, but with certain conditions attached. Till the settlement of the case, McDowell agreed to pay one-third of the total arrears for lifting the lock-out. But N.J. Menon, director (technical), made it clear that there was no question of paying a sales tax without proper assessment and that "we may be forced to close down our operations in Kerala till the issue is settled without discrimination."

The reprieve is also applicable to the three public sector companies but the question was just how long. The uneasy stalemate, unless broken soon, may serve as a brake to further industrial investment in Kerala which has practically no industries to boast of.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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THE GULF

Construction Crunch

THE PARTY is over. Ever since oil prices leapt over the moon in the early '70s, the Middle East was the boom arena for Indian construction companies who bagged contract after contract for everything from housing to bridges. But the times have a-changed: a lethal combination of the Gulf war and sagging oil prices have put a damper on things. Until mid-1981 Indian construction companies secured overseas projects worth Rs 5,000 crore: from then on, till 1984, the flow diminished to a trickle of Rs 1,500 crore and 1985 is not going to be any improvement over the preceding years. Says Harshavadan Shah, chairman, Overseas Construction Council of India (OCCI): "It is a dwindling market. The Iran-Iraq war has completely upset the applecart."

The decline has mainly hit construction projects: sparing the turnkey contracts which have been coming to India at a regular rate of Rs 100 crore a year. Says Kalyan Banerji, chairman, Export-Import Bank of India, the channelising agency for any project of over Rs 5 crore: "The Arab countries have turned net borrowers in the international monetary system, which means that the competition is much more acute than it was." The strike rate for bids secured as against bids made is about one in twelve now: last year Indian companies bid for projects worth Rs 3,200 crore, but expect to get only about Rs 300 crore worth.

To add to their woes, the contractors are not getting their money. The major Indian presence was and is in Iraq—and Iraq, saddled with a costly war of its own making, is not paying up to the tune of Rs 2,000 crore although a deferred payment agreement has been hammered out at the Government level. In addition, there is Rs 200 crore worth of equipment lying in the Middle East which contractors are reluctant to re-import into India because of the customs duty charged.

All in all, it is the gloomiest of scenarios, as a recent document prepared by the OCCI makes clear. And what it also says is that the real crunch is yet to come. "When we've finished our current commitments and find that there is very little else we can build, that is when the shoe will bite," says Ajit Gulabchand, managing director, Hindustan Construction Company Ltd (HCCL), a division of the Walchand group. He says that HCCL was doing work worth Rs 30 crore only two years ago, but this had dropped to Rs 5 crore now. "We are a little desperate," Gulabchand admitted.

Similar stories are to be heard in almost every office. K.G. Shenoy, president, corporate development division, Makers Development Services Pvt Ltd, says: "As the slump has hit the foreigners also, the competition is crippling." An indication of the decline comes from the executive of a large company who says that the number of workers they employed has dropped to a fifth of the number three years ago.

Besides the obvious factors of the war and OPEC's problems, there are other not so obvious reasons for the obvious Indian downslide:

- the Gulf countries and Arab governments are looking for project financing and Indian companies can't offer financing, though for exceptionally viable projects the Government may permit them to do so;
- customers are reluctant to award jobs to Indian companies because a few of the public sector ones didn't finish work in Kuwait and Iraq. Most Gulf countries, therefore, now prefer European and US companies whose operations are also far more mechanised and hence faster;
- a number of local contractors in the Gulf have developed reasonable expertise in simpler construction jobs such as housing and roads.

Indian contractors are plagued by their lack of modernisation as well. An official of the National Projects Constructions Corporation (NPCC) says: "Our project management techniques are obsolete—no computerisation, for instance—and we face manpower problems, like having to build more houses for labour, bigger kitchens and so on, simply because we are labour-intensive." The cost advantages that Indians enjoyed because of cheap labour have also suddenly vanished. C.L. Verma, managing director, Continental Construction Ltd, says: "Our labour is more costly and troublesome. There have been a number of strikes by Indian labour in Iraq. Chinese and Filipino labour is far cheaper than Indian labour."

Payments are a problem and not just the 'deferred' ones, which incidentally, apply only to previous projects and not new contracts. Iraq, for instance, had offered Continental Construction a highway project but the Indian Government

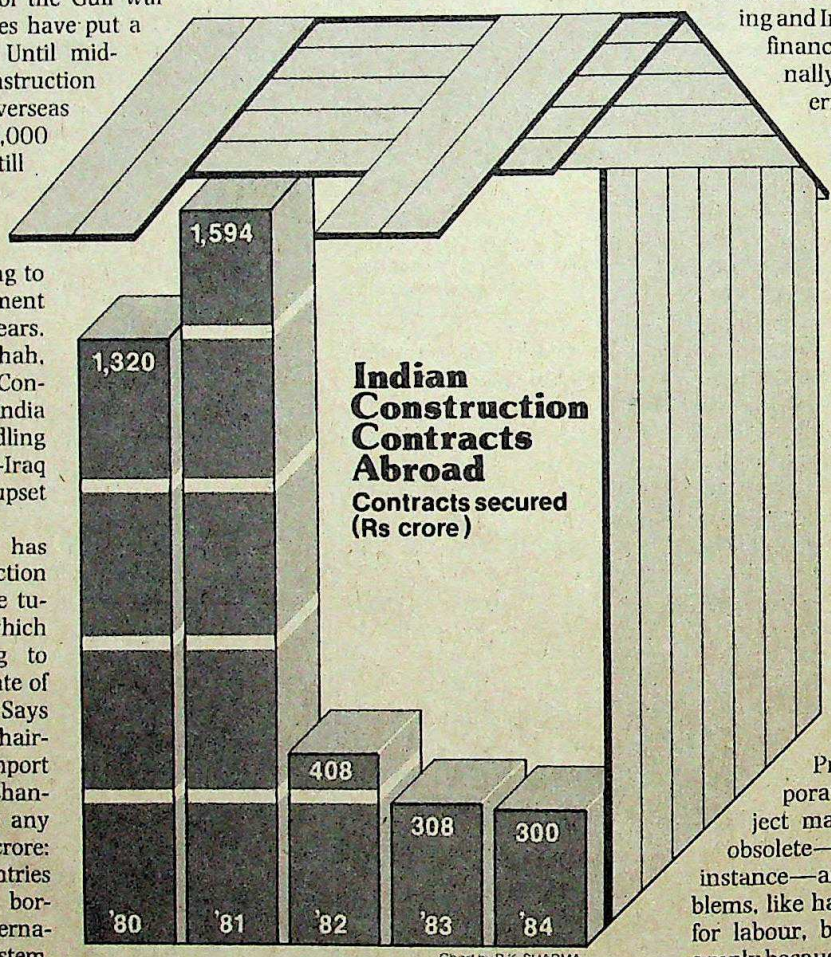

Chart by B.K SHARMA

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turned it down because of the deferred payment problem. Countries like Libya want to pay in oil but when sold at the OPEC price, the oil brings in $30 a barrel while the spot price on which the Indian firm can re-sell the oil is only $27. The oil can't be brought home either because India does not have the refining capacity.

While the going was good, the Indians didn't look elsewhere. Now, at long last, they are looking for greener pastures. One of them is, of course, India. Shah points out that in the Sixth Five Year Plan 42 per cent of the total outlay was for construction. The increased outlay in its successor should be a welcome boon to Indian companies. They are also looking hungrily at the many institution-funded projects coming up all over the world and the OCCI document wistfully lists $ 3 billion worth of World Bank and Asian Development Bank-funded waterworks, bridges and dams.

HOWEVER the slice of action that the Indian companies will get is likely to be quite thin and could, in most cases, be limited to subcontracts. The competition is getting fiercer by the day. For example, one Indian construction company had tendered $160 million for a bridge in Malaysia. A Korean company bid a rock-bottom $54 million and took the contract. Another Indian consortium bid $160 million for the Marsyangdi hydel project in Nepal. A Japanese firm took it away for $63 million. "With such cut-throat survival tactics," says Gulabchand, "Indians will be left out in the cold." And what is worse, the foreigners are said to be sniffing around hopefully in India, offering the same cut-throat prices.

The OCCI is planning to send a delegation abroad to explore new areas. Paradoxically, the area of hope is still in the Middle East and Africa—after the war. The Arab construction market is, at $100 billion, estimated to be the third largest after the US and Japan, and a number of countries in the region can be tapped. Iraq has budgeted $ 84 billion over the next five years, Algeria about $10 billion, Egypt about $ 30 billion, Saudi Arabia—the richest projects market—$65 billion. Others, like North Yemen and South Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Syria and Qatar will chip in with substantial investment. India will get only the crumbs—its current share, anyway, is infinitesimal—but it would be "better than nothing," as Shah says.

JAGANNATH DUBASHI

"It is a dwindling market. The Iran-Iraq war has completely upset the applecart."

HARSHAVADAN SHAH
chairman, Overseas Construction Council of India

Breakthroughs elsewhere will not be easy. According to J.P. Srivastava, group general manager, Indian Railway Construction Corporation (IRCON), one of the few companies which is keeping its head up in the present slump, the other possible areas are already the fields of others. South-East Asia, for example, is dominated by the Japanese and their specifications for material and equipment are totally different from Indian or western—he cites the example of railway lines. "So it is difficult to make a mark in this region even as subcontractors to the Japanese," he says, except in Vietnam and Thailand, which, in any case, want aid-linked projects that India can ill-afford.

NAMAS BHOJANI

"The Arab countries have turned net borrowers, which means that the competition is much more acute than it was."

KALYAN BANERJI
chairman, Export-Import Bank of India

Elsewhere, the picture is not all rosy. Central African countries have no funds to speak of although India has set up sugar and cycle factories there and IRCON has done signalling work in Nigeria. Latin America is out because of the US stranglehold—it gives aid directly—the language and the lack of communicaton.

An NPCC official argues that since the market for conventional construction has shrunk India should venture into areas of sophisticated technology—small chemical and industrial plants, turnkey farming jobs—and that Indian companies can quote lower than western ones because production costs are lower in India. He further says that a market exists in maintaining complex equipment, air-conditioning plants, diesel generating plants, inventory and spare parts management, and maintaining hospitals and airports. Other countries have moved into these areas and Indian companies will have to tie up with foreign ones.

Srivastava of IRCON feels that India should also begin exporting raw materials, if necessary with government subsidy because the expense can be recovered in profits. "At present we care tuppence for raw material quality at home since we operate in a suppliers market," he comments, but adds that it is not the case abroad. IRCON has just built a $350 million high-speed railway line in Iraq and about 10,000 tonnes of steel were used. "Can't even 5 per cent of this have been Indian?" asks Srivastava. "It may be uneconomical to produce only 10,000 tonnes of high quality steel but we have to make a start somewhere. When I tell people abroad that we produce about six million tonnes of steel they don't believe me."

All that is, however, in the future. For the moment, Indian contractors are concentrating on keeping the flag flying in the Middle East, even as they try desperately to make headway elsewhere.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI and PALAKUNNATHU MATHAI

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HBJ CONTRACT

Flip Flop

CONTROVERSIAL decisions on major contracts are not a new phenomenon in this country. But the Government brought little credit to itself last fortnight when it did an about turn on what is probably the largest contract on offer in the country today: the Rs 1,700 crore 1,730 km Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) gas pipeline. Reversing an earlier decision to parcel the contract out piecemeal, and cancelling a tender that was floated last year, the Government announced that a fresh tender would be floated and the contract given to one party on a turnkey basis.

That had virtually everyone crying foul. Almost every word written on the subject in the newspapers was condemnatory, and Minister of State for Petroleum Nawal Kishore Sharma was grilled for two hours in Parliament by irate opposition leaders. Much of the heat was generated by the suspicion, aired both in Parliament and outside, that the move was designed to help a company that had not even responded to the initial tender.

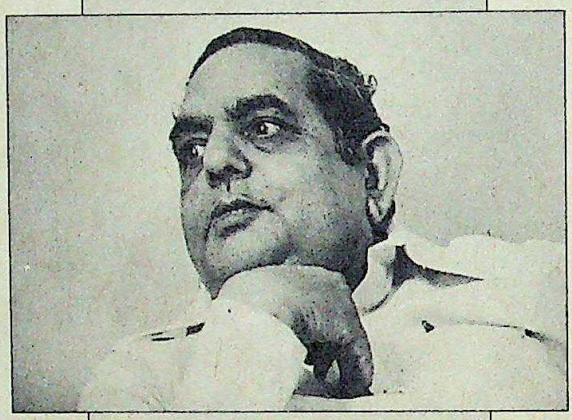
Speaking to INDIA TODAY, Sharma dismissed the criticism as "motivated" and said: "If Snamprogetti was not involved no one would have paid any notice." That may or may not be true, but the Government's change of mind came in the wake of months of intense lobbying by Snamprogetti's Delhi representative, Ottavio Quattrocchi, who himself has stated repeatedly that a turnkey approach was in India's best interest.

Nevertheless, the decision will probably delay the construction of the pipeline, with possible downstream delays in the commissioning of fertiliser plants, and perhaps will entail a rise in the cost as well. The new decision also means a reduction in the role of the prime Indian consultant Engineers India, as Sharma himself admits, and possible loss of orders for Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL), which had been told that it would get the order for compressors and cathodic protection systems that are a part of the contract.

Sharma explained that the decision was taken because the Indian companies involved did not have the requisite experience in laying gas pipelines, BHEL did not make the kind of compressors required and because the delays would not cause downstream problems.

But these arguments do not hold much water. For one thing, while BHEL does not make the compressors it already has a collaboration agreement with the Italian firm Nuovo Pingnone. And BHEL has been talking to Bechtel Corporation of the US on the engineering for compressor stations. As for the cathodic protection system, BHEL signed an agreement a few months ago to acquire the technology from Harko of the US. The only valid criticism against BHEL came from an official spokesman, who said that BHEL had quoted Rs 75 crore for the cathodic protection system whereas the original cost estimate was Rs 25 crore.

HARI OM GULATI



"If Snamprogetti was not involved no one would have paid any notice."

NAWAL KISHORE SHARMA
minister of state for petroleum

Sharma may also have been incorrect when he said that the downstream fertiliser plants would not be delayed by the new decision. He said that the National Fertilisers Ltd's (NFL) boiler at Guna would not be ready before March 1987. But NFL's Managing Director B.S. Kakkar said that the boiler would be ready by December 1986, by which time the pipeline will not be ready. Sharma also said that the revised construction schedule would start ticking from December this year, whereas the kick-off date may in reality be March 1986. With a projected lead time of 15 months, the pipeline will not reach NFL's plant till June 1987: a delay of six months that can mean a production loss estimated at around Rs 63 crore.

Official spokesmen put forward some other arguments in defence of the turn-about. For one, it was said, Engineers India and the Gas Authority of India Ltd (which will own the pipeline) will now have to deal with only one prime contractor, so that the responsibility for delays and cost overrun can be fixed. And Sharma made the point that none of the oil pipelines built so far in India had been finished on time and within the original cost limits. "We want to change this and make sure this is not repeated," he said.

While there is some validity to this argument, the fact also remains that numerous turnkey contracts too have not been completed within the stipulated cost and time limits. And the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) developed the Bombay High offshore oilfield in record time without going in for a turnkey approach, and despite having no prior experience in offshore work. Finally, transfer of technology and the learning process are both retarded with the adoption of a turnkey approach.

What wasn't clear about the whole episode was who exactly had taken the decision to switch approaches. In the run-up to the decision, a furious row had raged last year between the then petroleum secretary A.S. Gill (who favoured the old piecemeal approach) and the then petroleum minister P. Shiv Shankar. Also, a committee of secretaries had considered the turnkey approach and rejected it on the grounds of the delays involved in a fresh tendering process. But Sharma argued last fortnight that the committee of secretaries was not authorised to take any such decision. Asked who exactly had decided in favour of the turnkey approach, Sharma denied the prime minister had anything to do with it, and claimed: "The decision was taken by my ministry."

The final verdict on the wisdom of the Government's decision will, of course, have to wait for events to unfold: will the pipeline eventually be laid on time and within the stipulated cost limits? If yes, Quattrocchi will have been proved right in his argument that the decision will stand the country in good stead. If not, the country will pay a heavy price indeed. But either way, the governmental flip-flop of going down first one road, then turning round and opting for another could have been avoided.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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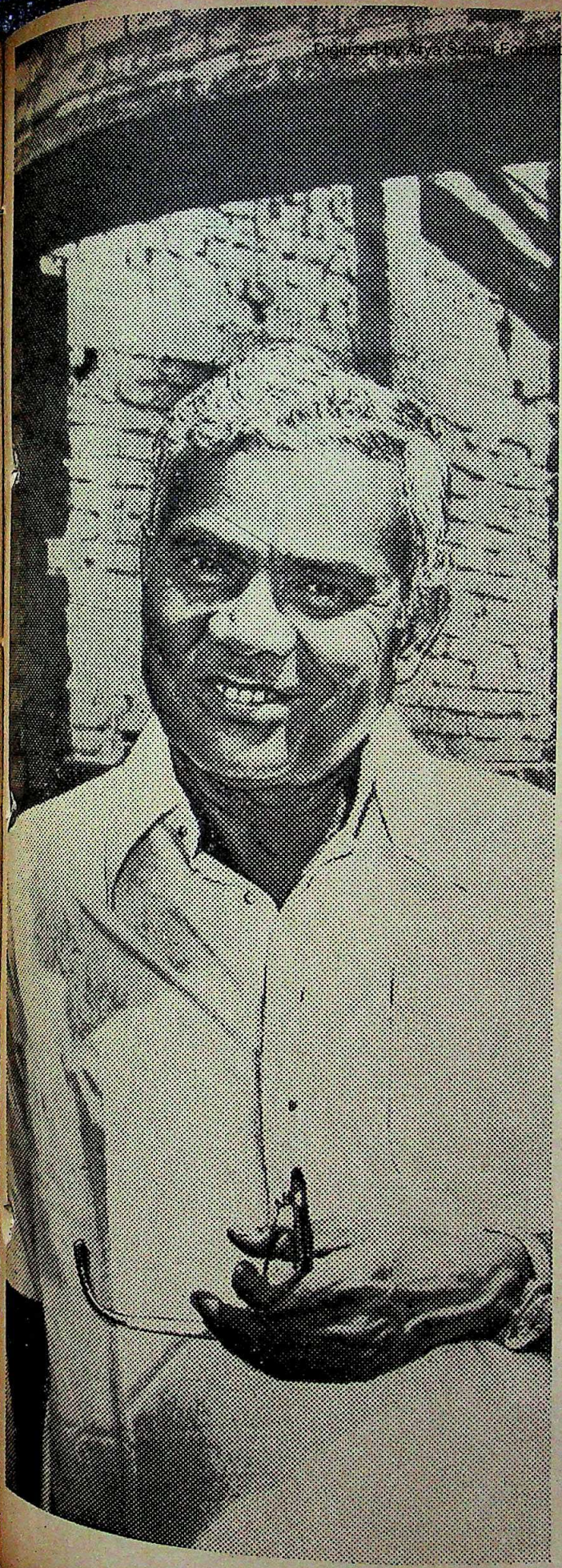

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WEST BENGAL

Principled Loss

DOES it matter whether a cat is white or black so long as it catches mice? In Left Front-ruled West Bengal, the answer is apparently yes. For the manner in which a row has kicked up over inviting a private company to join hands with a state-owned TV manufacturing company suggests that the Marxists couldn't careless about whether the cat catches mice or not so long as it is red.

Red before results seems to be the slogan in another case as well, involving a proposal to set up a joint sector power generating agency. Although the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) promised money if the joint sector venture was set up, the Government of the power-starved state has been strangely unresponsive while at least three other state governments—Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Bihar—are going ahead with similar joint ventures.

Both cases erupted last month with acrimonious exchanges among the Left Front partners. The Industries Department had thought it would promote the development of an electronics industry in the state by asking the National Insulated Cable Company (NICCO) to join hands with the state-owned Webel TV in order to help improve Webel's hard-pressed financial situation and get things moving. Instead, there were cries of a sell-out. The CPI(M)'s party organ *Ganashakti* ran an article on trade union opposition to the move while the party's national paper, *People's Democracy*, warned against attempts to dilute state ownership of the public sector.

West Bengal's Forward Bloc Industries Minister Nirmal Bose is therefore hard put to explain the obvious logic of the decision: "The Government is not selling its share in Webel TV, we are only associating NICCO for raising more funds to expand the company." But Sujoy Bhattacharya, president of the employees union of the West Bengal Electronics Industrial Development Corporation (WBEIDC, which owns Webel TV, is unconvinced, and says the move is a "private sector conspiracy and an attempt to knock out Webel TV as a competitor in the lucrative TV market."

Nevertheless, the logic of the proposal cannot be denied. Webel TV has been struggling along with a turnover of barely Rs 50 lakh a month and has been in the red so far, unable to raise the money needed to expand. The induction of NICCO is part of a growth plan, with NICCO committed to contributing Rs 25 lakh to the company's share capital and a further Rs 49 lakh being raised from the public, so that the company's share capital is raised from Rs 25 lakh to Rs 1 crore (with the state Government chipping in with an additional Rs 1 lakh).

P.S. BANERJEE

WBEIDC staff protesting proposed changes in Webel TV

NICCO's participation will mean not only a quadrupling of the capital base but also the induction of fresh Japanese technology (from Sharp), and the reorganisation of operations so that a scattered group of workshops is brought under one factory roof in the Salt Lake industrial estate on Calcutta's eastern fringe. Says NICCO's Managing Director Rajive Kaul: "We have been talking to the Government for the past two years about our efforts to diversify into electronics through Webel," and he hopes to multiply the company's turnover tenfold in a year's time.

However, Sujoy Bhattacharya of the employees union sticks stoutly to his guns, pointing out that of the six joint sector subsidiaries of the electronics corporation, only one is making money. But it is clear that his opposition is essentially ideological, because he adds: "How can the Left Front, which has been demanding the nationalisation of all units whose management has been taken over by the Government, now do an about-turn and hand over a public sector unit to private sector control?"

The state Power Department's efforts to set up a new joint sector power generating agency have similarly failed to meet with the approval of the Left Front's CPI(M) bosses. A state government official explains: "We need funds desperately for completing the second 680 mw stage of the super-thermal power plant, because we have got only Rs 350 crore for the seventh plan when the project cost is Rs 600 crore." The IDBI has agreed to finance the remainder provided the Government sets up a new company, preferably in the joint sector, but the Government has so far not responded. In fact the IDBI has even relented recently and agreed to finance a wholly state government-owned corporation, but there is no response to this proposal either.

The virtues of this dog in the manger attitude are hard to find. Last year, for instance, the state electricity board managed to increase its power generation by just 1 per cent even though an additional 210 mw units went on stream. In contrast, the private sector Calcutta Electricity Supply Corporation increased its generation by 15 per cent during the same period. Some state power department officials have argued that in the light of this record, a new power agency headed by professional managers with private sector backgrounds would be able to deliver better results. But the problem with this approach, however, seems to be that the cat would no longer be red.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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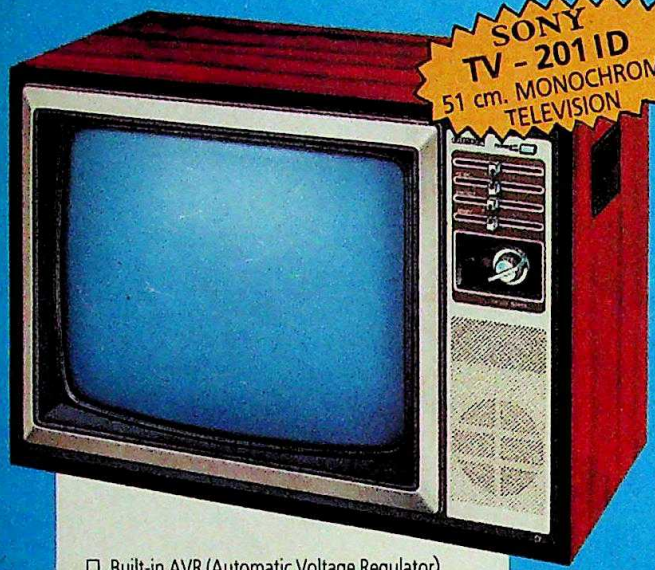

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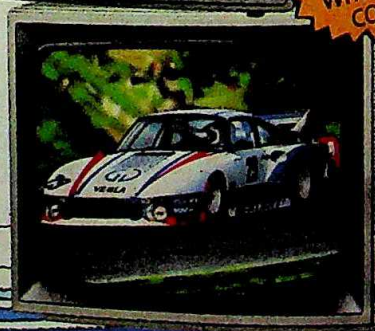

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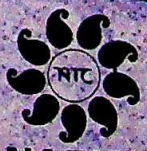

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In Trichur: money is business

KERALA

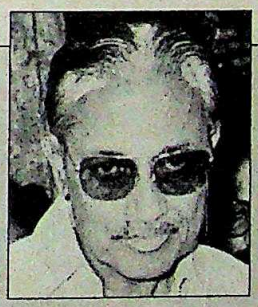
Banking on a Boom

THE STATE finance minister frets and fumes, bankers curse, the Reserve Bank worries and the State Government plans a crackdown. The focus of all this attention is Kerala's latest money mushroom: private finance companies which charge such sharp interest rates that they are known in local parlance as "blade companies".

In the cutthroat business of instant finance, these companies have certainly flourished. Calicut University economist B.A. Prakash estimates that in Trichur alone some 1,500 finance companies have amassed deposits totalling a stupendous Rs 100 crore. And the state convenor of the Small Financiers Federation, V.V. Augustine, reckons that statewise deposits range between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 1,500 crore.

A boom it certainly is—but there seems to be a lot more to it than meets the eye. As Finance Minister K.M. Mani said: "These companies do not have a safe footing nor sound background nor principles." While it would be less than fair to imply that all those engaged in private finance are of dubious reputation or use less than honest methods, there's no doubt that many of the get-rich-quick stories that abound in a state flush with remittances and savings from the Gulf money boom from across the Arabian Sea are rooted in these so-called blade companies.

The core of the boom is the rates of interest offered and charged. While there are genuine loan companies, others obtain money from depositors in the form of loans for which promissory notes are issued. On paper an interest rate of 9 per cent is paid, but with some companies an extra 20 to 22 per cent is alleged to change hands under the table. This takes interest earnings to over three times the 10 per cent on bank deposits, which explains why lakhs of depositors head for their offices. Says K.R. Nair, a retired government official who has sunk over Rs one lakh in one company: "I know it is highly risky to put my life's savings in these companies. But the greed in every man for better returns tempts him to invest."



"Due to the Reserve Bank credit squeeze, traders found they could not get loans from banks while private financiers advanced lakhs over a promissory note."

M.O.JOHN
president, Kerala Small Financiers' Association

Even so, higher interest rates are only half the story. Some of these companies borrow high and lend higher. Businessmen affirm that they borrow at 36 to 48 per cent, though the promissory notes issued may well show only 12 per cent. What is remarkable is the money has takers—with some reason. Explains M.O. John, rice merchant and president of the Kerala Small Financiers' Association: "The Reserve Bank credit squeeze in the last couple of years was one of the major reasons for the blade company boom in Trichur. Traders found that they could not get a loan from a bank without influence, while private financiers advanced lakhs just over a promissory note." The Trichur example could be applied to the entire state, leading naturally, to the fact that the number of finance companies and unregistered financiers has spiralled to about 15,000 today. Arguing that the business he represents is neither to be scoffed at nor dubious, Sajan Varghese of Oriental Finance and Investment Company says: "People are not fools to invest their money with us. I hardly know any of my depositors but they seem to have tremendous faith in my company because they know their investments are safe."

If the depositors are happy, there are plenty of others who are upset. Congress(I) MLA Thachadi Prabhakaran, who is president of the Kerala State Cooperative Bank, paints a dark picture indeed when he claims that "the blade companies have sounded the death-knell of the cooperative banks in the state. Our deposit mobilisation is far below expectation owing to the more attractive interest offered by these agencies."

Harihara Iyer, chairman of Dhanalakshmi Bank, a scheduled bank, echoes these fears. "The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Government should do something about these mushrooming companies because they are eating into our deposits," he points out. But there is little the RBI can do, limited as it is by its own stipulations. As one official ex-

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plained, "Only limited private financing companies come under the purview of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, and since these companies are partnership firms, the Reserve Bank has no control over them." And though the rules specifically restrain any firm, individual, or groups of individuals from using the words 'bank', 'banking', or 'banking company' for the purpose of carrying on business, they still cannot do anything about financing agencies proclaiming themselves bankers or investors. As another RBI official says, "We cannot do anything about semantic quibbles."

While Finance Minister Mani leaves sufficient room for doubt regarding these finance companies when he says that "commercial banks in the country would be able to meet the genuine credit requirements of the business sector and therefore how far these finance companies are legitimate is anybody's guess", he is nevertheless quite wary of writing them all off. "It does not necessarily follow that they are actually indulging in fraud," he reasons.

But critics of the loan companies carp that they generate black money, break banking laws, and at times, leave their depositors high and dry. Some of them are alleged to pocket the 16 to 26 per cent difference between what they pay their depositors and what they charge their lenders, obviously without declaring the amounts to tax officials. It is not easy, either, to comprehend the actual turnover of these companies. Charges a senior official of the RBI in Trivandrum: "By managing two ledgers of the same account, the private financiers operate with scant respect for banking laws and in the process manage to generate crores in black money."

More alarming, according to banking circles, is the fact that non-resident Indians, mostly living in the Gulf, are sinking their money in these agencies. P.T. Thomas, manager of the State Bank of Travancore's Sasthamangalam branch and secretary of the Indian National Bank Officers' Congress, says: "The blade companies are wooing non-residents in a big way. Some of them even go to the Gulf, collect the funds, and deposit them in foreign banks as dollars. In gross violation of RBI rules they pay them or their relatives in India in rupees."

"I hardly know any of my depositors but they seem to have tremendous faith in my company because they know their investments are safe."

SAJAN VARGHESE
owner, Oriental Finance and Investment Co.

Not all financiers, however, have the same degree of credibility and instances are legion of operators disappearing with large sums of money. While the Kerala Police have made just the occasional arrest, Home Minister Vayalar Ravi feels that it is difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff, since most financiers stay ahead of the law. Still, the Government has lined up an amendment to the Kerala Money-lenders' Act in an attempt to regulate individuals, firms and non-incorporated associations that accept deposits, restricting the number of deposits to 250. Within two years of notification of the Act, the agencies will be required to readjust the accounts and repay the excess deposits. But Kannam Rajendran, a CPI MLA spearheading the movement against these financiers, holds that "it remains to be seen how the blade companies will return the deposits they have invested in real estate, plantations, and speculative business."

The proposed amendments appear to have shaken private financiers in Trichur, coming as they do in the wake of the extensive raids by income-tax authorities following the controversial Elite International Hotel deal of P.N. Shankaranarayan (INDIA TODAY, January 15, 1984). Shankaranarayan's disclosures referred to cash received from and paid to various private finance companies, apparently leading to the closure of several companies. He later formed a borrowers' association and allegedly refused to pay interest on loans taken. Private finance companies, unable to go to court, were forced to cut interest rates on deposits in Trichur. A director of a dozen private finance companies admitted that in the coming months they would probably be able to offer only 20 per cent on deposits because, he feared, there may be no takers at lending rates of 36 per cent.

Yet the fact remains that government servants, teachers, and businessmen continue to flock to these financiers—reflecting an attitude that will take some beating down. And though Industries Secretary Arun Kumar is determined to plug the loopholes, he confesses that the lacunae in the law keep many of them afloat. "We are alerting the people of the legal implications through newspaper advertisements," he points out lamely.

So the private financiers may yet have the last laugh. As Roy Mathew, one of the best-known names in the business, puts it: "We have been in this business since our grandfather's time. No government can successfully implement a law to stop money-lending because it is centuries old." And in this case, old has certainly been minting gold.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

Roy Mathew and his father: empire-builders

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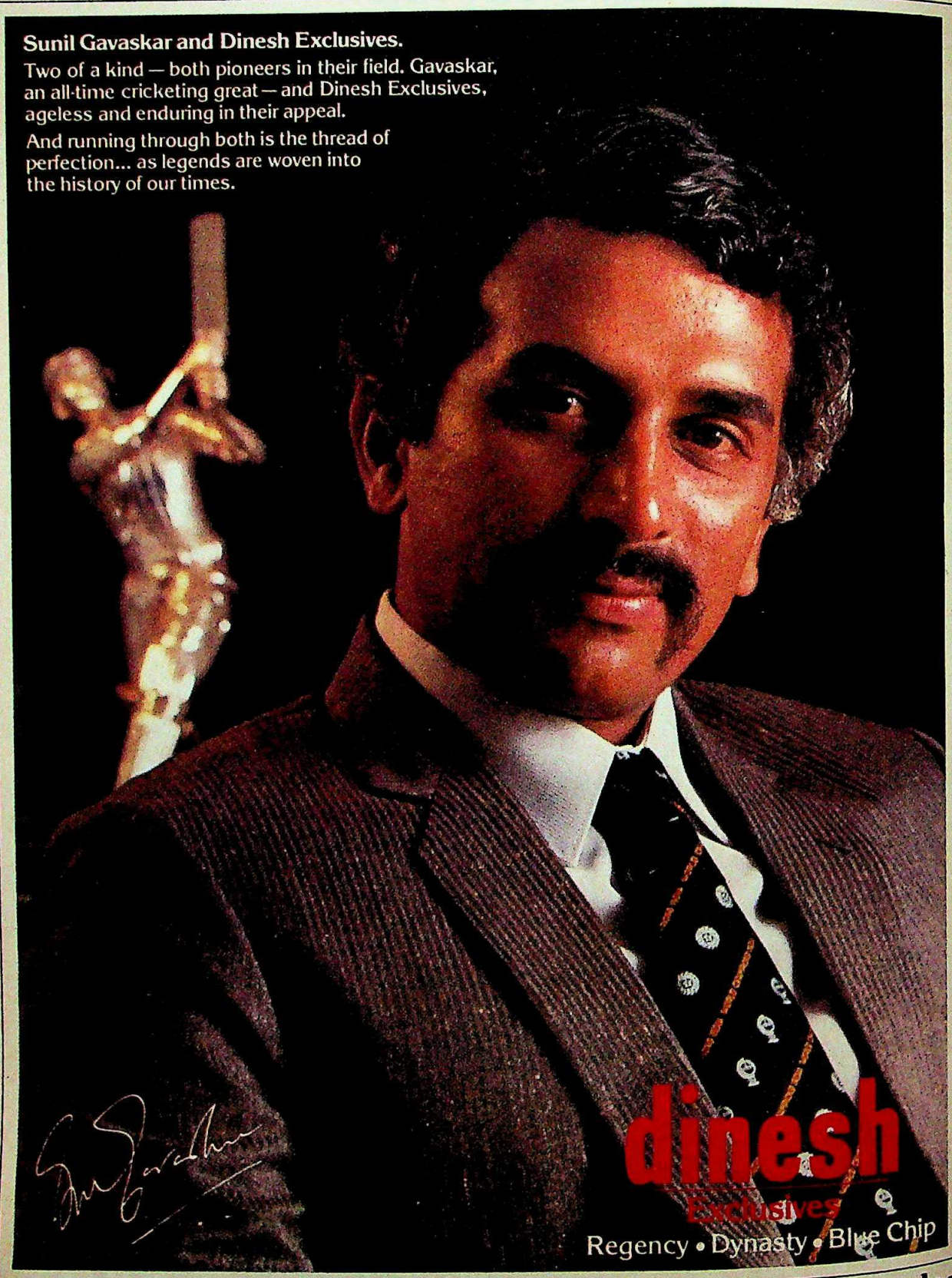
Portrait of two legends.



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Decades later... still the leader.

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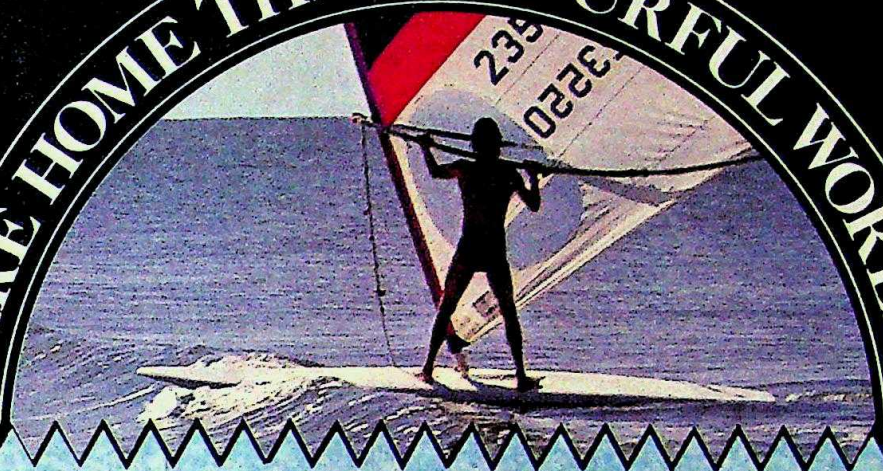

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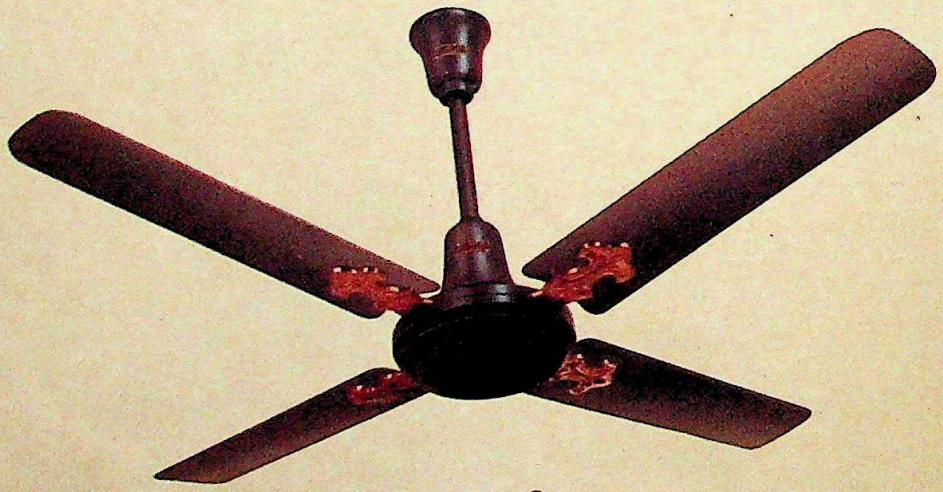

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ADVERTISING

Sudden Exit

IRONIES in the advertising business strike hard and often. Eighteen months ago when Tara Sinha was appointed president and chief executive of India's second-largest advertising agency, Clarion Advertising Services (billings for 1984-85: Rs 22 crore), she was regarded as the new Cinderella whose magic wand would propel the company to pastures new. Last month, the same board of Clarion directors who since 1979 had been persuading Sinha to leave her prestigious job with the Coca-Cola Corporation in the United States and take over Clarion in India, summarily terminated her services. Reason: she turned down the board's repeated requests to relinquish her appointed rank and become managing director, an apparent elevation which nevertheless would cut substantially into her perquisites, namely residential accommodation, as they would come within the purview of the limits laid down by the Government for board-level appointments.

Sinha's sacking came after a long passage of bitter and acrimonious wrangling. Her claim was that the board, by pressurising her to become managing director, was reneging on the terms and conditions ratified in her five-year contract as president and chief executive of Clarion. The board's charges against Sinha were more serious: in a letter dated October 22, 1984, the Chairman of the board S.N. Banerjee accused her of preferring the status of employee of the company rather than its director for "monetary considerations", and rejected her proposal that the company advance a loan of Rs 5 lakh to rent her brother's house in Delhi as her official residence and undertake repairs and extensions. The board claimed that suitable alternative accommodation could be found; Sinha said it could not, as the monthly Rs 10,000 allowance the company offered her for housing would be eaten up by taxes.

The further irony about Sinha's peremptory dismissal was that even as the squalid dispute over suitable accommodation was about to break out, she had tentatively accepted the post of managing director; she found the proposed job unacceptable only when she learnt of the supersession of "the previous commitments by the company" the managing directorship would entail.

While both members of the Clarion board and Tara Sinha went into purdah last fortnight following her stormy exit, their supporters were busy spilling the beans, with senior company officials leaking the confidential correspondence between the two. And the fiercely competitive and high profile advertising trade was agog with rumours that Sinha had left to start her own advertising agency, taking with her several important Clarion accounts. What on the surface appeared to be a quarrel over terms between Sinha and a board made up of lofty-minded elders (film maker Satyajit Ray is a member though he hasn't attended a board meeting in years) turns out to be a struggle for control of the company's fortunes.

While the Clarion board found Tara Sinha's financial demands difficult to meet, they are hard pressed to justify her sacking on professional grounds.

By all accounts, the 53-year-old Sinha is a formidable manager, her cool exterior containing aggressive salesmanship and wide-ranging experience in the field of advertising and marketing of 30 years. Like board chairman Banerjee, she was one of Clarion's founder directors back in Calcutta in the 1950s, and only left in 1973 when she was invited to join the external sales division of Coca-Cola in Atlanta, Georgia. Her protagonists in the agency claim that she returned for two reasons: sentiment for a company she had helped found and a desire to get back into the mainstream of Indian advertising.

Sailing back into the Clarion fold in October 1983, she briskly began to steer the company on a course of major reorganisation and expansion, stirring up its stagnant waters along the way. Last year, Clarion's Calcutta-based vice-chairman Subroto Sengupta and its Bombay chief of operations Christopher Passanah left in a huff (INDIA TODAY, September 30, 1984) and Sinha set about making aggressive bids to grab new accounts and raid number one rival Hindustan Thomson Associates (HTA) for key personnel. The number of senior creative directors went up from two to eight (four came from HTA) and she also bagged HTA's media director Paul Nayyar. The company's billings rose from Rs 17.65 crore in 1982-83 to the present Rs 22 crore, a cumulative increase of over 23 per cent.

The key new clients the agency acquired under her stewardship included Indian Shaving Products (the Gillette-Poddar collaboration), Modern Homecare Products (Johnson Wax-Modi collaboration), Wimpy, the Festival of India, three products by Reckitt Colman and several by Richardson Hindustan. Sinha's crowning achievement was that she lost not a single account and, in fact, stemmed the agency from bleeding. The major Food Specialities (Nestle products) account which Clarion had for long handled had been lost just before her arrival; she not only managed to retrieve it by acquiring new Maggi products but also obtained the new Nestle coffee brand called Master Roast.

Significantly, while the Clarion board found her financial demands difficult to meet, they are hard pressed to justify her sacking on professional grounds; in fact, her proposed elevation as managing director was ostensibly designed to increase her executive authority. "It was an impossible situation," admits a Bombay-based executive of Clarion, "she wanted all the privileges of a non-director with all the authority of absolute boss." Sinha's followers admit that she was not ashamed to demand her pound of flesh—she had fought for, and received, the one per cent commission on company profits permitted under Company Law Board rules—for a job she was good at.

Last fortnight, however, she was said to be holding out for a settlement, failing which she could sue the company for breach of contract. But it was clear to all that Clarion's loss could well be Sinha's gain, especially if she succeeded in walking off with chunks of the agency's best business.

—SUNIL SETHI with bureau reports

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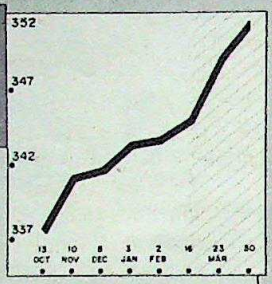
INFLATION in wholesale prices has accelerated sharply last fortnight following the hikes in petroleum prices in the budget; consumer prices have so far held steady. Money supply and bank credit to firms have been sluggish. Foreign exchange reserves declined and the trade gap widened last month. The share market continues to boom but the bullion market was stable.

ALL DATA are seasonally adjusted. The current trend is completed on the basis of the past six months data to which a regression is fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
5.8% p.a.

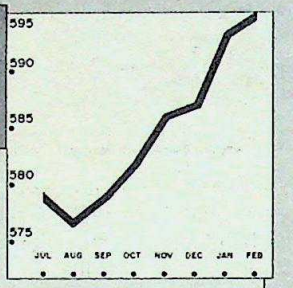


Wholesale prices surged upwards nearly 2 per cent after weeks of relative stability due to sharp increases in the prices of fuel and power.

Consumer Price Index

1960 = 100

Current Trend
6.7% p.a.

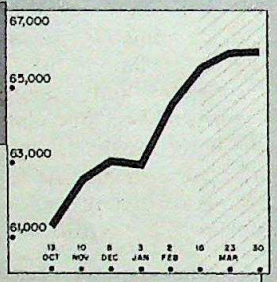


The consumer price index held steady, registering a 0.3 per cent increase in February, about half the trend rate.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crores

Current Trend
14.0% p.a.

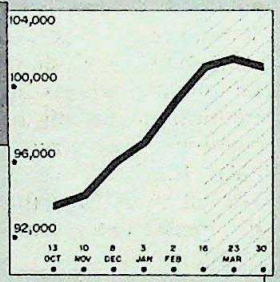


Commercial bank credit was up 0.7 per cent last fortnight speeding up marginally in comparison with the the long term trend.

Money Supply M3

Rs Crores

Current Trend
19.2% p.a.

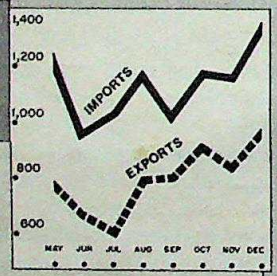


Money supply recorded little change over last fortnight decelerating sharply over the previous week.

Foreign Trade of India

Rs Crores

Current Trend
4.8% p.a. Exports
4.3% p.a. Imports

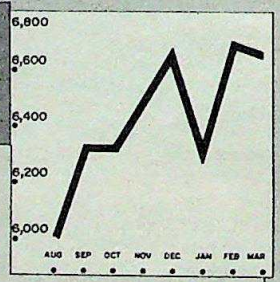


The trade gap widened by about Rs 50 crore last month while both imports and exports maintained the trend growth rate.

Foreign Exchange Reserve

Rs Crores

Current Trend
10.1% p.a.

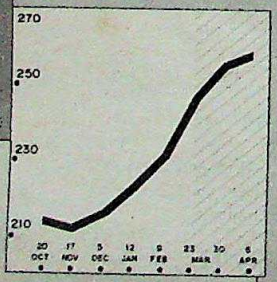


Foreign exchange reserves declined by half per cent last month leading to a deceleration in the long term trend rate of growth.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
37.5% p.a.

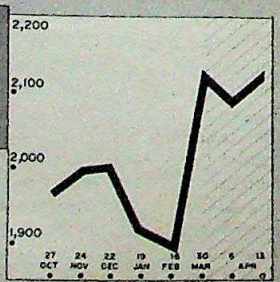


Optimism in transport equipment and tea plantation securities drove share prices a booming 4.8 per cent last fortnight.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gms

Current Trend
12.4% p.a.



Gold prices dipped last week and came up again, in the process recording no net change over the last fortnight.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with maximum growth in March 85

	%Growth
Fish	25.94
Oranges	15.57
Onions	15.55
Skelp	15.46
Plates & Sheets	14.59
Mustard Oil Cake	13.96
Steel Structurals	13.14
Rails	12.15
Linseed	11.30
Betel-nuts	10.35
Pig Iron	9.19
Solvent Extracted Oil	8.52
Linseed Oil	8.17
Mustard Oil	7.14
Rubber	6.42
Furnace Oil	5.43
Groundnut Oil Cake	5.26
Mustard Seed	5.17
Bars and Rods	4.66
Tobacco Raw	4.64
Semis Billets	4.60
Khandsari	4.52
Barley	3.61
Ceramic Tiles	3.60
Petrol	3.57
Moong	3.48
Cotton Seed	3.41
Kerosene	3.10
Artifical Yarn	2.66
Masoor	2.60
Cotton Raw	2.49
Ghee	2.41
Pet Crude & Natural Gas	2.40
Polythene Moulding Powder	2.34
Gur	2.32
Cycles	2.28
Phosphatic Fertiliser	1.77
Whisky	1.76
Groundnut Oil	1.47
Trucks	1.42
Wheat	1.33
Bajra	1.29
Copper & Alloys	1.20
Eggs	1.17
Coffee	1.14
Hides Raw	1.10
Atta	1.05
Ball-bearings	1.04
Cotton Yarn	1.00
Maida	0.97

Of 139 important series considered, 68 with a weight of 41.25 accelerated while 71 with a weight of 45.4 decelerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1985	1984
Coal Th Tonnes, March	142.61	138.12
Saleable Steel Th Tonnes, March	649.3	614.3
Cement Th Tonnes, March	2383	2291
Electricity Generated Million kwh, March	14132	13216
Thermal Plant Load Factor, March	55.5	54.9

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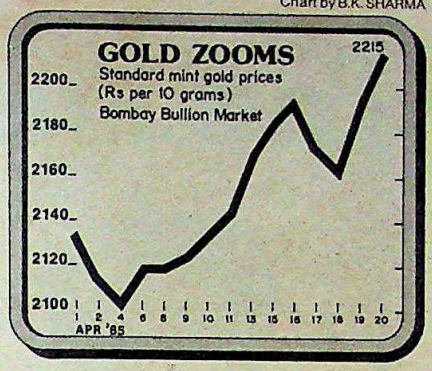
THE MARKETS

Holding Firm

THERE is no silver lining without a cloud. The market is still in a bullish mood but doubts are creeping in. The recent steady rise—the index is up by more than 10 per cent since the budget—may be too much of a good thing and there are many people who feel it may not last. Those with long memories say that the first four months of 1977 had also seen a similar aggressive bull phase but it was followed by a precipitous slide which wiped out in as many months every gain totted up.

Is history about to repeat itself? Almost certainly not, if you can be certain about anything in the share market. The conditions today are entirely different. The tax cuts in the budget are not a flash in the pan and more cuts are on the way. Businessmen are happy with the new regime which seems quite sincere about rolling back the control and permit raj and leave things reasonably free for private industry to operate in. But the important part is that there is much more money about than was the case eight years ago. And because of the abolition of estate duty and heavy reduction in wealth tax, a great deal of black money is about to surface and find its way into the legitimate market.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Corporate reports have been more or less according to expectations, with quite a few bonus issues thrown in. More are on the cards, Century Spinning being one. The share picked up substantially in the last couple of weeks, but it was not the only one. Among the quantum jump scrips are Chloride India, Hindustan Lever, Cyanamid, DCM, of course, but in this case the reasons are different, Indian Hotels, Indrol, Ion Exchange, Mather & Platt and Sandoz. They have probably just moved up with the tide and may sink when the tide is out, but it could also be something else. When the whole of the market is on the boil as it has been for the last few weeks, it pays to keep an eye on those scrips which seems to be more active than the others.

The current buoyancy is likely to be helped by the new seventh plan which, all said and done, is no different from the previous plans. But the proposed outlay of Rs 180,000 crore is a bullish factor even when it is cut back by about 10 per cent or so, as it might be. There are of course the usual fears about inflation —some crystal gazers say that we are in for a 15 per cent price hike before the year is out—but inflation is not a bad thing provided it doesn't get out of hand. When it does get out of hand, consumer goods companies are a better hedge against inflation than those making capital plant and equipment. Hindustan Lever and Food Specialities rather than Guest Keen Williams. But inflation is still a long way off and it never pays to worry about such things when the bulls are still firmly in control.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1985 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 17.4.85	Change on Fortnight
Asian Paints	126.00	87.00	122.50	3.50 –
Associated Cement	458.00	382.00	458.00	13.00 +
Atlas Copco	52.00	37.50	41.00	8.50 –
Avery India	74.00	56.00	74.00	8.00 +
Bajaj Auto	1,265.00	855.00	1,225.00	40.00 –
Ballarpur	49.00	44.00	47.25	1.65 –
Baroda Rayon	360.00	281.00	360.00	37.00 +
Bata India	64.50	48.00	58.75	4.75 –
Bayer	395.00	315.00	325.00	5.00 –
Best & Crompton	81.00	61.00	81.00	4.00 +
Birla Jute	57.30	51.70	56.50	0.60 –
Blow Plast	55.00	39.00	48.50	6.00 +
Blue Star	43.00	32.50	42.50	nil
Bombay Dyeing	87.00	63.00	87.00	3.50 +
Britannia Industries	60.60	46.50	55.00	4.70 –
Brooke Bond	62.00	47.50	58.00	3.00 –
Century Spinning	920.00	805.00	915.00	50.00 +
Chloride India	78.00	56.90	78.00	10.00 +
Colgate	270.00	143.50	270.00	40.00 +
Cyanamid	55.00	33.00	55.00	10.00 +
DCM	86.50	45.00	78.00	14.75 +
Dunlop	29.00	22.30	27.00	0.80 –
East India Hotels	34.50	25.50	34.50	1.50 +
Elecon	85.00	54.00	82.00	14.00 +
Escorts	67.00	49.87	65.50	7.00 +
Food Specialities	154.00	86.00	128.00	11.00 –
Glaxo	41.50	24.00	41.00	0.50 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	616.00	533.00	608.00	0.50 +
Gwalior Rayon	64.00	53.75	61.00	1.00 –
Hico Products	30.50	22.00	26.00	3.00 +
Hindustan Aluminium	58.00	51.00	56.00	1.60 –
Hindustan Lever	90.00	50.75	90.00	4.00 +
Hindustan Motors	47.80	38.00	46.00	0.44 +
Indian Aluminium	29.25	25.50	27.50	1.00 –
Indian Hotels	114.00	76.00	113.00	13.00 +
Indian Oxygen	55.00	43.50	55.00	0.80 +
Indian Rayon	78.00	63.50	78.00	1.00 +
Indrol	162.00	90.50	162.00	17.00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	221.00	159.00	215.00	16.00 +
Ion Exchange	97.00	57.50	81.00	1.00 +
J. K. Synthetics	67.00	52.20	65.10	1.70 +
Kinetic Engineering	180.00	127.00	178.00	6.00 +
Kirloskar Oil	33.00	24.50	25.75	1.25 +
Kothari Industrial	26.25	20.00	25.00	1.25 +
Lakme	92.00	74.00	75.00	5.00 –
Larsen & Toubro	106.00	72.00	102.00	nil
Lipton	39.00	26.50	35.75	1.95 –
Lohia Machines	55.25	42.00	54.00	0.25 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	63.00	47.50	53.50	2.00 –
Modi Rubber	25.00	19.50	23.50	1.50 –
Motor Industries	435.00	315.00	390.00	30.00 –
Mysore Cement	35.50	30.00	34.00	1.00 +
National Organic	310.00	240.00	310.00	10.00 +
Otis Elevator	146.00	86.00	137.00	3.00 –
Peico Electronics	68.00	38.40	68.00	5.10 +
Premier Automobiles	370.00	310.00	368.00	3.00 +
Ranbaxy	86.00	49.00	86.00	6.00 +
Raymond	85.00	59.00	81.00	nil
Reliance Textiles	187.00	120.00	187.00	13.00 +
Shaw Wallace	88.30	72.50	80.00	8.30 –
Shriram Fibres	47.00	34.00	47.00	6.00 +
SPIC	77.12	43.50	77.12	7.12 +
Tata Steel	562.00	373.50	558.00	56.00 +
Telco	555.00	406.00	555.00	10.00 +
Voltas	390.00	360.00	362.00	1.00 –
Zuari Agro	58.00	46.00	57.00	2.20 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	7.9452	7.7513
Austria	Schilling	1	0.5905	0.5772
Bahrain	Dinar	1	32.7839	32.1397
Bangladesh	Taka	1	0.4971	0.4816
Canada	Dollar	1	9.1277	8.9316
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1469	1.1223
Egypt	Pound	1	15.6012	14.9026
France	Franc	1	1.3569	1.3274
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5882	1.5571
Indonesia	Rupiah	1	0.0268	0.0114
Iran	Rial	1	0.1380	0.1355
Italy	Lira	1	0.6483	0.6336
Japan	Yen	100	5.0607	4.8780
Kenya	Shilling	1	1.0092	0.9912
Kuwait	Dinar	1	41.2043	40.3652
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0478	4.9538
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8069	0.7945
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6952	0.6725
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.6661	3.5818
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7905	0.7613
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6257	5.5195
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0743	0.0726
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4619	0.4485
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.1469	1.1223
Switzerland	Franc	1	5.0034	4.8927
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7127	0.7015
Thailand	Baht	1	0.4655	0.4572
UK	Pound	1	15.9461	15.6617
USA	Dollar	1	12.3375	12.0775
UAE	Dirham	1	3.4662	3.3525
USSR	Rouble	1	14.8012	14.4253
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.1510	4.0605

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted on 22.4.85.

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KISHORE KUMAR

The Last Encore

THE PARADOXES are infinite. The man cannot read a word of music yet last year recorded over 300 songs. He is middle-aged, frizzy-haired and looks like a paan-chewing babu but has been through four stormy marriages to outstandingly beautiful film stars. He is the most sought-after artiste in the film industry, and also the most reclusive. He is a gifted comedian yet he prefers to spend his spare time watching horror movies.

Last month, Kishore Kumar, the pasha of playback singing and movieland's most eccentric inhabitant, came up with the biggest paradox of them all — announcing his retirement when he is poised at the peak of his astonishing career. The announcement, as is the case with most things the man does, was greeted first with scornful scepticism and then with mounting disbelief. "The man cannot quit. How can he when he is in the high noon of his career?" queries a dazed Rahul Dev Burman, the country's top music director. Snap comes the answering retort: "The sun cannot get more vertical after that, can it?"

As a swan song, it is typically Kishore. At 56, with two heart attacks, four tempestuous marriages and an unending string of playback hits (with a reported fee of Rs 35,000 for a three-and-a-half minute film song), the man with the golden voice has finally taken the decision to call it quits and return to his roots—his little-known hometown of Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh.

His sudden exit leaves a yawning void. Even on the wrong side of 50, Kishore is undoubtedly the king, the astonishing range and clarity of his voice undiminished. The number of songs he recorded last year constituted nearly three-fifths of all the 500-odd songs grafted onto the sound-tracks of the 153 feature films made in 1984. That alone leaves him head and shoulders above any of the contemporary crop of male playback singers like Nitin Mukesh, Manhar Udhas, Sabbir Kumar and Mohammed Aziz. In fact, if his heart attack in 1982 and his celebrated moods had not slowed him down, Kishore would still be recording five songs a day as he used to.

Photographs by SADANAND

Yet, it is the singer not the song that has created the legend. His capacity to "turn voice into invoice" as one film producer says unkindly is best symbolised by the framed slogan that features prominently in his drawing-room. It reads: "I want money". Although a millionaire, Kishore's reluctance to pay taxes is a byword in income tax circles. His palatial and heavily-guarded bungalow at Juhu has been the target of innumerable raids and the singer currently has tax arrears of Rs 17 lakh. In one such raid in 1982, determined taxmen attacked the walls of his house with crowbars and metal detectors. Says son Amit Kumar, himself a playback singer of repute: "It's a hard job to bind my father down to anything—rules, regulations, relations."

But in his own zany, unconventional way, Kishore revolutionised playback singing in Indian films. His singing style marked a dramatic departure from the established, ritualistic sameness of film music. Says Kalyanji, the senior partner of the famed Kalyanji-Anandji music director duo: "Before Kishore, the songs used to be pretty but they'd hang out of the script and stay there like some external adornment. It is Kishore who made us aware of the possibility of integrating the song to the script and to the general tone of the entire film." For the film *Don*, Kishore stuffed a paan into his mouth to sing the hit, *Khaike paan Banaraswala*. Bappi Lahiri, the leading music director, recalls that when he sang for the title track of the 1984 release, *Sharabi*, Kishore deliberately embellished the song with a "subtle, tipsy slur".

For the last 20 years, that voice has

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ranged over such diverse films like *Guide*, *Amar Prem*, *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* to the more recent releases like *Tohfa*, *Himmatwala* and *Maqsad* and his latest song for the G.P. Sippy film, *Saagar*, thus establishing him as an indispensable pillar of the entertainment industry. Says Arun Amin of Music India: "It's amazing how Kishore has survived the changing fashions—classical, folk, Negro, Punjabi, rock and roll, disco. He has changed colours like a chameleon slithering through a variety of foliage." Adds Kishore's brother and veteran actor Ashok Kumar: "For many years now, Kishore has sung the most frequently hummed tunes of the country. That is because of the arrow-like accuracy of his voice and the clarity of his expression which is a by-product of his mature ability to act."

Kishore began his career as a singer-actor back in 1951 but it did not take the industry long to realise his true potential —that of a talented mimic, something his lawyer father had realised much earlier. As a child, Kishore used to entertain his father's guests by imitating the late K.L. Saigal. As a child, he also displayed his other 'magnificent' obsession—money. He charged his father one rupee for each mimicry session.

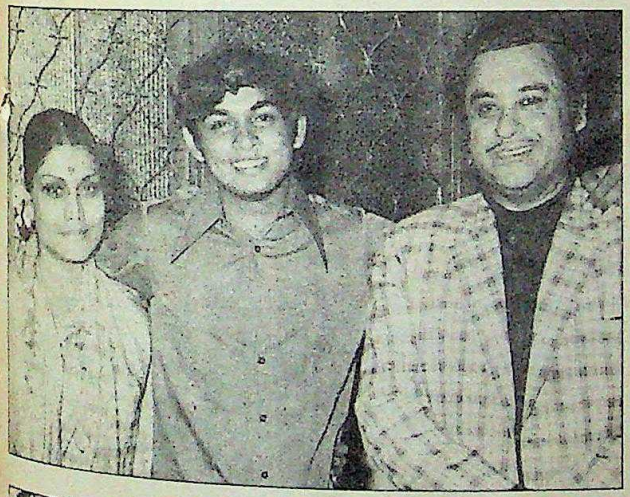
From mimicry to playing the comedian was a short and inevitable step. But it was not till two decades later that he managed to find his true niche, as a playback singer. His breakthrough came with *Aradhana*, the 1969 hit, where the folksy and catchy tunes of S.D. Burman and Kishore's superbly controlled voice blended to create box-office history. The theme song, *Roop tera mastana*, was sung with an erotic edge new to Indian film music but perfectly in setting with the romantic theme of the script and a new singing star was born. Says Rajesh Khanna, the hero of the film: "I feel that if I were a singer, I'd have sung the song exactly like he did, with the same timbre, the same dramatic modulation."

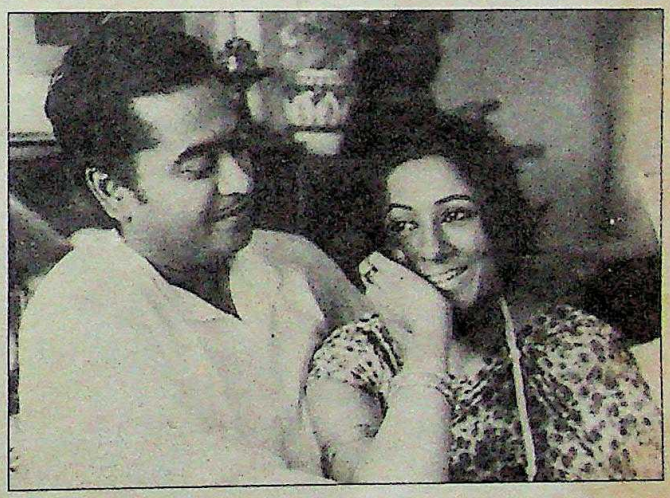
But it was really the Tamil producer-director M.V. Raman who first saw in the dark Bengali boy, the touch of genius. That was in the '50s when Kishore was singing for Raman's film, *Bahar*. Raman was impressed with Kishore's slightly eccentric way of singing. Says Kishore: "Raman liked that funny streak in my personality and my capacity to execute madness artistically." Raman cast him in his next venture, *Ladki* and the spate of films that followed firmly established Kishore as the industry's top comedian hero.

In 1958, Kishore produced and starred in *Chalti Ka Naam Gadi*, as he says, to "balance out" the unexpected profits from his earlier Bengali hit film, *Lokuchuri*. *Chalti* ran for 25 weeks and in one year, seven films with Kishore in the lead role had scored jubilee runs, a record unsurpassed by any comedian so far.

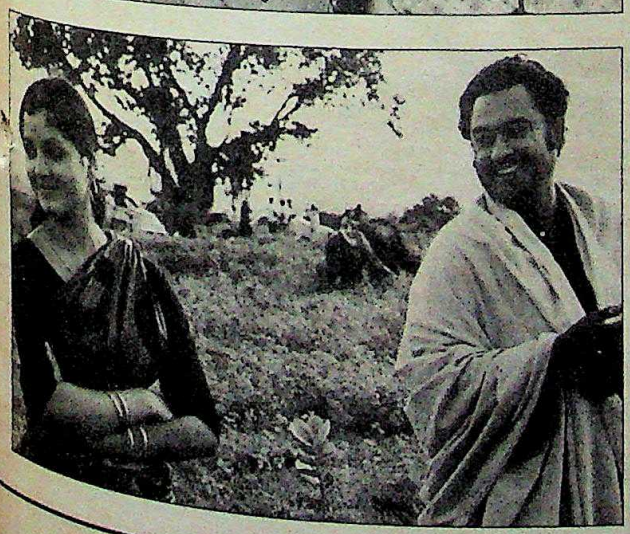
Chalti was another milestone in his life. It was on the *Chalti* sets that he met Madhubala, the famous screen siren. Kishore had barely obtained his divorce from his first wife, Ruma. Kishore was smitten with Madhubala and the outcome was inevitable—marriage. But unknown to Kishore, his lovely bride had a perforated heart and she was soon bed-ridden. As

(Clockwise from top left) Kishore with his wives Rumadevi, Madhubala, Leena, Yogita: a ladies' man





BHAWAN SINGH



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INTERVIEW

"Show-biz doesn't suit me"

KISHORE Kumar's high-walled, tree-lined bungalow near Bombay's Juhu beach is as well-recognised a landmark as the beach itself. Its security is impressive: no visitor is allowed until the sentry at the gate has obtained his master's permission through a red intercom whose parallel lines abound in all the lavishly—if not garishly—upholstered rooms of the building. Even after being cleared at the gate, entry into the drawing-room is regulated by a retinue of nine domestic hands. It is impossible to relax in that room: the cushions on the sofa are too thick; the cuckoo clock on the wall is too shrill; and a picture-card mounted on a frame menacingly reads—I want money.

"That's meant for producers": the bespectacled singing wizard, clad in a printed lungi-kurta, says before settling down for an interview with INDIA TODAY *Principal Correspondent* SUMIT MITRA. *Excerpts:*

Q. ***Which of the following are you first—director, actor, singer?***

A. Actor. I am an actor who sings off screen for another actor. That is what playback singing is all about. Songs should follow the state of mind of the actor on screen. It can be grammatically perfect, you know, with all those embellishments that the *ustads* are good at, only if you're singing for a film on, say, the life of Tansen.

Q. ***But if you're constantly acting as a singer don't you think that you run the risk of losing a consistent singing style?***

A. Who cares for singing style in films really. K.L. Saigal had the best style, but today's audiences will not accept the unreality of a ceremonial piece of music every now and then. We playback singers develop a lot of vanity. We tend to think of ourselves as singers independent of the script.

Q. ***Aren't you handicapped by not being a trained musician?***

A. Very little. I have a good memory, and that helps. When that fails there is always a tape-recorder to fall back on. In the early days I used to rely on a personal system of notations where the letters on high notes kept rising above the line. But that really called for extra long sheets. But you don't need notations in Indian music really. You need them when you're using harmony.

Q. ***Is it not abhorrent that songs should be an integral part of Indian commercial cinema even though we Indians are not a particularly musical people?***

A. Who am I to object to songs? It is my livelihood. But its responsibility lies with the film makers who, after 50 years of sound film, have not been able to give cinema an identity of its own. If you ask the directors the same question, they'll put the blame on the audience. But the film-goers have been conditioned to expect a boy and a girl to burst into song when they meet. When a man and a woman roll over each other on velvet grass in Kashmir valley, you expect them to make love—not sing in the voices of Kishore Kumar and Lata Mangeshkar.

BHAWAN SINGH

"The tax raids, the complicated laws and by-laws, the hassles—they all make popularity a punishable offence."

Q. ***People here talk of your aloofness towards other singers—like the late Mohammed Rafi, and Lata Mangeshkar.***

A. That is utterly baseless. I had great regard for Rafi, a singer of a rare calibre. Lata is the goddess of singing; she fully knows about my admiration for her. I think what is more frequently criticised is not my attitude to colleagues but my attitude to singing for films. Playback singing is fun and good money. But it's no big art really; only the film and record people glorify it with all those gold and silver discs given to singers. I wish I could take all of them to the goldsmith and draw the metal out.

Q. ***Are you really quitting?***

A. Good question. But yes. Absolutely yes.

Q. ***What do you think of the next line of playback singers?***

A. Mostly imitators of their more successful predecessors. Nitin Mukesh and Manhar are the poor man's Mukesh. Sabbir Kumar and Anwar are the poor man's Rafi. Bhupinder, Suresh Wadkar—they have styles of their own but are yet to be accepted.

Q. ***Why are you quitting films?***

A. I am 56. I had a heart attack three years ago. And I need rest. I don't want to retire after people have begun wondering whether I'm still there. And show business doesn't suit me any longer. Look at the prohibitive taxes for those who are really successful. The tax raids, the complicated laws and by-laws, the hassles—they all make popularity a punishable offence.

Q. ***So that's the reason?***

A. One of them. Actually I'm tired of this life in Bombay. I just want to start over again at my old place, in the company of all those little people whom I grew up with. If I sing, I want to do it for myself.

Q. ***Has Indian playback singing any future?***

A. Commercially, yes. Artistically, no. You don't expect music to be brilliant when the films are so bad. Actually the B-movies that are doing good business now cater to an audience which wants a lot of noise to fill the soundtrack...and a lot of feminine flesh to fill the optical track. Jeetendra, Sridevi...what kind of film and what kind of music do you expect with these ingredients? The industry is full of shopkeepers who're out to make money—not art.

Q. ***Who is the best music director you worked with?***

A. S.D. Burman. I owe everything to him.

Q. ***And the worst?***

A. I'll tell you after I reach Khandwa (his hometown where he wants to retire).

Q. ***One last question. Are you happily married?***

A. Yes...at last. But (with a wry grin) that's what I've always said.

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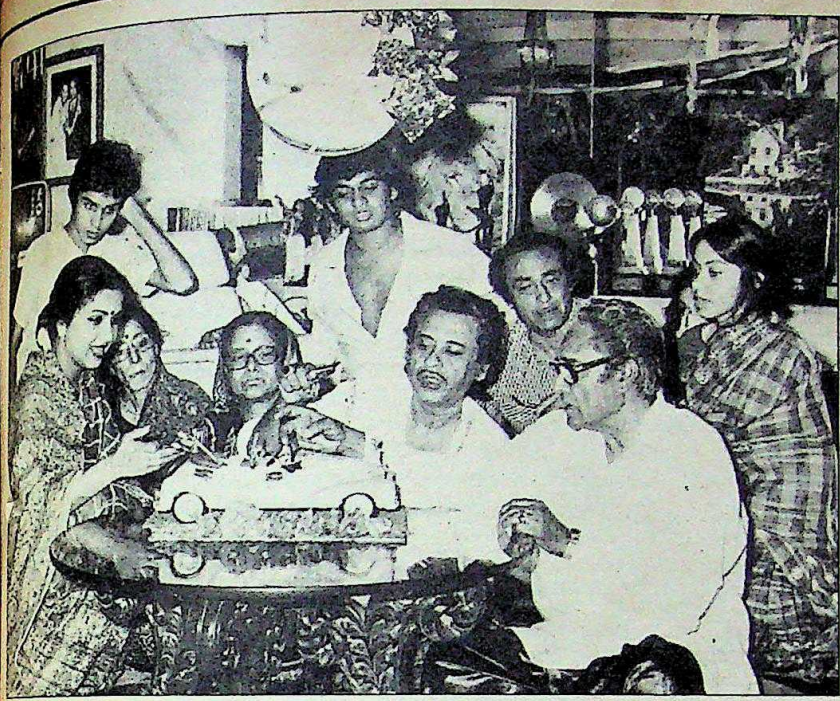

The *Chalti* trio and their families celebrate the film's success

her health sunk so did Kishore's career graph. "I was distracted. My rating as an actor dropped and I was invited to act only in B movies," he recalls. But there was, in the tragedy, an unexpected bonus. Forced to concentrate on something that didn't take up all his time, Kishore took to playback singing. The rest, as they say, is history.

It took him nine years to get over Madhubala's death in 1969 but he did it in his own inimitable style. One day in 1977, he called up Yogita Bali, then the current pin-up girl, and proposed to her on the telephone. He had known her for just two months and she was 26 years his junior. The marriage lasted less than a year. One fine morning she left the house saying she was going to visit her mother. She never returned. The gossip rags had a field day and Kishore went through a tortuous divorce settlement before zooming in on actress Leena Chandravarkar whom he married in 1981.

Lata, R.D. Burman, Kishore and Asha: odd man out

His eccentricity arouses mixed feelings in the industry. R.D Burman says that Kishore's is a split personality, on the one hand a slightly mad joker and on the other, a hard, practical man, a superb professional, who will do anything to extract the best price for his talents. Others like producer Manmohan Desai have sworn never to have anything to do with the man. "The man can really get petty. He has only money on his mind." Adds singer Asha Bhosale: "I have met him frequently but I always wonder how little I know him. He lives in a world of his own."

That is quite literally true. Gouri Kunj, Kishore's all-marble palatial house in Juhu, resembles the fabled Xanadu. Entry is strictly by appointment and that too after the sentry at the gate has confirmed the visitor's bona fides with his master over the intercom. Even then, visitors go through at least seven other domestics before meeting the master.

He is obviously a difficult man to work for. Secretaries have left him in droves with the result that Amit, his son from his first marriage, manages his father's affairs. The three brothers, Ashok, Kishore and Anup, who formed the rumbustious comic trio in *Chalti*, meet occasionally but Kishore is essentially an intensely private person who prefers to avoid family gatherings or glittering film parties.

When not recording at the studio, Kishore, with wife Leena and son Sumeet, three, sits at home watching a horror film from one of the 3,000 video cassettes in his collection. When Leena and the sons are out Kishore walks in the garden and talks to the chinar trees. His favourite is called Hari-Niranjan, a 30-foot specimen who, says Kishore, "knows all the secrets of my money and my loves".

Kishore's latest escapade, to his roots at Khandwa where he plans to "spend all afternoon swinging in a hammock under a mango tree", when he still has years to go as a money-spinner, is inexplicable. Evidently, despite the continuing promise of musical monopoly, Kishore, like all successful people in show business, is afraid of the pitfalls of the glamour trade, its hidden pockets of quicksand. "I'm going gold today," he says, "but what happens if I go lead tomorrow?" But then, that has always been his most famous personal hallmark; to quit when he is ahead rather than fade out as an ageing and loony lothario.

—SUMIT MITRA in Bombay

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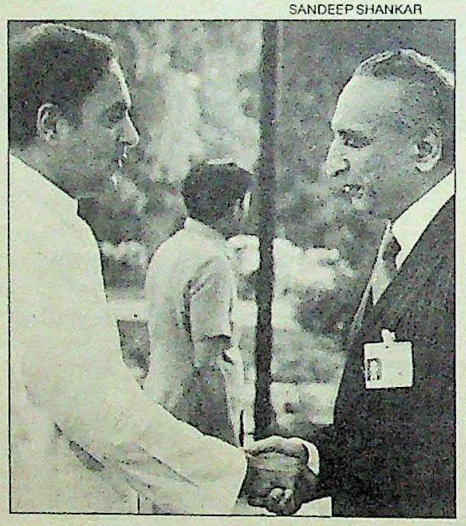
INDO-PAK RELATIONS

A New Resolve

"YOU ARE fortunate to have found such a dynamic, young, forward-looking prime minister at a critical juncture in your history," observed Pakistan's effable foreign minister, Sahabzada Yakub Khan in the course of an exclusive discussion at the Pakistan Embassy in New Delhi on April 20. "He gave the distinct impression that he is genuinely interested to improve India-Pakistan relations to a point where we can work together on bilateral as well as multilateral issues. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi will find us fully responsive to any initiative he may take to rebuild the relationship."

Most of what Yakub Khan told INDIA TODAY was off the record. In the third year of his foreign ministership, Yakub Khan is a mature diplomat, a disarming mix of cordiality and caution. However, Yakub Khan is now an "elected" member of General Zia's recently inaugurated "representative" regime. Last year, there were rumours in the corridors of the US State Department that Sahabzada Yakub Khan "may not last long" as Pakistan's foreign minister. It is good for Pakistan and India that he continues to be foreign minister perhaps with more authority than before to conduct Pakistan's relations with her neighbour India and other foreign countries.

SANDEEP SHANKAR



Rajiv receives Yakub Khan in Delhi

At the meetings of the NAM coordinating group in New Delhi, Yakub Khan's statements were no less positive about ostracising South Africa from the civilised community and extending all possible help to SWAPO in its 20-year-old struggle for Namibia's independence than the articulations made by Indian spokesmen. Yakub Khan pointed out that on a fairly large number of international issues, Pakistan and India did work together at the UN and NAM. Palestine, the concept of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean and Namibia, for instance. When one comes to think of it, the mass media in neither country ever mention these issues. What they do highlight, however, are the issues that divide India and Pakistan. Afghanistan and Kampuchea, for instance.

Yakub Khan's 45-minute meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was taken up mostly with Afghanistan and bilateral relations between Pakistan and India. Yakub Khan followed up these two issues in his longer talks with chairman G. Parthasarathi and Khursheed Alam, minister of state. Yakub Khan did get the impression that the Indian prime minister was in search of a comprehensive regional policy his government could pursue with coherence and consistence over the next five years.

For the present, however, the two countries' approach to improving relations, which is a shared objective, remains different. India appears to attach more importance to "ground issues" like trade and commerce, freer human movements, freer flow of information, knowledge and ideas. Pakistan doesn't object to this style. It has, in fact, offered a number of confidence-building proposals, such as conclusion of an anti-terrorist treaty which would include immediate mutual extradition of hijackers, and consultations among commanders of border regions on issues like extremists of either country escaping to "sanctuaries" in the other. None of these proposals has India rejected or accepted for discussion. What Pakistan wants is that alongside these "ground" issues, political talks should also continue with greater earnest because the two reinforce each other. India has no objection to this style, but no great enthusiasm either. So when the political talks will be resumed would be determined by the two foreign secretaries when they get together at Thimpu, capital of Bhutan, in May for the SARC foreign ministers' meeting.

It is interesting that Rajiv Gandhi should borrow from the Chinese inventory of diplomatic vocabulary the concept of "step-by-step" while thinking of improving relations with Pakistan. The Chinese will probably pace up their "step-by-step" tactics to some kind of a long jump in the near future in normalising relations with the USSR. The India-Pakistan amity engine can at best be expected to take a frog leap forward.

It has been heard in the corridors of South Block that in May last year, the two countries had "virtually" resolved their differences on the two obstacles to a treaty, namely, bilateralism and bases. Indian officials have claimed that the final drafting of the clause pertaining to the bases was left to the Pakistan foreign office together with an unqualified gesture of trust: "Whatever draft you send us, we'll accept it." Pakistani sources, however, have a different story to tell. They concede that the issues in dispute were thoroughly discussed and the areas of differences substantially narrowed down. But points of difference still remained, which Pakistan hoped would be removed at the next round of talks in Delhi. That round was "indefinitely postponed" by India.

On Afghanistan, the Pakistan Government, on mature thinking, has determined that what Mikhail Gorbachov told General Zia at their 55-minute meeting in the Kremlin was "not a threat", but an expression of concern at reports that the US might obtain Pakistan's cooperation in escalating the level of fighting in Afghanistan. The Pakistan Government is not likely to agree to any such American move. With partial revival of political life in Pakistan, new public attitudes may soon shape up towards the country's involvement in the Afghanistan issue. In Pakistan's perception, the Soviet stand has hardened since 1983, but UN sources have told Islamabad that Moscow seriously wants the next round of "proximity talks" to make progress. The Pakistan foreign office and the new cabinet will have to work out a positive strategy for the next round which will be held in May or June. In New Delhi, Yakub Khan and his Afghan counterpart crossed each other's shadows several times but did not even say hello to one another. Proximity hasn't reached the stage of even a handshake as yet, not at any rate on the soil of New Delhi.

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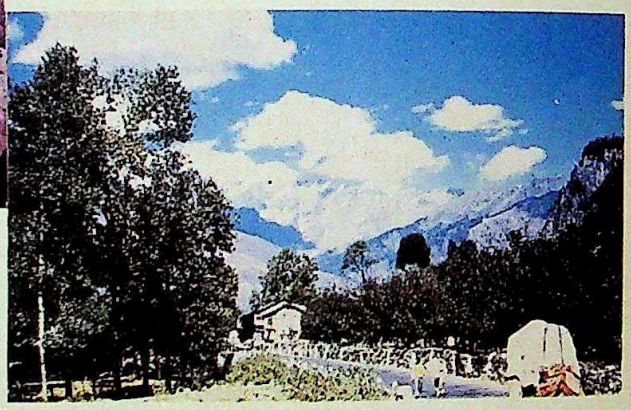

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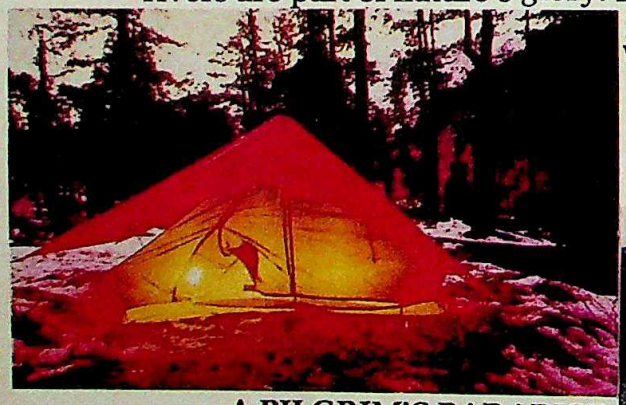

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BIHAR

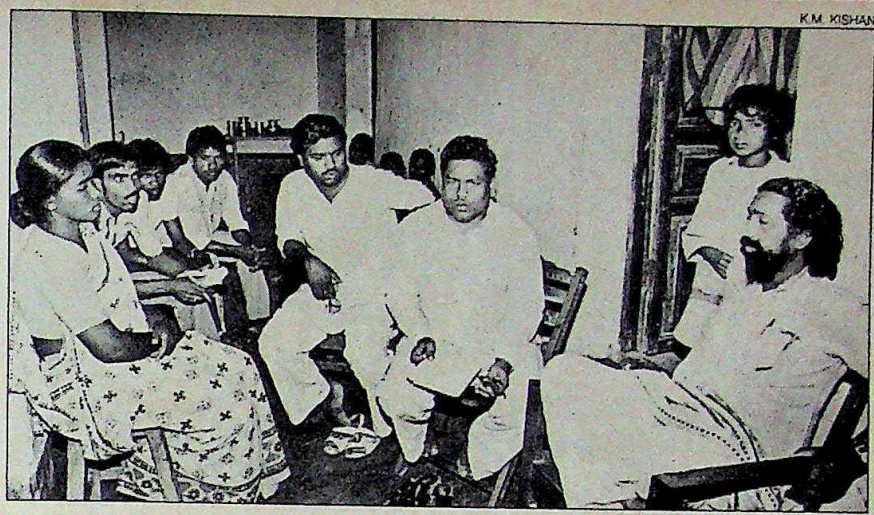
Tribal Trouble

THE FIRST official reaction to the brutal killing of 15—possibly more—tribals last fortnight in the village of Banjhi ensconced in the patently poverty-ridden Santhal Parganas region was, strangely, negative. But not for long. Even as Home Minister S.B. Chavan in Parliament turned down a demand for a probe into the circumstances of the incident, Bihar Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey flew to the troubled spot, announced a judicial inquiry, and deputed Minister of State for Welfare Thomas Hansda to camp there and restore peace.

The seemingly prompt action on the part of the chief minister was to be expected, to say the least, for in the dock were the police. This time by firing upon and killing, upon their own admission, 15 Santhals on April 19 in Banjhi village of Sahebganj district. What compounded matters was the gunning down, among them, of a one-time Jesuit priest, Anthony Murmu, 55, a former member of the Lok Sabha who earned a berth in 1977 on the Janata Party ticket.

Banjhi is a non-tribal village dominated by Bhagats (a business community) and Muslims and serves as the pulse for the approximately 25,000 Santhals who live in 20 villages surrounding it. Dependent on the *dikus* (a term used contemptuously by the Santhals for them) for their daily bread and exploited relentlessly by them, there is little love in their hearts for the 'outsiders'. But what makes last fortnight's incident horrifying is the manner in which the killings were conducted. If the accounts of the tribals are to be believed, the victims were caught and shot in cold blood, abetted by the *dikus*. Simon Marandi, a Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) MLA, recalls how Father Anthony and Madan Murmu were first locked up in the panchayat bhavan, and then transferred to a godown by the *dikus* and police. Tortured and finally shot dead, the two men were killed by the Bhagats, claims Shiboo Soren, another JMM leader.

Sahebganj Police Superintendent B.C. Pandey, however, explaining away the eruption of violence as just another manifestation of age-old mistrust existing between the locals and outsiders, maintained that the Santhals had raided Banjhi village to loot firewood from a Muslim household. And when the villagers resisted, the Santhals had apparently set off a rumour that they had been fired upon and started to fiercely beat upon their drums—a traditional signal of alarm. Very soon, a mob 10,000-odd strong had congregated, blocking the main road connecting Sahebganj with Dumka, the divisional headquarters, and then went on a rampage through Banjhi. By the time the subdivisional officer, Hari Narayan, had arrived on the scene complete with police posse, Pandey claimed the entire village was in flames. The contingent was met with a hail of arrows—compelling the police to return fire first with teargas and lathicharge, and then bullets.



K.M. KISHAN

Murmu's widow with Soren (extreme right) and Marandi to his right

While Pandey contended that Father Anthony had been instrumental in instigating the tribals in order to earn the sympathy of the JMM following his failure to secure a Congress(I) ticket, the locals' perception of the man was quite the contrary. For them, Father Anthony was a man of peace, who had renounced his priesthood in 1972 to better serve the cause through politics. Widow Bibiana Baski, 30, clutching their five-year-old son Clement to her breast, said tearfully: "He was about to join the Congress(I)." And on that fateful day, Father Anthony had allowed himself to be persuaded by the Santhals to visit Banjhi to pacify his people and allay the grievances of the *dikus* and the police. He paid with his life.

The official version implicating the Santhals in wholesale arson is hotly denied by Shatrughan Sinha, a teacher and CPI member of the state's Legislative Council. The only representative of any opposition party to visit the spot, he claims that the post office and other buildings were razed to the ground by non-tribals themselves in order to lend credence to the police story.

Trouble has, in fact, been brewing ever since the authorities had settled a big pond in the middle of Banjhi village in favour of a rich and powerful Mahajan Moti Bhagat, thus closing an avenue of livelihood by fishing for the impecunious Santhals. After some haggling, however, Bhagat permitted them use of one part of the pond, warning them specifically off the other saying poisonous snakes lurked in those waters. What actually emerged was the decomposed body of a tribal. Enraged, they attacked Bhagat's house and, according to non-tribal shopkeeper Ashok Kumar Pandey, set it on fire. Bhagat says that the next day, March 26, they would have destroyed the entire village—but were prevented from doing so only by the intervention of the police. Peace then held until April 15 when, supposedly instigated by Soren and Marandi, they destroyed a shop at Dighi and some railway property at Telo two days later. The killings of April 19 followed.

The Santhals' woes are as old as the forests that once sheltered them and their desire for revenge is slowly mounting. The judicial inquiry is set to investigate the circumstances and sequence of the police firing, and also to establish whether the incident was pre-planned. But the Santhals intend to conduct their own parallel probe. Wearing a set expression on his face, Soren revealed that he had asked for a village-by-village census to determine the exact number of Santhals killed—for a start. Like so many children of the soil, the Santhals too are an innocent and tolerant people. But once their pride is hurt and antipathy aroused, they will act. And that can breed anger and revenge.

—FARZAND AHMED in Banjhi

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INDIAN AIRLINES

Computer Chaos

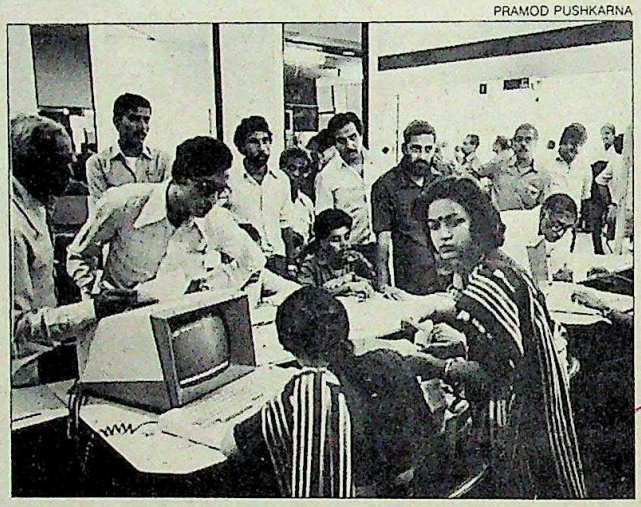
COMPUTERS can do a great deal, as everyone knows. But few could have reckoned with the chaos that the Sperry 1100/82 fourth-generation computer would cause as the country's domestic carrier finally entered the computer age last month.

In Hyderabad one day last month, dozens of passengers landed up at the city's Begumpet Airport with confirmed tickets, only to find that none of them had any seats on the flight: the computer had overbooked. In Delhi, businessman P.Shiv Sarma could not get any information on his position in the waiting-list because, he was told, the new booking system is not designed to give passengers this information. Failing to get his wait-list ranking even at the airport on the morning of the flight, Shiv Sarma finally bought himself an executive class ticket. Back in Hyderabad, a prospective passenger could not get his seat confirmed for three days because "the computer is down". The reservations manager said he could not do anything about this because the manual booking system had been dismantled. And in Bombay, a journalist waited eight hours for a confirmed seat before finally giving up. At Amritsar, which has to communicate with Delhi by teleprinter, even a passenger who was at the top of the waiting-list had to wait for three days and yet his waiting-list number didn't change. All wait-listed passengers were asked to go and take a chance at the airport. Ultimately the plane took off with more than 20 seats empty. Since the discontinuance of the system of allotting a seat quota to different on-line stations, passengers at stations like Amritsar which have only teleprinter links to the central computer centre in Delhi are automatically put on the waiting-list.

These examples have been multiplied a hundredfold over the last month, and the letters columns in newspapers have been full of complaints provoked by the chaos resulting from a hasty and ill-prepared leap into the technology of the late twentieth century.

The excuses now come tumbling out faster than a computer print-out: the failures are not of the computer but the post and telegraph department's communications links; if the computer does go on the blink at the main reservation office in Delhi, it is because there is no stand-by generator to protect against the inevitable power cuts; there aren't enough terminals at the Bombay city booking-office so a queue builds up; the tickets are still manually written, and the staff take much too long over this so the time saved on the computer is immediately lost; and so on and on.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Passenger queues at IA booking-office: wait-listed

In Bombay, an airline official complained that the city booking-office had only eleven terminals when twice that number were needed. "The average time taken to process one request is now 15 minutes, whereas the earlier manual system took only five minutes," he said. The microwave link to the main computer in Delhi has a response time of five seconds, but the parallel satellite link-up has proved inordinately slow. A second superfast microwave link is all too often inoperative, another official explained.

"There's nothing wrong with the computers, it is the post and telegraph communication lines that are acting up", says IA's Director of Operations, Captain P.N.Reddy. And installing a stand-by generator at the booking-office in Delhi is a problem because the office space has been rented from a dozen different property owners, who cannot all be persuaded about the need for a generator.

The resulting chaos is cheerfully admitted. S.K. Sengupta, IA's adviser on computers and data communications, said that last fortnight the Bombay circuit was down for half a day, Hyderabad remained cut off for one or two days, and the Bangalore line too gave some trouble. Passenger experience suggests that the breakdowns have been far more frequent, and longer lasting. But there can be no answer to why the airline did not anticipate the problems it has run into, especially since it has taken three years for the computer reservation system to be installed: the Government had cleared the project in mid-1982.

Officials working in other airlines do not buy the IA argument that all this amounts to little more than teething problems. An Air-India official said IA was unwise in introducing the system at the peak of the summer holiday rush. In fact, Air-India too initially faced similar problems with communication links. The representative of a foreign airline said IA had simply not planned properly: it should have retained its manual booking system till the new system was well established.

The IA brass is now working overtime to try and make good. New wireless links between the main P&T stations and IA's reservation centres are planned, and ticket-writing will also be mechanised. The reservation counters have been instructed to give passengers their position on the waiting list, and a new mini-reservation office is planned in Delhi with a generator back-up.

When all these will materialise, and how far they will solve the problems remain to be seen. But last fortnight, senior IA officials were putting a cheerful face. Sengupta said he was not unduly perturbed by the criticism, and insisted that any new system with such a wide network of terminals is bound to have initial problems. He also felt the system could be refined using the daily feedback on how well or badly it was functioning. But till all this happens, most passengers will wonder whether, apart from the intermittently instant information about seat availability, anything has really been achieved so far by IA's attempted take-off into computerland.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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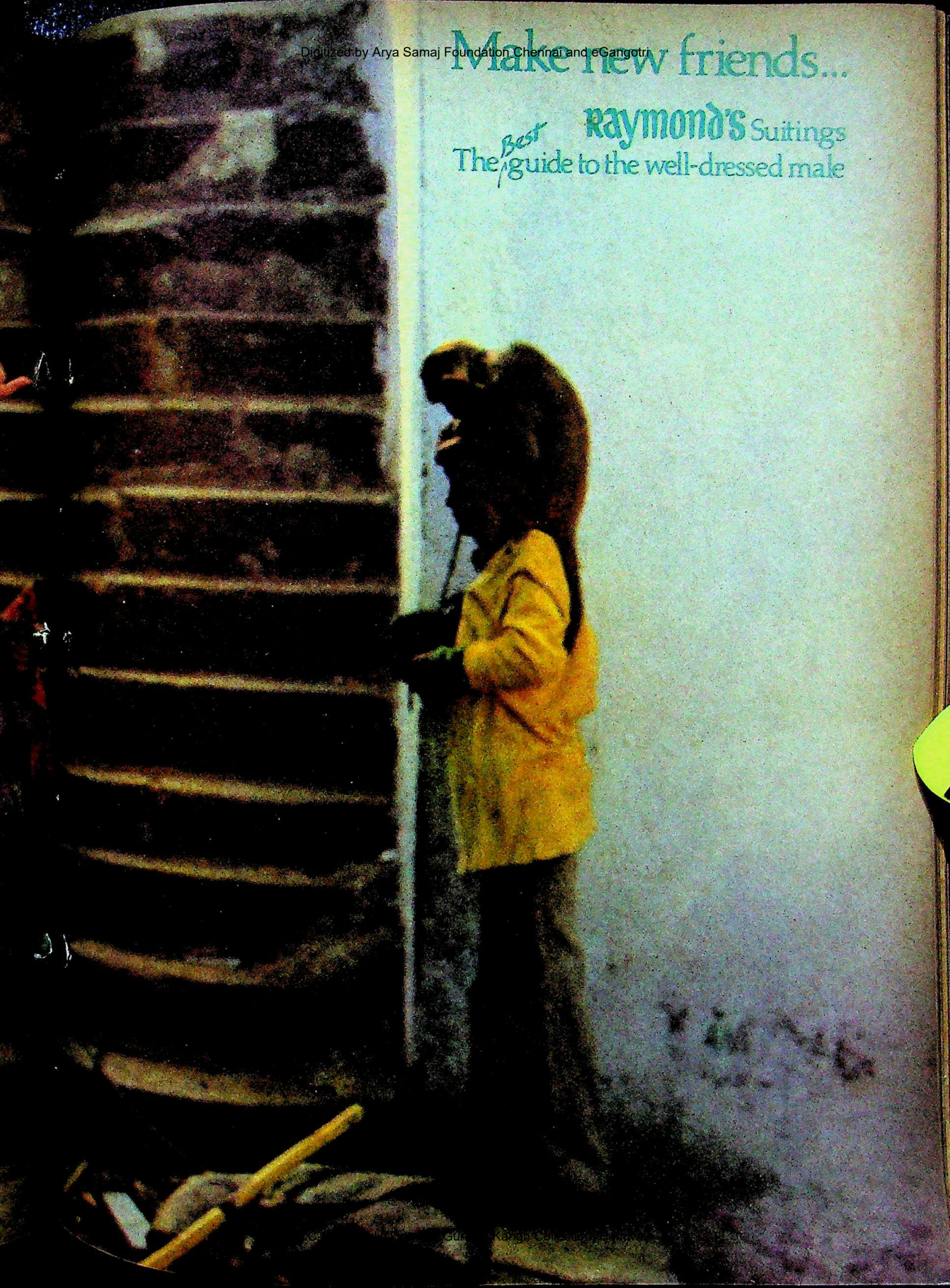

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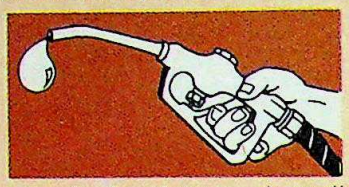

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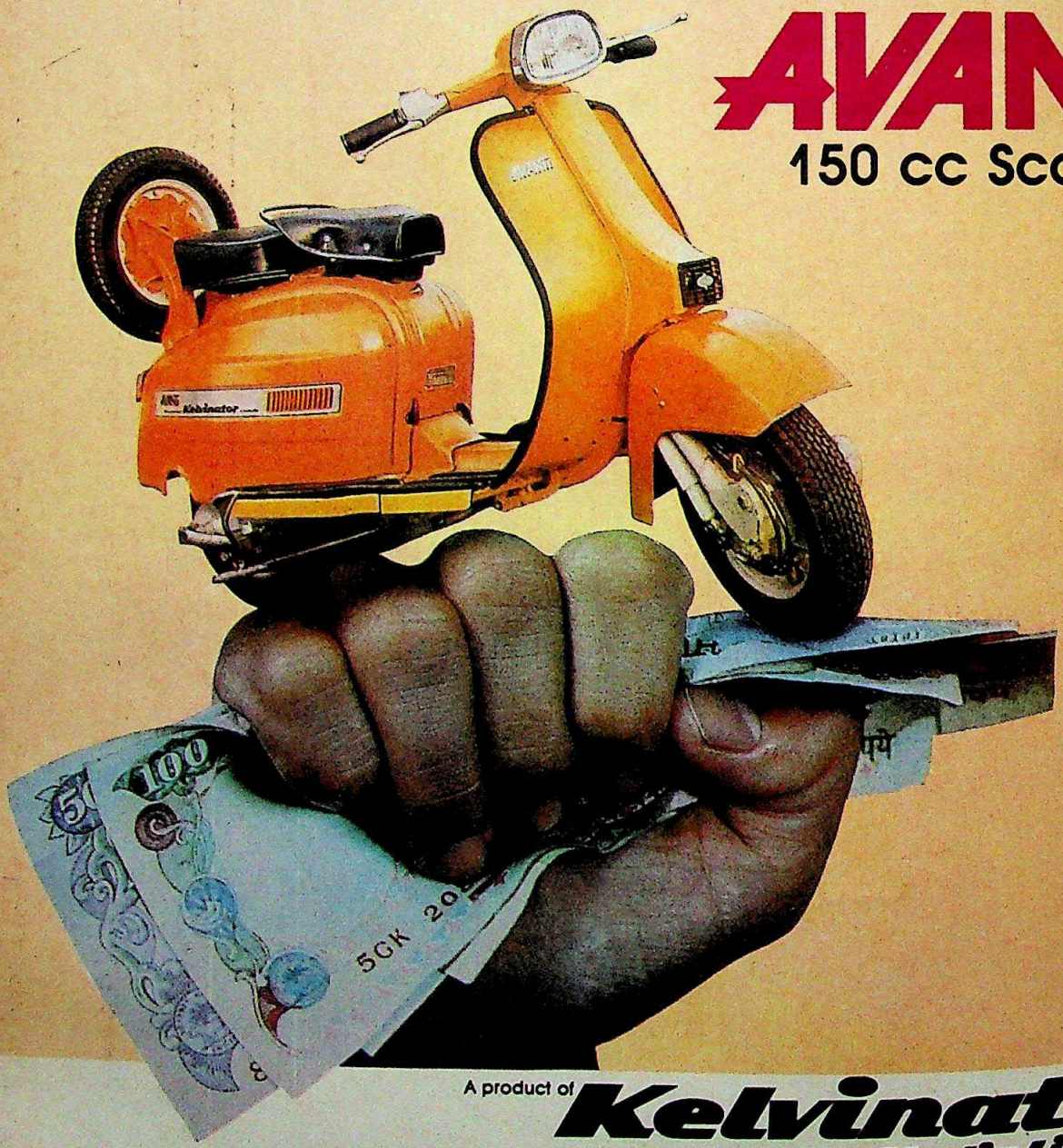

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TV COMMERCIALS

Viewing the Viewers

SUDDENLY there are so many of them: single girls coping with single boys, an overloaded family coming to grips with overloaded emotions, clean-cut officers chasing unidentified flying objects across space, and a high-life socialite talking to other socialites in a 'purr'fect accent. And the ads: before during and after, touting everything from soaps to ghee to colour TV's. By one estimate, nearly a quarter of television time is taken up by advertisement spots and over a dozen sponsored programmes which go out to a theoretical audience of 33 crore all over the country on an estimated 5 million TV sets. The trouble is no one knows who is watching what, when and why.

Over the next few weeks, the first indications of audience likes and dislikes will be pouring in from all over India as nearly half-a-dozen research and marketing agencies tinker with TV rating systems. The Marketing Research and Advisory Service Pvt Ltd (MRAS) is working with Doordarshan on a massive once-a-year survey which will cover 40 towns and reach 40,000 households. The Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB) is tinkering with a similar probe spread over 11,500 people in the four metropolises as is Pathfinders, another Bombay-based consumer information group. Scientific Analysers of Market Information and Research (SAMIR) a company of the Reliance Textile Industries group is concentrating on Bombay for a "continuous daily audit" on TV viewership. Says Ranjit Chib of MRAS: "There's tremendous demand for this kind of survey. After all, if you're spending Rs 1.60 lakh on a two-minute spot you want to put it next to a programme which people will watch."

First off the mark is SAMIR, with weekly reports. Its system is deliberately simple: 100 households in three income groups contacted every day in Bombay. Each asked to recall, over the last 48 hours, when they switched on the TV set, and the appropriate 15-minute intervals on a data sheet ticked off. Unlike other and more sophisticated surveys, SAMIR's field operators do not ask the families which programmes they watch—the argument is that this could introduce bias.

The results, which are available to anyone for an annual fee which ranges between Rs 15,000 and Rs 25,000, confirm what everybody suspected—that sponsored and film-based programmes are the most popular. For instance SAMIR's findings for the week March 11 to March 17, 1985, show that twice as many people switched on their TV sets when it was time for *Hum Log*, *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, *Khandaan* and *Ados Pados*, the durable *Chitrahaar* and the feature film than for *Sunder Maze Ghar* and *Dyandeep*. Significantly, Hindi soap and comedy serials score heavily over their English counterparts. Says SAMIR Chief Executive G. Parthasarathy: "Although the findings are no surprise, they reassure advertisers they know now that their money is going in the right places."

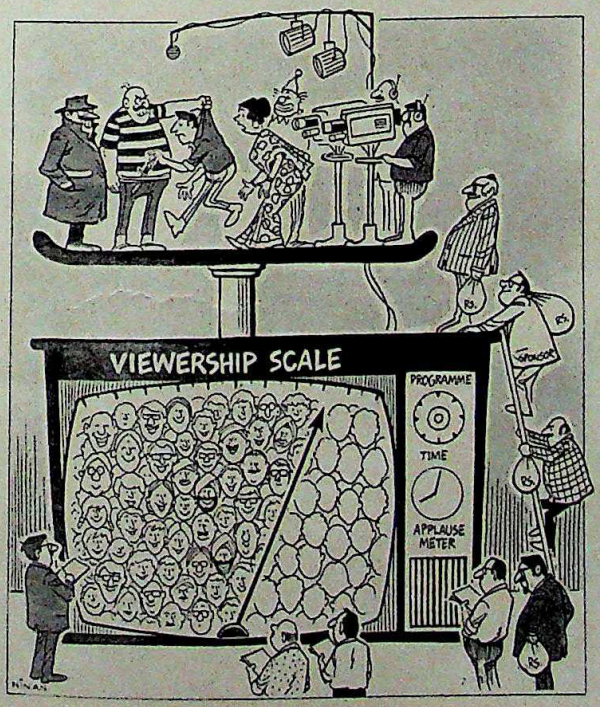
But SAMIR's rather simplistic methods are quantitative rather than qualitative and the other surveys will be probing much deeper and wider. IMRB whose television rating points study will be done two or three times a year and so, for Rs 15,000, is looking at both primary TV-owning households and secondary audiences (people who watch TV in other homes) and will ask about specific programmes as well as time slots aided by prompt cards. Says Project Director Katy Merchant: "The trouble with the when-did-you-switch-the-TV-on routine is that no one might be watching the set and this could lead to inflated figures for some programmes." She has a point there. SAMIR's results show that on Sunday, 97 per cent of families had their sets switched on during the Marathi news, but as it comes between two segments of the feature film, how many actually watched is debatable.

Even as researchers debate how exactly to find out whether people are really interested in how the *Khandaan* tycoon destroys his rivals, they are unanimous on one point: the mechanised methods adopted in the West, such as meters inside specially constructed sets to record timings, are too sophisticated for India. "The meter would introduce a definite bias and would be too expensive to install and maintain," says Parthasarthy. Besides, the question-and-answer method is cheaper in India with its single channel than in the West, with its multiplicity of channels.

The research agencies are sinking several lakhs each into the surveys and are reported to be breaking even before the first reports are out. MRAS claims to have already roped in about 25 clients. IMRB says it has "received a number of enquiries" but SAMIR admits that it has got only a handful. Chib feels that this is only the beginning of TV rating in India and that with the current consumer boom and the rapidly spreading reach of television, the market cannot but grow. "We will still have a long way to go in terms of people approached. In Britain the BBC survey touches a million people every year," he points out.

There is only speculation on whether the surveys will cause rescheduled or changed programmes according to public taste. One advertiser comments: "As Doordarshan goes by 'social objectives' and not what the public wants, ratings are meaningless". An indication of the TV monopoly's interest in audience research can be had from the fact that of the Rs 20 lakh budgeted for the audience research unit, Rs 17.5 lakh went on salaries. It appears that others have to do for Indian television what it cannot do for itself.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI



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CHANDRALEKHA

Breaking the Bonds

TO RESOLVE the contradiction between traditional dance and reality has been a long, lonely and unending journey for Chandralekha, the silver-haired danseuse-feminist who has been described as the doyenne of thinkers in Indian dance. Often compared to Isadora Duncan for the total freedom of spirit in her life-style, Chandralekha gave up performing in public 14 years ago in the belief that Bharatanatyam had arrived at a dead end, saturated as it was in the dust of obsolete religion and mythology.

Last year, she returned from her self-imposed exile to present a dramatically unconventional choreography in *Primal Energy* at the East West dance encounter in Bombay. And now, she has once again burst through into brilliance with *Angika*, her latest choreographic work. Nothing like it has been seen on the Indian dance stage and for good reason. *Angika* represents a major departure from traditional dance.

Divesting classical dance of its esoteric and ornamental trappings, Chandralekha's *Angika* reinterprets dance as a balance of poetry and power in the human body. By drawing upon the collective experience of the physical traditions of martial arts, yoga and dance, Chandralekha has managed to synthesise several elements into a joyous celebration of the body. This historical, anthropological, almost anthropomorphic exploration of the tradition of body language was conceived in six startling sequences of pure magic.

The group of Bharatanatyam exponents from Rukmini Devi's Kalakshetra, young exponents of Kalaripayattu, the martial art of Kerala, and practitioners of yoga fused together to create images visually so overwhelming that a *tillana* will never seem the same to followers of Indian dance. Exulted fellow dancer Kumudini Lakhia: "In three minutes, Chandra has stripped Bharatanatyam of 500 years of hypocrisy." Last December, when *Angika* was previewed in conservative Madras, half the audience rushed backstage after the performance to discuss excitedly Chandralekha's efforts to, in her own words, "strip Bharatanatyam of all that is merely decorative, ornamental and sentimental and return to the essence of form, to reach out and re-discover the vibrant and vital language of the body".

Though in her 50s, Chandralekha's creativity seems boundless. Says her close friend, film director Hrishikesh Mukherjee: "Rarely in life does one come across such a unique personality. She has never borrowed ideas, they all spring from within her. She has the potential of being one of the finest writers in the country." Certainly, Chandralekha's accomplishments are astonishingly varied: a novella called *The Street*, a book of poems *Fire, Counter Fire*, containing her own drawings, dozens of posters and illustrations, and the choreography for *Devadasi*, *Navagraha*, *Tillana* as well as the Mayurbhanj Chhau dances in Kumar Shahani's film, *Maya*

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Images drawn from Tantra
Shakti (female) astride
Nara (male): *Naravahana*
A sequence from *Angika*:
Chandralekha and Ashok
Kumar K.

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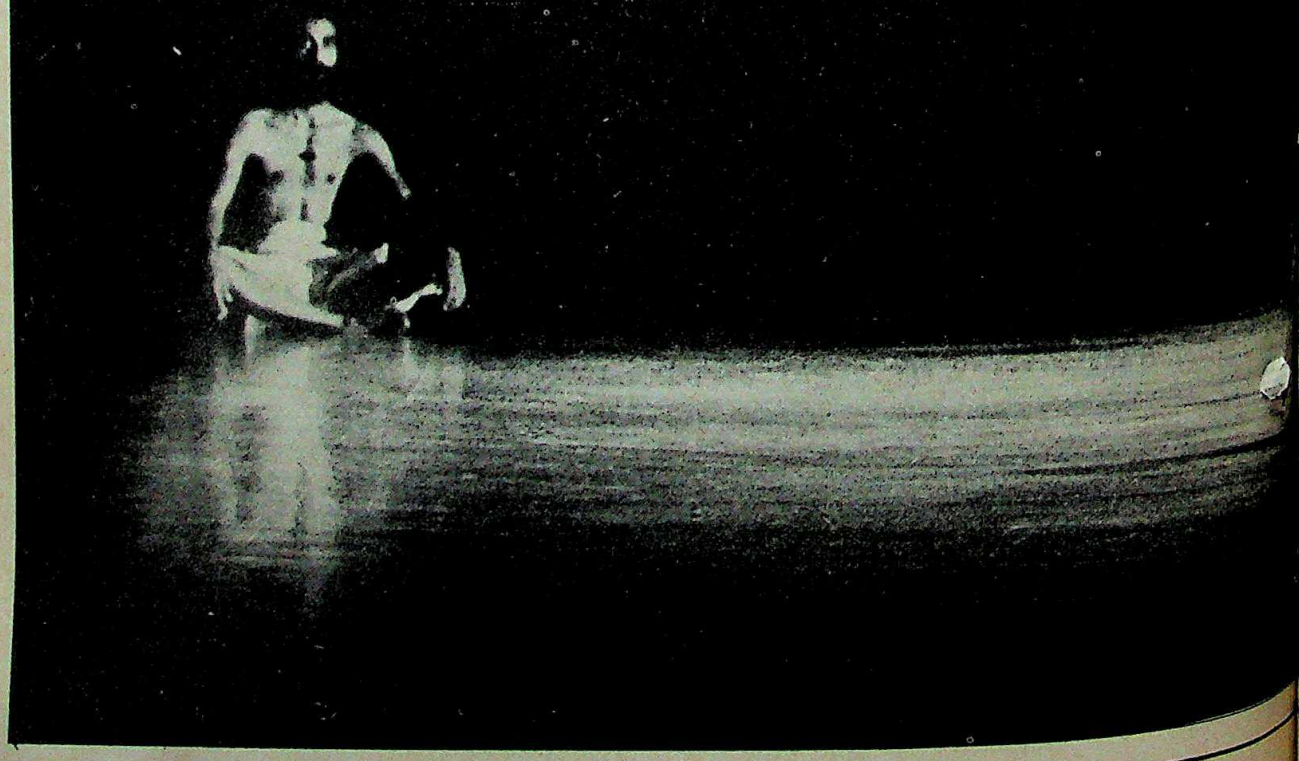
Darpan. In collaboration with Andy Warhol, Merce Cunningham and David Tudor, she has produced a film on body culture for the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art and has made another film on dance for the BBC. She also designed the immensely popular pavilion 'The World is my Family' for the 1969 Gandhi centenary celebrations for which she read almost every letter the Mahatma had written.

As *Angika* demonstrated, the only sign of age is her cascade of silver hair. Her face is still mobile and alive and her body unbelievably lithe. "All my life," she says, "I have been anticipating that something is about to happen, something that belonged to the realm of imagination." She has been a non-conformist from a very young age, spurning conventions of education and marriage. Today, she refuses to talk about her past or her family. "It is of no relevance today. I lead the life of an independent woman surrounded by friends."

Her introduction to dance came in the early '50s when, fresh out of law school, she met Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, the poet and writer who was then 58 years old. Recalls Chattopadhyaya: "The first time I saw this thin lovely girl with the long black hair I knew she was someone special. I could see the spark in her." From that first encounter, he "took charge of her mind" and her personal life. He introduced her to dance guru Ellappa Pillai who used to conduct the great Balasaraswati's recitals. Within a short time, Chandralekha had blossomed into one of the leading dancers of the day along with Mrinalini



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Maṇḍala postures from Bharatanatyam: Sumitra Gautam

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Sarabhai, Shanta Rao, Kamala Laxman and Vyjayanthimala.

Her personal life was, meanwhile, achieving equal publicity. She moved in with Chattopadhyaya and shortly after, a shy sculptor called Dashrath Patel also entered their lives. The intense, triangular relationship became a celebrated *menage a trois* though Chattopadhyaya angrily brushes aside any talk of a sexual relationship as "so much damn nonsense". According to him: "Sex as such hardly exists. Each time you create something beautiful you have in fact something akin to a sexual experience."

In 1973, when her guru Ellappa Pillai died, she moved away from dance and plunged into painting, writing and design. She formed the cooperative, Skills, along with journalist Sadanand Menon and Dashrath Patel to teach low cost commu-

Images drawn from physical exercises: walk of camels

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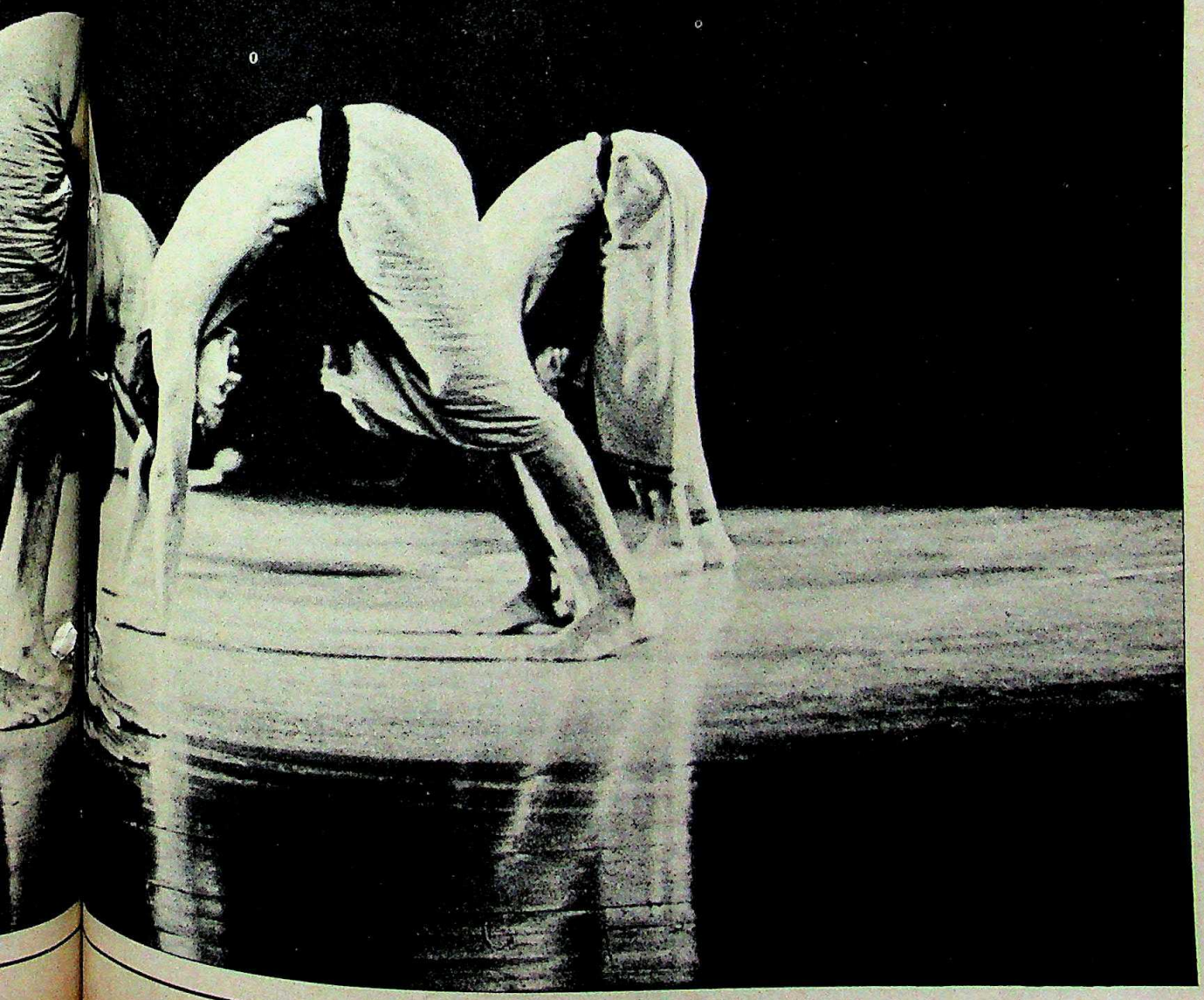
nication methods. Yet, it was almost inevitable that she would return to dance. "I moved away not from dance but from the false values in dance today which has made it almost a spectacle. I seek to restore the vital link between body and nature, body and work, body and ritual. Life and art have to mix."

Her long absence from the dance arena was not entirely of her own making. Her unconventional approach to dance made organisers wary of inviting her to major dance festivals. "They were scared of me. I would be a threat to the status quo ideology of dance," she says. It was Dr George Lechner of the Max Mueller Bhavan organiser of the East West dance encounter, who invited her and her troupe to perform in Bombay, thus bringing her back where she belonged.

Chandralekha is convinced that



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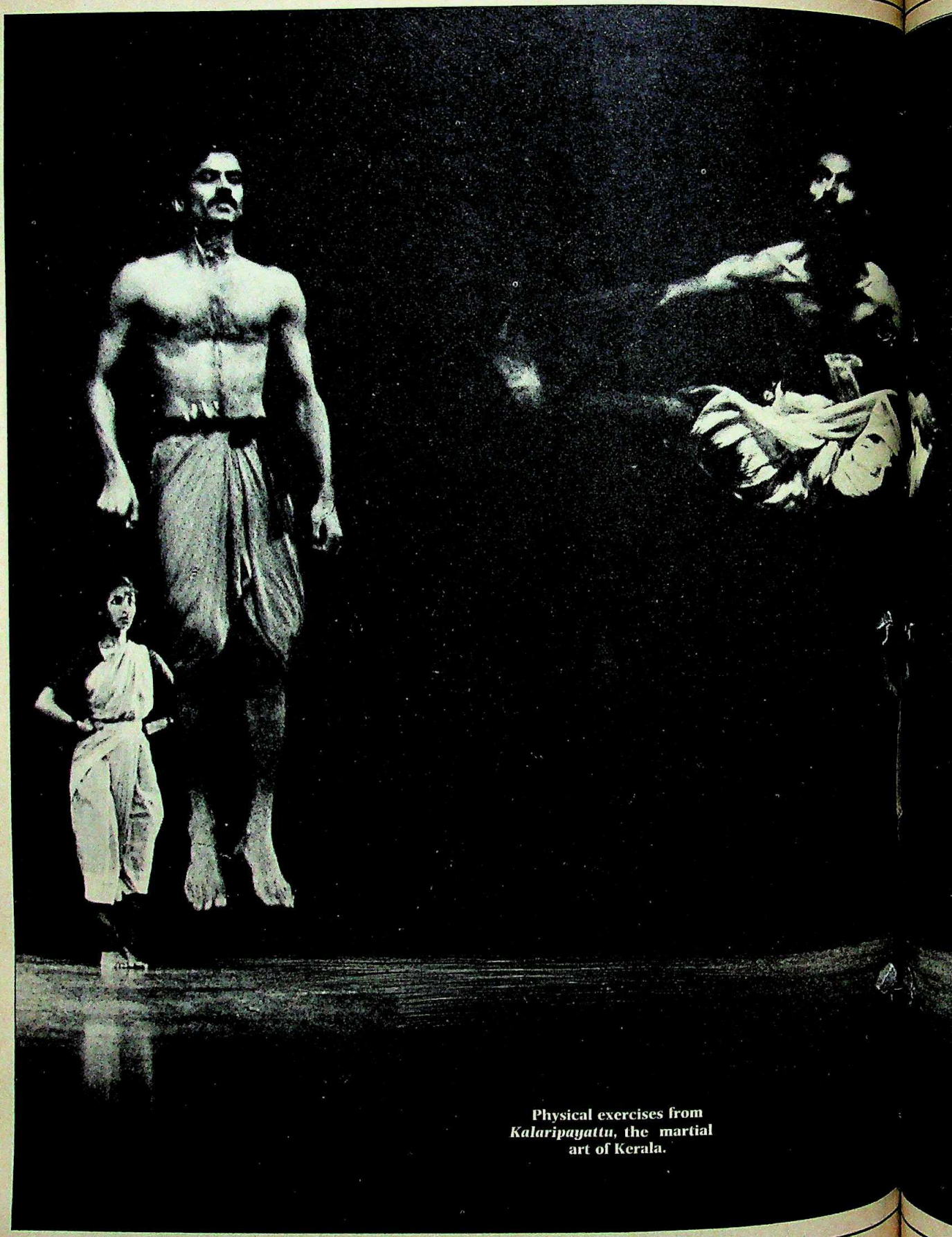

Physical exercises from *Kalaripayattu*, the martial art of Kerala.

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solo dance is out and is now only concerned with group work and dance to project togetherness and emphasise her unshaken belief that a dancer cannot remain isolated "like a hothouse flower" from the mainstream of life. "If many of today's leading dancers have not reflected on the need for change it is partly because they are trapped in the system and are themselves its perpetrators," she says. After years of single-minded effort, Chandralekha seems to have finally succeeded in finding expressions of a new image of the dancer and the dance.

—COOMI KAPOOR with SUNIL KOTHARI

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RAJASTHAN

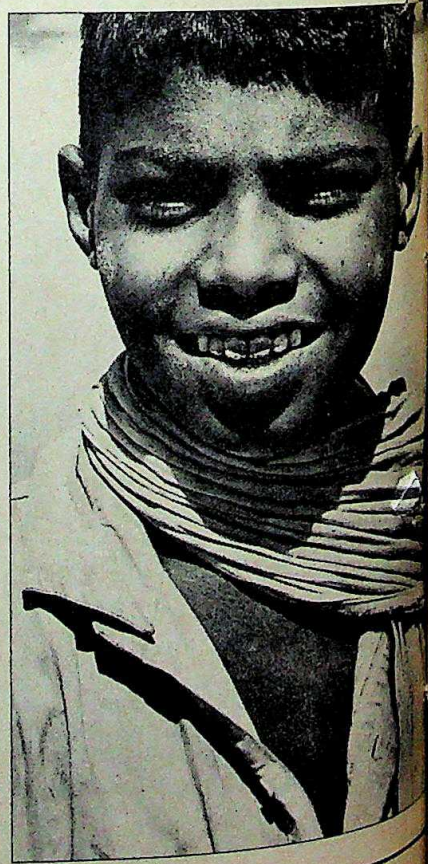
Crippling Scourge

Water may give life but in 6,000 villages of Rajasthan water is also giving sickness. Fluorosis, a slowly debilitating disease that is caused by an excess of fluoride in drinking water, has already permanently crippled over 3.5 lakh inhabitants of the desert belt, and, with no help coming from the Government, it looks like the deadly disease is going to cripple several more. INDIA TODAY *Correspondent* RAMESH MENON *travelled over many of the afflicted areas to see where nature, and man, had been unkindest. His report:*

IN THE sweltering heat, under a poorly thatched roof in Lunva village of Barmer district, lies Motaram, 50, trying desperately to ward the flies off his face by twitching his muscles. He cannot move his hands or his legs and the flies continue to prey on his body. Motaram was once a healthy man but for the last 19 months he has been completely bedridden, a victim of fluorosis, and growing more helpless everyday.

Dargi, 60, lives in a nearby shanty. Her body is a twisted mass of limbs. She lives, but more as a vegetable than a human being, sentenced to her bed, dependent on others, and with nothing to

Teeth discoloured by fluorosis (below) and (right) a victim: desert ailment



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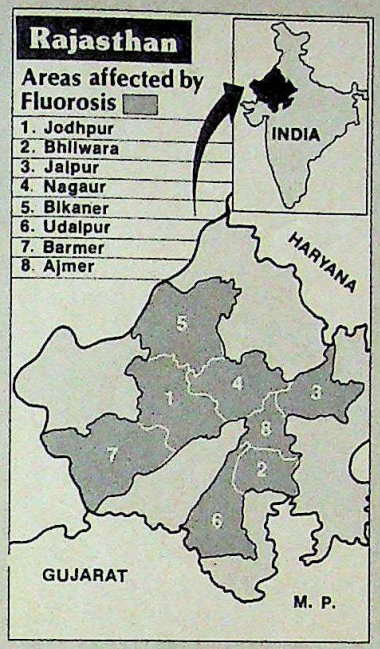
look forward to.

At first sight, Manmal, a 38-year-old shopkeeper in the same village, looks perfectly normal. He can stand upright and even walk straight, but he cannot bend down as his bones have stiffened and in the years to come he will get worse.

Manmal, Dargi and Motaram are only three victims of the irreversible and crippling disease. There are countless more. Recently when the district administration checked up 100 villagers of Lunva and the surrounding countryside, it found that all of them were suffering from the same disease. Last year, the Barmer Lions Club organised a dental check-up for 80,000 children. To its horror it discovered that as many as 70 per cent of the children had already moved into the first stage of fluorosis.

In Nagaur, an entire area has been locally nicknamed *banka patti* (bent strip)—most of the villagers here have turned into hunchbacks because of fluorosis.

There is a morbid resignation on the faces of the villagers; their only consolation—that life can't get any worse. The Government, on its part, is hardly aware that a problem exists at all and it is a measure of its apathy that state officials have seldom ventured into the state's desert regions to document the real extent of fluorosis. Even youngsters like Lakharam, 28, of Barmer district have accepted that clean, fluoride-free drinking water will remain a dream. Once in a while, though, during election time come hopes of health and during the last polls, local candidates brought in shining new pipes to convince gullible villagers of their promises of potable water. But elections came and went, and the unused PVC pipes still glimmer in the noonday sun.



An entire area has been nicknamed "*banka patti*" (bent strips). Most of the villagers here have turned into hunchbacks.

It isn't much that the villagers ask from the Government—only water. To their simple minds, development is synonymous with villages that have acquired potable water. Punmaram Bishnoi, 22, insists that the backward Sanchor town of Jalore district is "forward and developed" simply because it now has good and clean drinking water brought in by a government scheme.

In most of the 6,000 affected villages, however, the wretched peasants have accepted that their thirst for good, clean water will remain unquenched. In 1962, Devaram the then sarpanch of Lunva wrote to the Government that villagers were getting maimed due to an excess of fluoride in the village well. A spate of letters and reminders followed. But it was only last year, 22 years after that first letter, that the Government dug a tube-

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well and potable water flowed into the village for the first time. The happy villagers sang and danced and celebrated, but for many of them by then, fluoride had already attacked their bones.

The most frightening aspect of the disease is that once it finds a home in the body, it does not leave it. Although it sometimes takes up to 20 years for the disease to completely manifest itself, it starts its destruction almost immediately. Fluoride is not absorbed into the bloodstream, it has an affinity for calcium, so it deposits itself on the bones, especially between the joints. Slowly the movement between the joints becomes restricted and pain develops. One by one, the different parts of the body become stiff and useless.

A child who has been drinking water with a high fluoride content, finds that his teeth discolour and acquire brownish, yellowish spots by the time he is 10. This is the first visible sign. If he does not stop drinking the same water, he can get permanently crippled. By the time he is 25, his bones start getting stiff and he feels like an old man. In some cases, due to the compression of nerves by awkwardly growing bones, paralysis sets in. Said a pathetic Bhimaji, 28, from Lunva: "We have lost out on our youth. When we get up in the morning, our whole body is stiff. The joints loosen out only after half an hour of movement. What will become of all of us?"

While most villagers have accepted their own fate, they worry for their children. Moti Durga, 50, a Barmer farmer, cannot look sideways because he has had a stiff neck and spine for the last 20 years. But he is not worried for himself. Said he sadly: "Our life has been ruined. I will die soon anyway, but what will happen to our children, our bright-looking children?" The bright-looking children smile blissfully as they play in the desert sun. But the smiles reveal rotting and discoloured teeth.

Just how rampant the problem is, is uncertain. The Government has not bothered to keep any statistics on the disease and some officials even deny that it exists at all. Said Health Secretary R.J. Majithia: "What is fluorosis? I have never even heard of it." Later, after talking to health officials, Majithia said the fluorosis was not a health problem since it was a water-borne disease; it was the Public Health Engineering Department's responsibility to supply drinkable water. Majithia's attitude typifies the insensitivity of the Government to the silent suffering of lakhs of villagers. Officially, they just do not want to look at the problem and no measures have been taken to ensure that coming generations do not contract it.

THE ONLY authentic information comes from the Defence Laboratory in Jodhpur which has found, through surveys, that fluorosis is concentrated in the districts of Jodhpur, Bhilwara, Jaipur, Nagaur, Bikaner, Udaipur, Barmer and Ajmer. While permissible limits for fluoride content laid down by the World Health Organisation and the Indian Council of Medical Research is just 1.5 parts per million (ppm), 16 districts in Rajasthan have a fluoride content which is much higher, in some places like *banka patti* up to 15 times higher. The presence of fluoride in water is actually necessary for the healthy growth of bones and teeth—several brands of toothpaste, for instance, use fluoride as an ingredient to make stronger teeth—but when it exceeds 1.5 ppm, it has a disastrous effect.

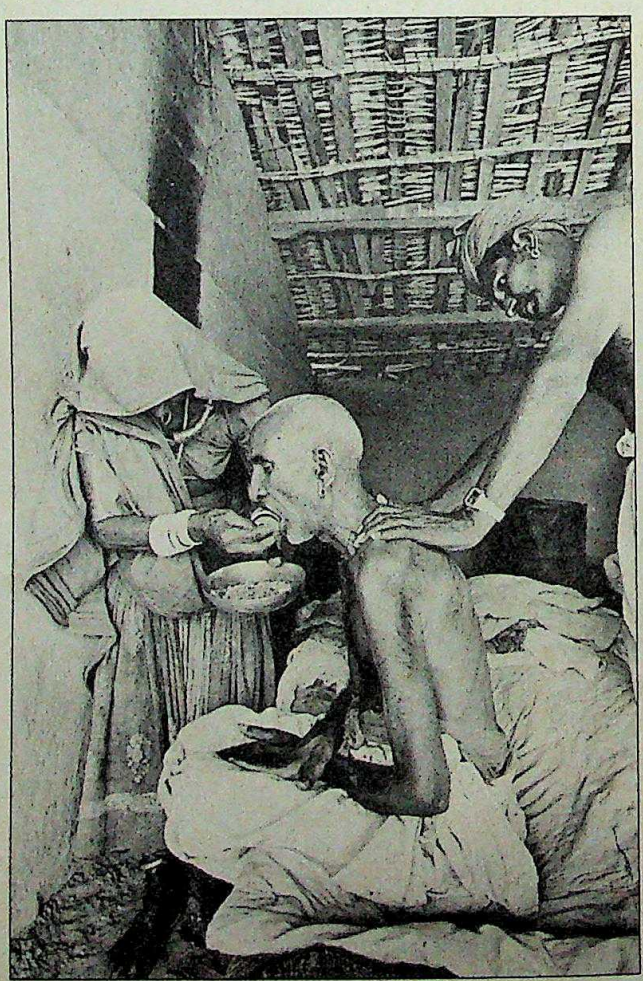
Fluoride is a natural element that gets into water through underground rocks. While it is a natural phenomenon, villagers suspect that in some areas it is aided by man. In these areas a series of mud check dams were constructed, and before long the fluoride content in the water rose. Said Dr Raghuveer Singh of the Jodhpur Medical College: "The sudden pressure of collected water has disturbed the balance of nature and today innocent villagers are paying for such projects."

Even if the Government decides to take immediate action now, it will take years to bring good water and health to the villages. An analysis of 5,000 water samples by the Defence Laboratory revealed that 91 per cent of the water was unfit for human consumption since it contained much more than the accepted limit of 500 ppm of dissolved solids, in some cases escalating up to 2,500 and 10,000 ppm. Some of the 6,000-odd affected villages are in the heart of the desert and just one pipeline for one village could cost a staggering amount.

The Defence Laboratory has developed a desalination and defluoridation kit, used mainly by soldiers in desert terrain. But it costs Rs 100 to create six litres of potable water, hardly the kind of expense that the indigent villagers can bear. The Government so far has chosen not to hear their soft cries for help. Said Jalore Chief Medical Health Officer Dr P.R. Parihar: "It is not a serious problem here. I have not come across any fluorosis cases." Just a few kilometres from his office, many crippled, helpless villagers are going to have to accept that clean, drinking water is not their birthright.

—RAMESH MENON in Barmer

Feeding a crippled elder



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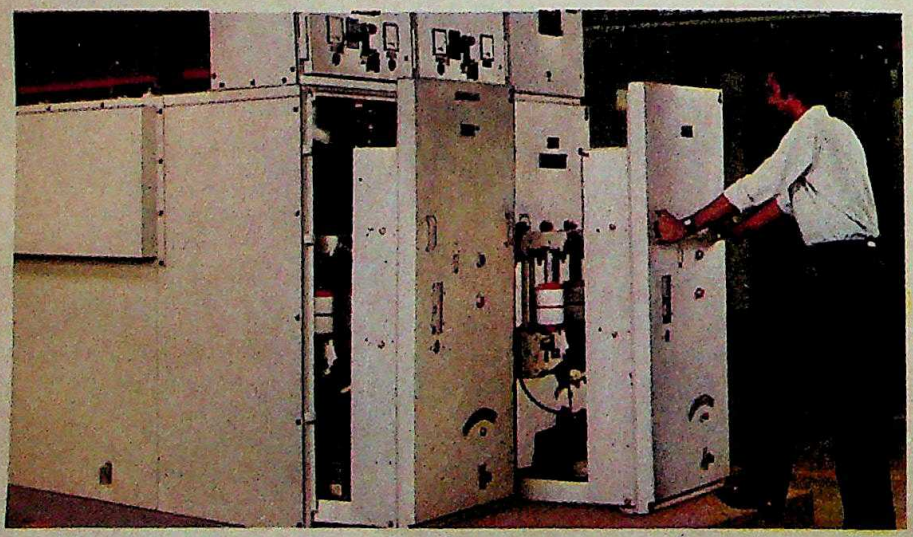

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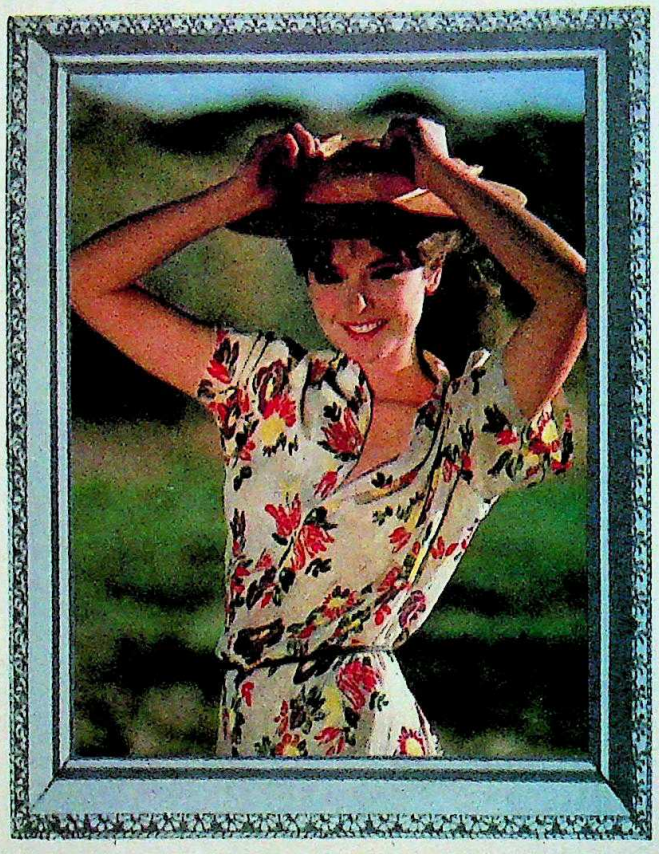
Weston color TV



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SPACE RESEARCH

The Cosmic Quest

FOR THE star-gazers it promises to generate much excitement. *Anuradha* may not be the sexy starlet with thundering thighs but when it launches into space nestled in the open bay of Spacelab 3 on board the space shuttle *Challenger* this fortnight it will be the first to eye the sky for an uninterrupted 90 hours to record the flow of low energy cosmic rays heading towards the earth. In this, the latest Indian experiment in search of the origin of cosmic rays, the special detector *Anuradha* is expected to gather vital information on the nature of cosmic radiation which, many cosmologists and particle physicists believe, may not only be responsible for the nature of the universe and the violent processes by which galaxies as well as individual stars and planetary systems evolve, but eventually the death of the universe.

The origin of cosmic rays—which are actually a very energetic radiation of fundamental particles, including protons of very high energy, travelling at speeds very close to that of light towards the earth—is not known with certainty. Some appear to emanate from the sun, but the phenomenon has continued to intrigue scientists since the Austrian Victor Hesse reported the discovery in 1912. The propensity of the particles to travel untold light years of space unimpeded makes cosmic ray studies both appealing and difficult. Scientists concerned with the evolution of the universe have developed a number of tools with which to explore the phenomenon ever since Hesse flew with balloon-borne instruments. Ground-based radio telescopes, balloon-borne sensors and a variety of trackers with the advent of satellite-borne detectors and equipment buried in deep mines have added new facets and knowledge on cosmic rays. The actual origin, however, remains a mystery.

Designed and developed jointly by scientists of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Bombay and the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) Ahmedabad, *Anuradha* is essentially a steel grey cylinder 53 cm tall, with a diameter of 48 cm, weighing 45 kg. It contains two stacks of hyper sensitive wafer-thin (one-fourth millimetre) discs of CR-39—the commercial name for allyl diglycol carbonate. Any cosmic particle passing through the stacks will leave its signature from which the identity, energy and time of arrival can be deciphered accurately. It will gather two kinds of data—one stored in the detector stacks and the other telemetered from the Spacelab 3 computer to the hub of activity at the Payload Operations Control Centre in Houston through a special telecommunications satellite. A combined analysis of the data will give the scientists information on the time and direction of each particle.

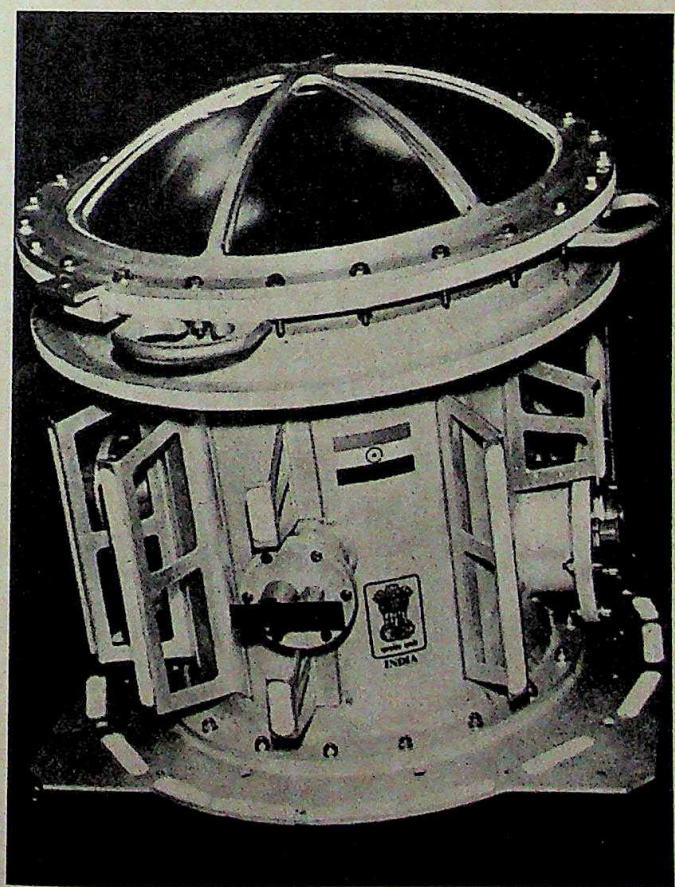
Says Professor Sukumar Biswas, the experiment's principal investigator and head of TIFR's Cosmic Ray and Space Physics group: "*Anuradha* represents both change and continuity in our cosmic rays studies. This continues our earlier work with a small size detector flown for 74 days on the exterior of the Skylab in 1973." This study had, for the first time, revealed information that the anomalous low energy cosmic ray particles have different characteristics as compared to those of high energy. The TIFR-PRL team concluded that low energy cosmic rays must be originating from sources and through processes distinctly different from those of high energy cosmic ray. The Skylab studies were further corroborated by the findings of the space probes Pioneer 10 and 11. The results prompted the TIFR-PRL team to accept an invitation for developing a space probe to take a free ride in the Spacelab.

For the Indian scientists a tricky task was to make *Anuradha* compatible with other Spacelab 3 passenger experiment. It had to be custom-built with special features to help the crew command this and other experiments simultaneously. The TIFR-PRL team and engineers of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay and the ISFRO Satellite Centre, Bangalore, took four years to shape *Anuradha*. Though originally scheduled for launch in May 1983, technical snags and other delays staggered the shuttle schedules to *Anuradha's* advantage. It will now be in flight when solar activity is close to its minimum, making it easier to record the low energy particle tracks. *Challenger* will be launched into an orbit of about 370 km above the earth and the advantage with *Anuradha* flying in Spacelab 3 is that it can be recycled like the laboratory and the spacecraft.

The findings of *Anuradha*, however, will not be finally known when the five-man team led by Biswas returns with data in mid-May. It will take almost a year to process and know the results of the last seven years' work on the Rs 50-lakh experiment. But as a young TIFR scientist said: "We are internationally recognised for our contribution to cosmic ray studies but major findings are never made in earthly time."

—AMARNATH K. MENON
in Bombay

Anuradha: eye on space



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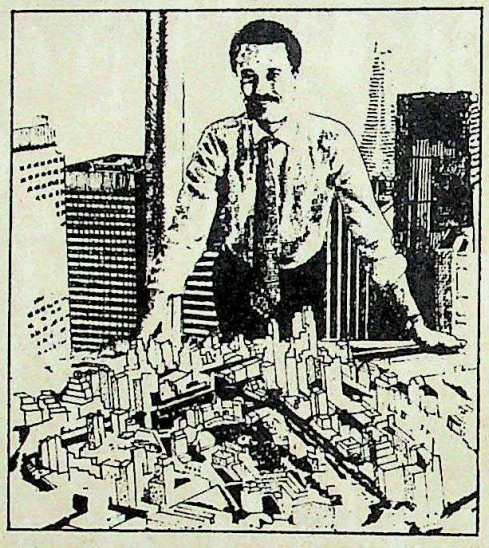

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MAYURI

A Profile in Courage

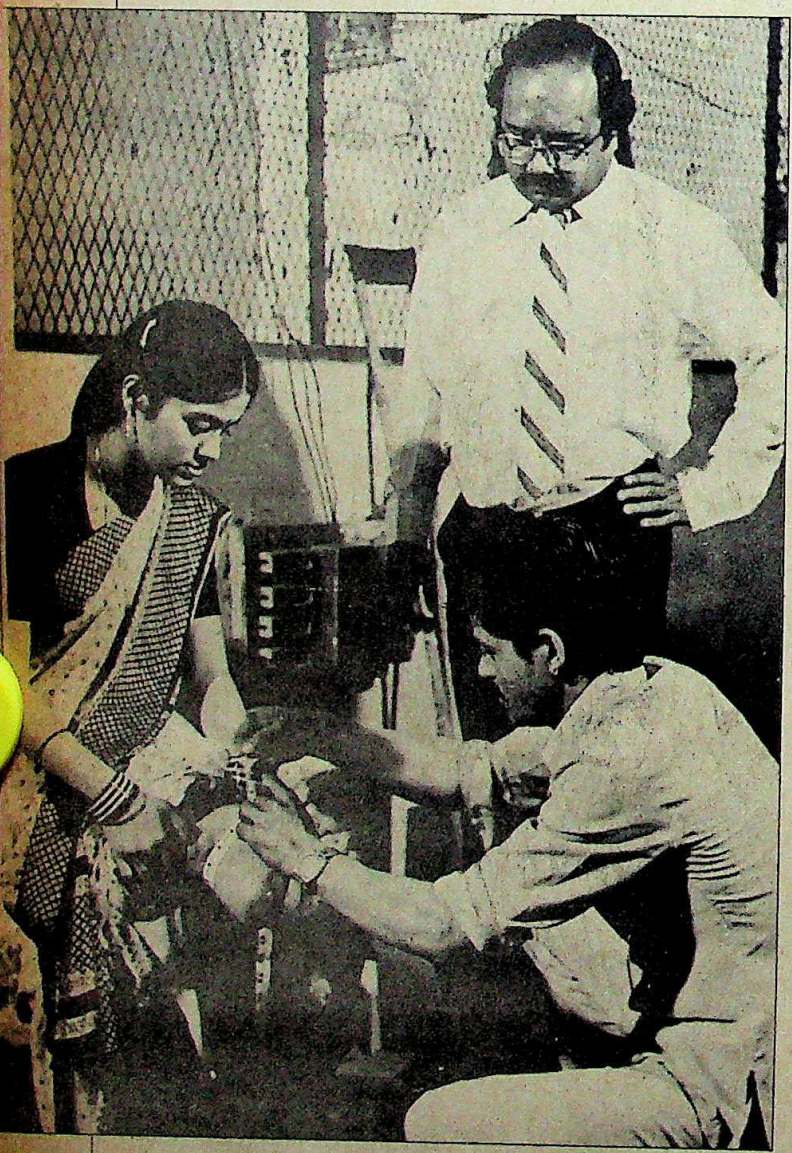
THERE is a Telugu film, *Mayuri* (dancer) that seems to have captivated the Andhra Pradesh moviegoing public like few others before it. Made by media moghul Ramoji Rao, the film is about a young paraplegic college girl's courageous battle to overcome her handicap and resume her tragically interrupted career as a Bharatanatyam dancer. The real reason for the film's surprising success, however, is that it is based on the true life story of the film's lead player, Sudha Chandran.

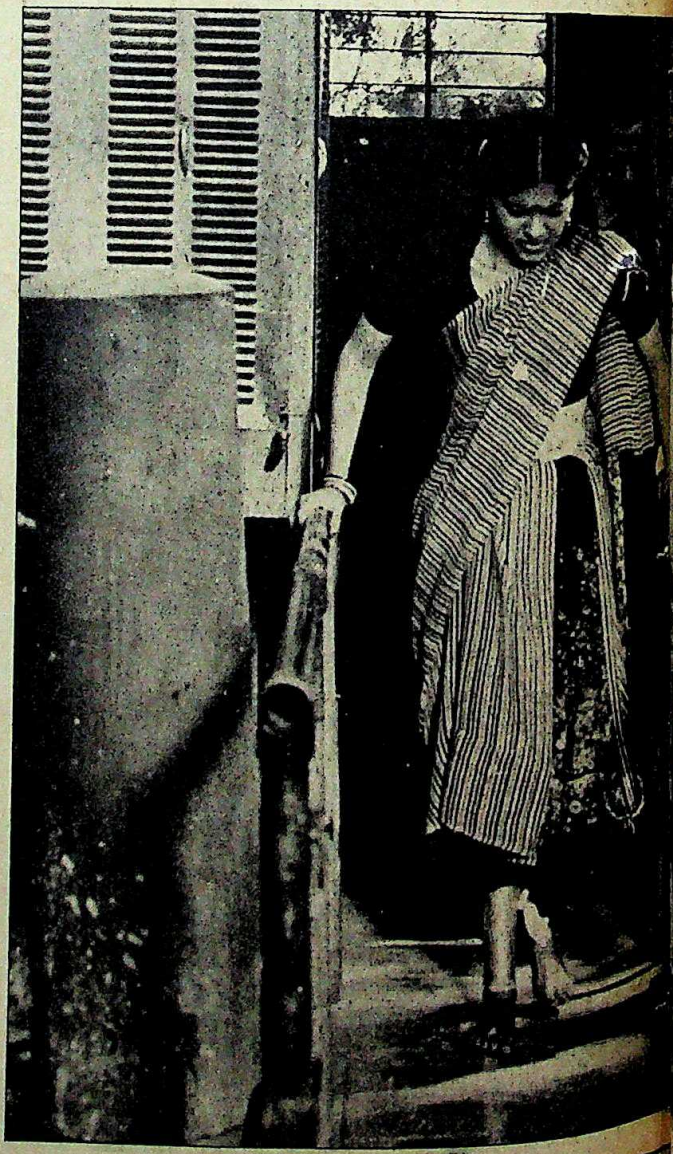
Even without the film's dramatic appeal, the Sudha Chandran story had already captured the popular public mind. Involved in a bus accident near Tiruchi in Tamil Nadu in May 1981 when she was barely 17, Sudha's feet were trapped under the seat and she suffered fractures of her right femur and left ankle. Unhygienic medical care at a local hospital compounded the injuries and when she was eventually shifted to Vijaya Hospital in Madras, gangrene had set in in the right leg. Faced with no other choice, the doctors amputated the leg below the knee.

At first, it seemed the young Bombay collegian's dancing career had come to a tragic end. But Sudha had other ideas. "I was determined to return to Bombay on two legs and not on crutches and dance again," she says. In her mind, however, she knew the impossibility of the task. Her doctors had already told her that even walking on an artificial limb would be a long and painful process.

Five months after the amputation, she returned to Bombay to resume her studies and start the slow and agonising process of physiotherapy. Her body had stiffened after lying in bed for over 20 weeks and hobbling around with a wooden leg with her back arched, she presented a pitiable sight. But her grit and determination only strengthened. While still recuperating in hospital, she had read about Magsaysay award winner Dr Pramod Karan Sethi and his widely-acclaimed 'Jaipur foot'. In end-1981, she wrote to Sethi who

Daring to dream, Sudha in *Mayuri* finds her feet, learns to walk and dances once more





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...gently invited her to Jaipur.

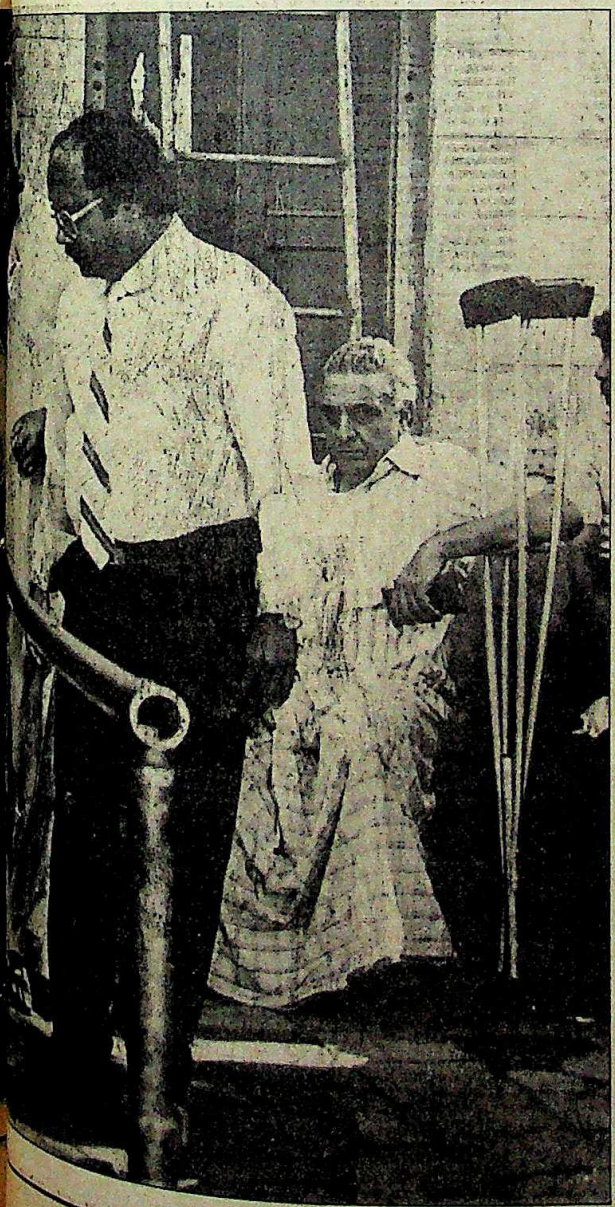
She arrived there confident that Se-...'s intention would allow her to walk ...rally again but what she really ...ed to know was whether she would ...ble to dance again. When she put the ...ction to Sethi with trepidation, he un-...atingly answered "yes". Recalls ...dha: "That three-letter word worked ...magic. At first I thought he was being ...le but when I went around the limb-...g and rehabilitation centre I realised ...was possible. My confidence grew when ...raftsman making the limbs jumped ...n from a height and showed me his ...s. They were both artificial."

...Sudha's case, Sethi had to modify ...normal 'Jaipur foot' to make it more ...ble for dancing and sudden shifts in ...body weight. The normal foot is made ...ordinary vulcanised rubber with a ...r of nylon cord. The section above the ankle is constructed with aluminium beaten into shape with a wooden mallet. For Sudha, Sethi and his craftsmen had to impart more spring into the limb.

Armed with new-found confidence, Sudha returned to take up where she had left off. But her dance guru, K.S. Ramaswamy Bhagavathar, was unnerved. "It was difficult to see her enduring the pain and the dancing made her bleed. But she had courage and determination," he recalls. On January 28 last year, 20 months after the amputation, Sudha's grit and courage were dramatically rewarded—she gave her first public performance. In a tribute to those who had helped her battle her way back to the stage, she gave a second charity performance to help raise funds for a new limb-fitting centre at Bombay's J.J. Hospital.

Today, Sudha runs her own dance school in Bombay while trying to improve her own technique. "The challenge is greater in learning while teaching," she says modestly. Her instant success in *Mayuri* has not affected her at all—she still remains the wide-eyed student but filled with a new resolve to inspire others with the story of her life. Not a day passes without the phone in her Vile Parle apartment bearing requests from callers in Andhra Pradesh asking her to dance or merely to speak to youth groups about her experiences. Tamil and Telugu publications have featured her on their covers and other film offers have poured in. But typically, Sudha says: "I had a horrifying experience but what the world fails to understand is that the handicapped need no sympathy, they need to be encouraged in whatever they do." Words of a wise one indeed—and one who has suffered and fought back.

—AMARNATH K. MENON



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FOOTBALL

Money Game

INDIAN football may seem to be at its nadir. But Indian footballers have never had it so good. Though their lack-lustre performances in the pre-World Cup matches against Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia lost India the opportunity to play for football's biggest prize, players like Krishanu Dey, Bikash Panji, Sudip Chatterjee and Biswajit Bhatacharjee are, ironically, the best-paid footballers the country has ever had. Calcutta's big three among football clubs—Mohun Bagan, Mohammedan Sporting and East Bengal—have reportedly staked about half a crore of rupees to grab as many of these "stars" as possible.

The irony is that not one paisa of all this money has been spent for the greater glory of the game or the country, only to further each club's efforts to become the local champion. Says the Secretary of the Indian Football Association (IFA) Pradyut Dutta: "The attitude of the big three clubs today unfortunately is to beat the others at any cost. Money, violence and politics have now entered Calcutta football." And the biggest spender was East Bengal which disbursed an estimated Rs 24 lakh, shelling out Rs 2.5 lakh to retain stopper Manoranjan Bhattacharya and between Rs 1.3 lakh and Rs 1.4 lakh to obtain striker Krishanu Dey and linkman Bikash Panji from arch-rival Mohun Bagan. East Bengal also managed to buy over Jamshid Nasirri from Mohammedan Sporting.

"Money, violence and politics have now entered Calcutta football."

PRADYUT DUTTA
secretary IFA

Mohun Bagan, on the other hand, could dish out only Rs 16 lakh and got star strikers Mihir Bose and Kartik Sett from East Bengal and Subir Sircar and Pradip Talukdar from Mohammedan Sporting. The poorest harvest was reaped by Mohammedan Sporting, which had only Rs 8 lakh to offer and not only lost a few players but managed to entice players only from Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the local club, Tollygunge Agragami. What is worse, by just trying to retain some of its better players Mohammedan Sporting is now deep in debt. At present it owes more than Rs 1 lakh to the IFA.

The two bigger clubs are not better off and have been forced to hike membership renewal fees. They are also planning to demand more for participation in national tournaments. "Don't quote me, but if many members do not renew their membership this year, we will be bankrupt," says a Mohammedan Sporting official. Surprising despite the money the players are still officially amateurs, an essential criterion for participating in the World Cup.

But so blatant has the auctioning of players become that this year club officials were carrying on negotiations while the players were still in training for the pre-World Cup matches. The chief coach of the Indian football team, Areen Ghosh, had bitterly complained that the club officials were disturbing the players' concentration while striking deals with them. His colleague Santo Mitra has deplored the lack of ethics among the players. With the club transfers and the big money being scheduled for just after the pre-World Cup matches, most of them naturally did not want to pull a muscle while playing for the country.

"The rules have to be amended," says the IFA's Dutta, "so that the transfers take place only in the lean month of December." Apart from this he is also planning to make it mandatory for a player to remain in one team for at least two years. "This will enable clubs to train and feed the players for the next season, something they do not do now since there is no guarantee the player will stay with them," explains Dutta.

But the Indian team's dismal recent performances and sordid monetary transactions have succeeded in opening a few official eyes, especially in West Bengal football. "Our only hope are the young, who can still learn to play a better game," says Dutta. Coaches and club and association officials, realising they can do little about the hardened world of upper division players, have now started moving to make the lowest division, the fifth, a nursery for nurturing potential talent. This might give the country a chance to see decent football.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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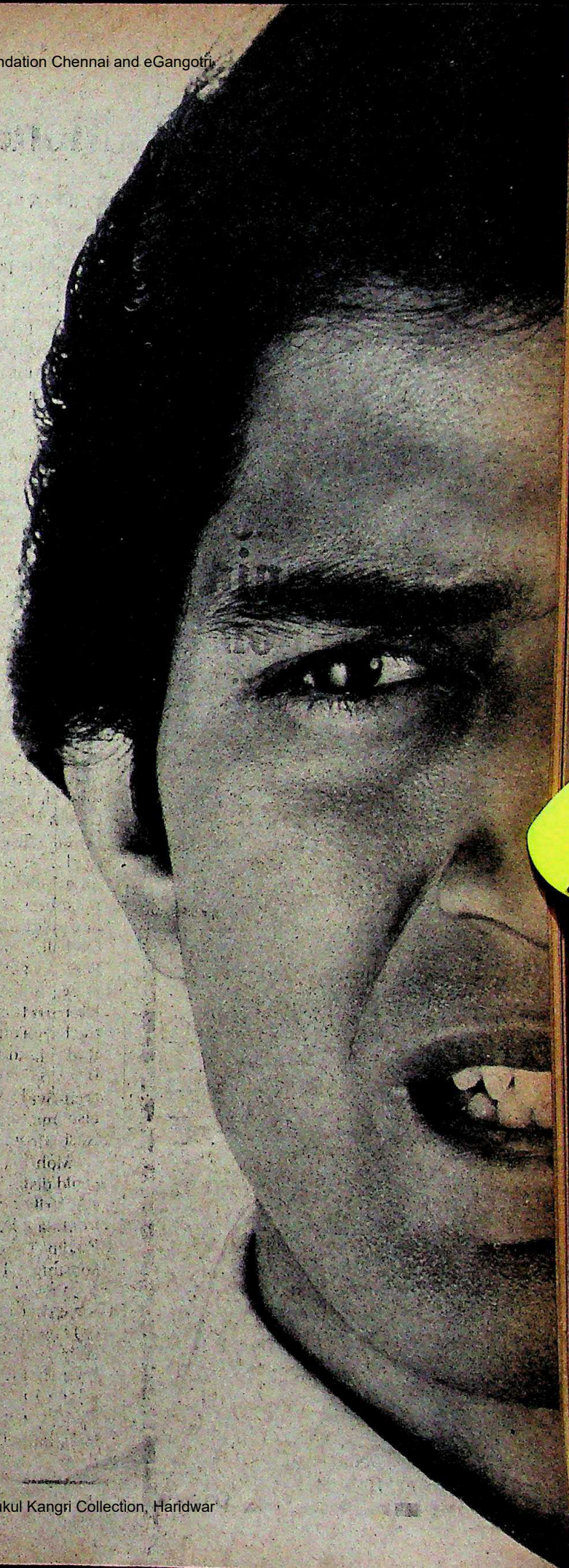
Jostling crowds, winding queues



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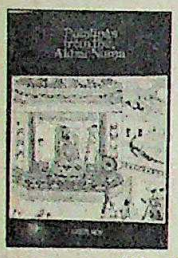
Historical Tapestry

PAINTINGS FROM THE AKBAR NAMA
BY GEETI SEN
Published by Lustre Press
(Price: Rs 295; Pages: 176)



THE *Akbar Nama* is among the major historical texts on the Indian past. Not only is it the chronicle of the reign of Akbar which would in itself lend it importance but it also reflects a large spectrum of the thought and activity of that time. The style is eulogistic but this has to be viewed as a genre in the historical biography of that period. Abu'l Fazl, the author and a contemporary at Akbar's court, relates the history of mankind from Adam to Akbar. This not only provides a chronology for the Mughals but also a perspective on Islamic historiography. The treatment of the reign of Akbar includes incidents which the king personally regarded as worth recording thus giving an insight into Akbar's view of his own life. The text also describes various aspects of government from a detailed consideration of revenues from the various provinces of the empire to food prices, wages, military organisation, and the imperial household. These sections have yielded data for analyses of Mughal economic history.

The illustrations to the biographical sections of the *Akbar Nama* were commissioned from the leading artists of the time some of whom were employed by the court. This is indicative of the patronage which the Mughal emperors extended to the art of book illustration and the superb styles of painting which resulted are a compliment to this patronage. Apart from their topical interest the illustrations included in this book present a remarkable perspective on miniature painting in the sixteenth century. The book is based on a manuscript from the collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Some of the paintings carry the imprint of the Persian style as in the exquisite composition of an interview between the royal emissary and the rebel, Bahadur Khan, painted by Farrukh Beg (Plate 37). Much more Indian in feeling is the superb depiction of the court with ambassadors from Badakshan and the Deccan. This painting resulted from the combined efforts of Miskina, Sarwan and Madhu, suggesting the appropriateness of referring to an atelier as the source of the painting rather than referring to the individual artist. Nevertheless a little more biographical information on the artists would have been of added interest.

An illustration from the *Akbar Nama*

The detailed study of such a manuscript has an art historical interest which is the substantial study of this book. The author draws attention to the significance of social history as well which she rightly feels can be derived from these paintings. However this aspect could have been investigated more fully. Social history would have required some comment on the various social groups depicted and the pictorial symbolisation of their relationships. Such an analysis would require some identification of the social identities of the groups depicted and a wide reference to other sources of the period which might authenticate the identification. The considerable detail in each illustration calls for a range of discussion on a large area of Mughal social life. In the picture illustrating the battle between two rival groups of *sanyasis* at Thanesar (Plates 42-45) one would have liked to know more about the Kurs and the Puris beyond the fact that the latter seem to have been Vaishnavites. Battles between *sanyasi* groups at places of pilgrimage for the establishing of an order of precedence were frequent, but the pictorial representation of these is rare. The very depiction of the royal hunt, where the deer seem to virtually leap out of the frame, brings to mind the question of why the cheetah has now become extinct in India.

The selection of paintings indicates the many facets of Akbar's interests apart from vividly recalling episodes from his life. The collection becomes the pictorial counterpart to the literary chronicle and inevitably one wonders whether it is substantially descriptive or an idealisation. The beauty of the paintings and their liveliness makes such an analysis both possible and pertinent. Geeti Sen's text is suggestive of these aspects but a fuller development of them would have been more satisfying. Nevertheless it makes a worthwhile book for the general reader and will, one hopes, encourage the more intellectually curious to turn to the *Akbar Nama* itself.

—ROMILA THAPAR

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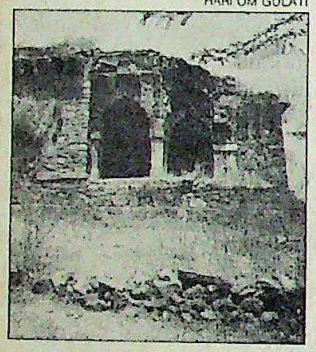
RAGHU RAI

HARI OM GULATI



Raza, Sakina, and the Begum; and (left) Malcha Mahal: station in life

◆ Notice those passengers who sleep and eat on railway platforms? Well, there's one family that has been sleeping, eating and living at the New Delhi railway station for well over 10 years—and they're not waiting for a train either. Her Highness **Begum Wilayat Mahal of Oudh**, along with her son Prince Ali Raza, daughter Princess Sakina, three servants, and 11 labradors, came on a train from Lucknow—where she had been ousted from her ancestral property—and stayed on at the station, simply because she had nowhere else to go. Home for her royal highness has been the verandah of a waiting room where she has no light, no fan and no bed to sleep in, although she has furnished it with her priceless Persian carpets. After having been a lady-in-waiting so long, the Begum has at last been allotted a home by the Government—Malcha Mahal. Malcha Mahal is really only a forgotten stump of a Delhi monument, overgrown with weeds and infested with lizards and bats. A real home for the Begum, it seems, is going to remain a castle in the air.

◆ At eight, he was too small to hold the guitar he wanted to learn to play. Instead **Jagdish Mistry** was handed a violin and today, at 22, the boy from Bombay has the distinction of being one of the few young violinists who have had the opportunity of training and playing with the master himself—Yehudi Menuhin. Last fortnight, it was Bach to basics in Bombay when Mistry—who lives in London—came home to play. "This is home," he said even though he admitted that one could not live off western music here; he plans to continue at the Guildhall School of Music in London where he is training. And what is Menuhin like? Oh, "grandfatherly and gentle," pat comes the answer.

Dimple and Rishi: fixed formula

◆ In 1974, everything turned Bobby: Bobby scooter-rickshaws, Bobby rubber chappals, Bobby haircutting salons. Roadside Romeos switched from "Hi baby" to "Hi Bobby". Now, 11 years later, the couple—**Dimple Kapadia** and **Rishi Kapoor**—who generated all that love in the air are going to have a go at it again in Ramesh Sippy's *Saagar*, slated to bring a wave of romance back to the grimy, violent world of contemporary cinema. To help them along, Sippy has created an entire fishing village on the shores of Marve beach complete with tavernas, churchyards, stray dogs and piglets—to film, "not a movie spectacle," according to Sippy, "but an intimate love story". *Saagar* should also give Dimple the chance to tide over her previous flops. The spell has been cast. But will the magic work?

Mistry: coming home

◆ Renu looks glum, Raja looks bored and Friday evenings are just not the same anymore. Last month, when **Shafi Inamdar**—hero of television's most popular sitcom *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* left the confines of the idiot box for the bigger and more lucrative world of big screen cinema, he left behind a vacuum that even his mountainous chachi from Meerut (Farida Jalal) has not been able to fill. However, Shafi, whose presence on the national network had grown as comfortable as an old shoe, insists that his family has not broken up and that he's "only temporarily discontinued acting in the show". He has gone with the whim, true, but he promises to return. In the meanwhile, he also needs time off to make sure that his real family does not break up. "I have a wife too, you know."

SUNDAY OBSERVER

Inamdar: temporary absence

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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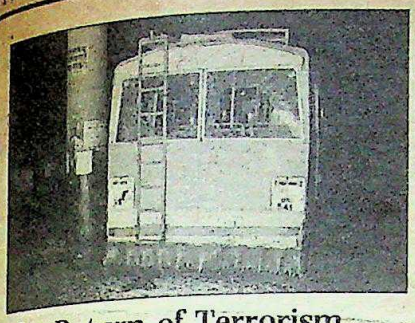

The Return of Terrorism

After months of relative inactivity, the spectre of Sikh terrorism was made visible again last fortnight. The bomb blasts that rocked parts of north India also exposed the hollow core of Akali unity and placed a dangerous question mark over the future of the Punjab crisis.

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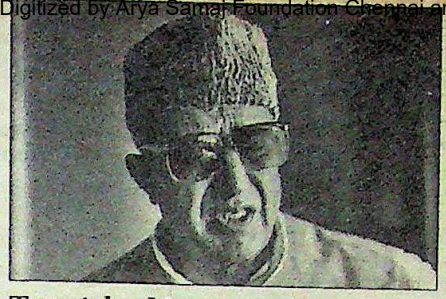

Tarnished Image

The G.M. Shah Government in Jammu & Kashmir faces serious charges of corruption and nepotism, detailed in damning memorandums sent to the Central Government recently. The memorandums list several cases against Shah and members of his ministry.

INVESTIGATION 76

Death of a Jet-setter

The suicide of Sayajirao Pratapsinh Gaekwad, a scion of the erstwhile Baroda royal family, on the French Riviera shocked the international jet set whose company he frequented. But his death also shed light on his bizarre life-style.

GLOBE-TROTTING 89

Trading in Blood

With the demand for blood in hospitals far exceeding supply, an organised and macabre racket involving blood banks and exploited donors is flourishing unchecked. More serious is the fact that in many cases the blood is diseased.

HEALTH 92

A Crucial Crossroads

Pakistan's march away from military rule continues haltingly and the forthcoming budget session of the national assembly will be crucial. Alongside, suspicion continues to grow in India that Pakistan is running camps for Sikh terrorists.

NEIGHBOURS 106

Under a Cloud

The moratorium placed on three private banks last fortnight plunged the banking industry into its biggest crisis in over two decades, and pointed to the deep rot undermining the stability of Indian banks while sapping confidence in other private banks.

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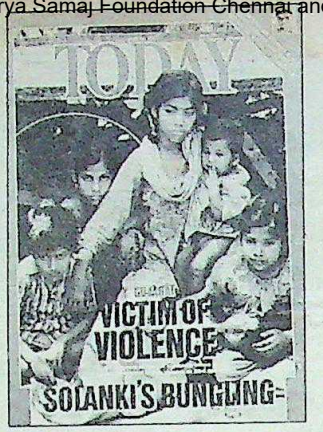

SHEER INDIFFERENCE

The children featured on the cover of your magazine will never smile again. And reading the report ('State of Siege', May 15) one wondered whether one was in India or Sri Lanka. This leads to another thought: how can our leaders think of mediating in Sri Lanka when their own house needs to be put in order?

What sort of democratic system is this that allows those responsible for carnage and violence to remain in power? If there is an election in the near future, one can confidently predict that the ruling party will be routed for the simple reason that it really makes no difference who rules: the law and order situation is allowed to go out of control.

Bangalore A. BRITO

■ Police excesses following the anti-reservation agitation have probably touched an all-time high. More shocking was the the Government's attitude. Gujarat is like a chess board in which the Government and the opposition are making pawns of the people, especially those of Ahmedabad. But these pawns are not lifeless and if the power game continues, democracy will be in danger. Instead of indulging in cheap tricks, our veteran leaders and politicians should try to live up to their promises made so generously at election time.

Satna (MP) JAIDEEP MITTRA

■ The reservation policy is a purely vote-catching exercise that is causing irreparable damage to a society badly in need of integration. It is obvious that in our supposedly democratic society, university places and government jobs should be obtained purely on merit. Certainly there are great cultural and "environmental" differences between the downtrodden communities and the rest of society but these can be nullified by economic aid given according to economic status and not according to caste.

Many Indians are now suffering because they were not born Harijans!

London SHILPA SAMANT

■ Had there been an opposition government in Gujarat, the Centre would not have hesitated in clamping President's rule. If Solanki is dismissed at this juncture, the opposition parties would capture another state when elections are eventually declared. The Congress(I) does not want to create another Andhra Pradesh. Rajiv Gandhi isn't all that "clean". As for Solanki, he has neither shame nor conscience when he declares "I will stay on."

Madras SUNDAR SRINIVASAN

■ The dictum "Hear no evil, speak no evil and see no evil" has one loophole. The clause "Do no evil" is missing. Independent India has spawned a generation of politicians who "do evil" and then refuse to see, hear, or speak of the evil results.

Abysmal poverty and illiteracy have given them the means to bleed India to death. They can come to power without doing anything for the people. They specialise in giving away things that were never theirs. They divided Indians into separate 'vote banks' and gave them religious fanaticism, communal hatred, linguistic fervour and caste privileges over the aspirations, sweat and blood of other equally unfortunate Indians.

The Akalis are now trying to consolidate the 'Sikh vote bank' at the expense of the nation. The Solanki Government got elected on the 'reservation vote bank'. Janardhan Poojari fed bank money to his vote bank. Devraj Urs had donated somebody else's land to his vote banks in Karnataka. The list of "evil-doers" with lofty ideals is endless.

It is high time some real benefits like drinking water and electricity to all villages, free education and books to the backward classes and rural employment opportunities are provided. The people are sick of politicians of all hues. Ahmedabad is only the tip of the iceberg.

Belgaum P.R. SHETTY

■ The anti-reservation stir is completely justified. Backwardness does not come with caste alone, backward people are there in all castes. Those belonging to the so-called backward classes are given many amenities, apart from reservations. Those belonging to the so-called forward castes are opposed only to reservations because these are made at the cost of their own interests.

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The backward classes have been given special amenities for decades now. But if all this has not brought even one of those people forward, what is the use of these concessions? And if our political leaders are so determined to implement the reservations policy, why don't they reserve the posts of president, prime minister, and chief ministers as well? If these are too important for politicians to be reserved, then college seats, jobs and promotions are just as or even more important for the common man.

It is more relevant for our government to try and destroy the very concept of the caste system. It can make a start in this direction by encouraging inter-caste marriages and taking other such measures.

Bangalore N.B.S. REDDY

QUEER LOGIC

Having minted enough money and at age 56, Kishore Kumar ('The Last Encore', May 15) says show business does not suit him. He recorded over 300 songs last year with a reported fee of Rs 35,000 per song—yet he grudges paying income-tax. A funny man nobody understands or appreciates. While he holds that the industry is full of shopkeepers out to make money, not art, one wonders if he is not one of them. What has he done for the sake of art?

Hassan O.P. RAMAN

BALL GAME

In the cover story 'The Turning Point' (April 30) you are right in saying that the Centre by conceding the demand for an inquiry into the Delhi riots after Mrs Gandhi's assassination has clearly put the ball back in the Akali court. In my opinion, the battle between the Government and the Akalis—with the Government giving gallantry awards to Operation Bluestar soldiers and yielding to an inquiry only on the threat of an agitation; and the Akali leader, Harchand Singh Longowal publicly glorifying Mrs Gandhi's assassins, and yielding to the pressure of the extremists—is a very immature manner of handling the situation.

Jabalpur AJIT HIVALE

■ The Government has shown the right approach in its bid to solve the Punjab tangle by making the recent announcement, and now much depends on the Akalis. The prospect of elections in Punjab in fact seems to be the main obstacle to a settlement.

Hazaribagh Bihar SANJAY ABHISHEK

■ The Akali leaders should stop making provocative statements and instead reciprocate the Centre's gesture. Rhetoric will certainly not take them anywhere, it will only complicate matters. In this context, Governor Arjun Singh's statement that "any confrontationist approach is not only harmful to the country as a whole but also to this prosperous state of Punjab" is valid and should be understood in the right spirit.

Madras A. SESHAGIRI RAO

WISE ONE

Jathedar Harcharan Singh Mahalon personifies reason and wisdom ('They were no Heroes', April 30). May his tribe increase. On the other hand, Rajiv Gandhi's recent statement about helping only states with Congress(I) governments indicates a lack of reason and wisdom.

Bangalore VINOD KUMAR B.

■ Thank you for the interview with Giani Harcharan Singh Mahalon. Such interviews make our country stronger and more secular. Akalis in their craze for power have forgotten the noble principles of Sikhism. They will have to pay for this.

Bombay JAGJIT P. SINGH

ABSURD REMARKS

Apropos of your Comment ('Peace Offering', April 30) the initiative taken by the Government is laudable. But what the Akali leaders are doing may once again open wounds that were just starting to heal. Statements suggesting reconstruction of the Akal Takht only reveal the callous selfishness and absurdity of the released Akali leaders. The Akal Takht is a holy shrine, not a child's toyhouse to be constructed, broken down and reconstructed.

Jalandhar RITU MALHOTRA

LETTING LIVE

'Is Calcutta Dying?' (April 30) was revealing. Calcutta has been moribund now for many years and Rajiv Gandhi's statement only made the country more aware of this bitter truth. Instead of viewing the statement as a criticism of their city, Calcuttans should be happy that there is atleast someone at the Centre who spared a thought for Calcutta and the miserable plight it is in.

Chandigarh ARINDAM DUTTA

■ The article portrays a one-sided picture with some stray photographs taken in and around Calcutta thrown in. After the partition, Calcutta has had to bear the brunt of a vast influx of refugees from erstwhile East Bengal. Besides, people from different states, especially in the east, come to this city in search of jobs and Calcutta, despite her teeming numbers, doesn't refuse them. After all, live and let live goes the proverb. There has been no attempt to plan a constructive revival of this city. Arguments that there has been no proper planning for this and counter-arguments only serve to hinder the development of the city. It is high time a positive effort was made in the right direction.

Hindmotor, West Bengal KANAD GHOSH RAY

■ The photofeature was excellent —thanks Raghu Rai for snapping the bitter facts of life. But he should have photographed Chowringhee area during peak hours (for traffic jams), during the monsoon (for the poor drainage system), and during rush hour when buses, trams and trains go packed beyond belief (for the population explosion). All these are daily bread for the average Calcuttan.

Needless to add, Calcutta is still the cheapest city in the world where even a person earning a meagre Rs 200 a month can lead some kind of a life. Besides, the glorious past of this city and her people can never be forgotten. Instead of only blaming each other, the Central and state governments should come together to restore Calcutta to her former splendour.

Digboi DINESH KUMAR CHOUDHURY

FREE WILL

In his lamentations over the sad state he expects India to be in when the new age dawns in the year 2000, Jay Dubashi ('India 2000 AD', April 30) makes invidious comparisons with China. The progress of China has been remarkable indeed, but China is a totalitarian state which can mobilise its masses to carry out state i.e. party policy at any and all times. And if you are Chinese and don't like that policy you have only to speak out to find out what totalitarianism is.

India as a democracy is committed to freedom as a vital ingredient in the life of each citizen. So it is torn by a hundred conflicting pressures. Lincoln stated the basic dilemma of all free people: "How can a state be strong enough to maintain itself yet not so strong as to crush the liberties of its people?" China is one example for the third world to emulate, in our time. India is another. Everyone is free to choose.

Peddapuram (AP) GORDON STEVENS

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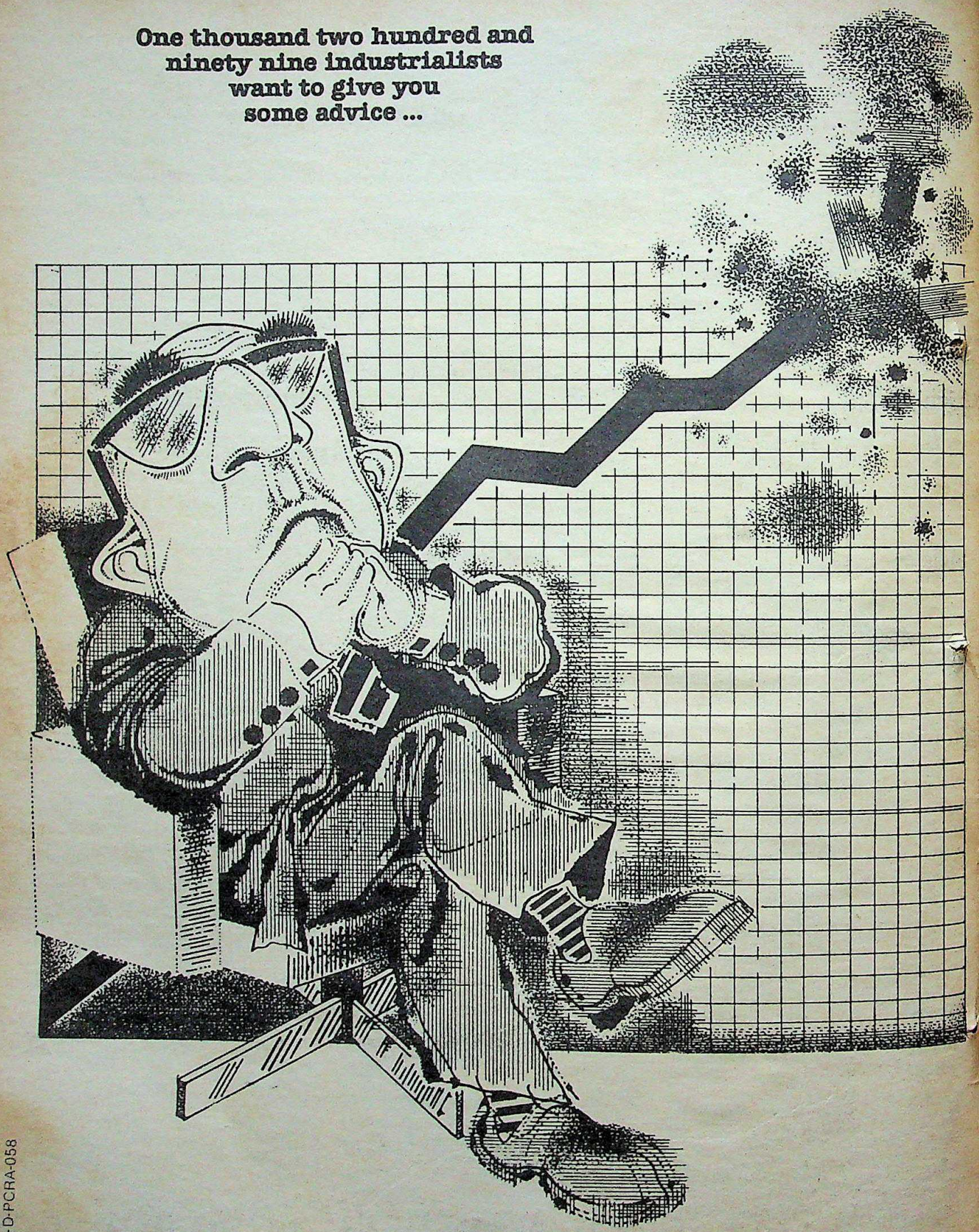
One thousand two hundred and ninety nine industrialists want to give you some advice ...



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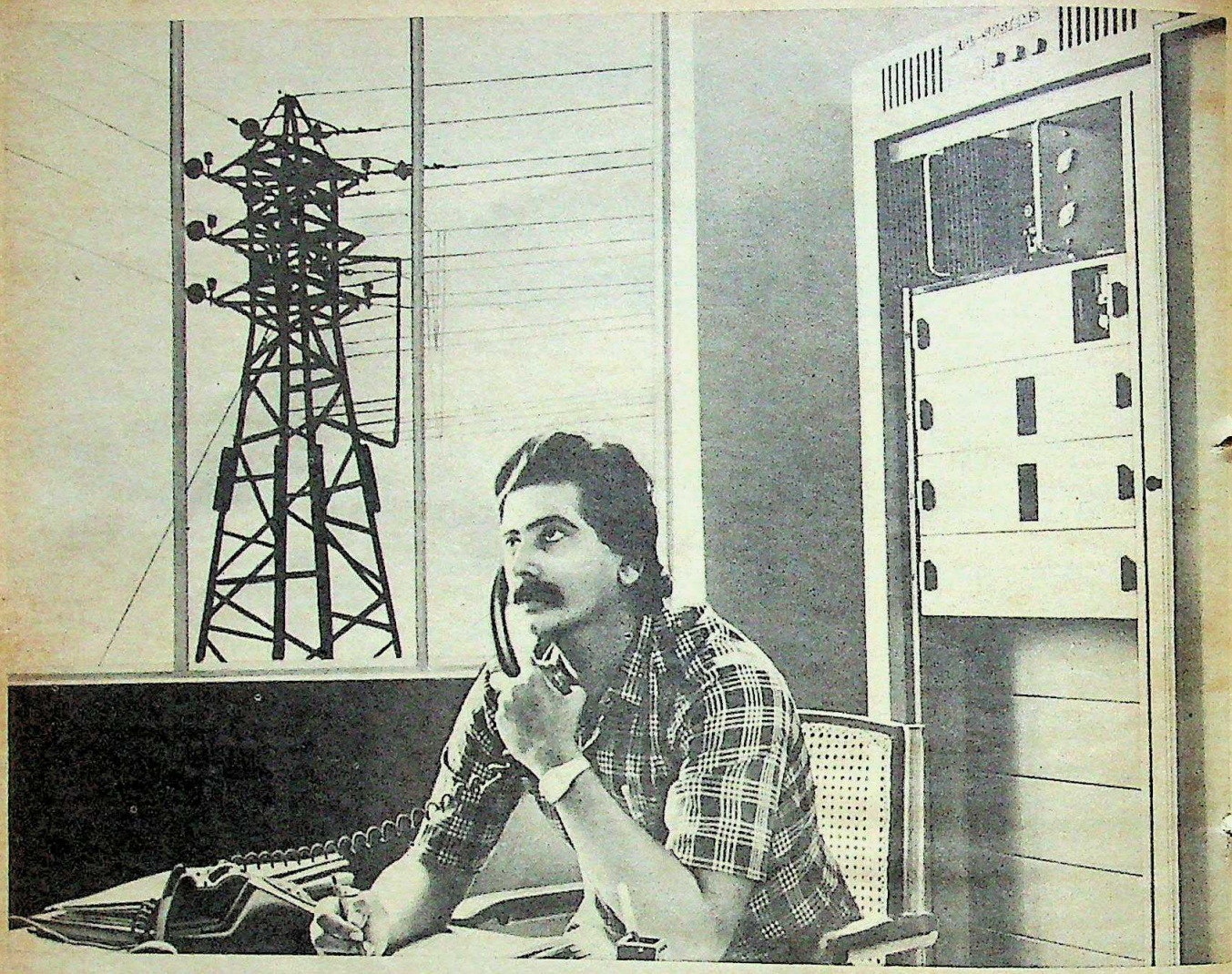

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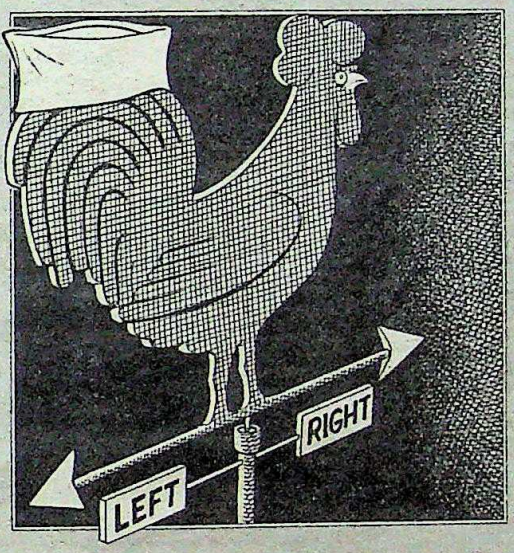
Doublespeak

IF GEORGE Orwell had been around, he'd probably be chuckling at the recent jamboree of the Congress Party in Delhi's Talkatora Stadium. The spectacle of the ruling party embroiling itself in a largely semantic debate over whether or not it must in its resolutions endorse socialism, the public sector and all that, was a typical example of the doublespeak that Orwell long ago warned against. But no one in the Congress(I) seems to have paid him the least heed: the redrafted resolution was a classic example of the typical, dubious triumph of oldspeak over newspeak and confusion over clarity.

Unfortunately, however trite the language of the debate, it is no laughing matter. For it reveals an unwillingness to face facts and an all too ready recourse to shibboleths and mantras. If Congressmen persist with their mistaken impression that the party's clichéd slogans are the touchstone of its ideology, they will be unable to move with the times, to recognise the changing world for what it is, and participate with success in the modernisation of this ancient land.



It is all very well to swear by socialism, to swear by the public sector and by the industrial policy resolution of 1956. But such loyalty to these slogans ignores some very basic points. First, in the last three decades, enough crimes have been committed from the shelter of these slogans to make them meaningless. Was Mrs Gandhi's nationalisation wave of the early 1970s any more socialist than her subsequent denationalisation and liberalisation measures? Was the stranglehold of the permit raj a better interpretation of Nehru's ideas as expressed in the 1956 resolution than the relative freedom he himself gave the private sector in the 1950s?

Second, with these slogans in command, Indian industry and economy have attained a certain maturity, a not unimpressive rate of growth. But they have outlived their usefulness, and for the last few years they have become counter-productive, restraining rather than regulating, keeping on an unnecessary leash the enormous productive forces that are raring to go. The policies of old need to be looked at critically. The public sector has served a vital function: it has created a basic infrastructure, provided key raw materials and given the economy industrial muscle. But today it is largely unprofitable and inefficient, and too much of it is an unacceptable drain on scarce public resources. Its role and direction deserve to be critically reassessed.

Similarly socialism. That much abused word, which found its way into the Constitution only at the end of the third decade of Independence, has for a long time been nothing more than a fig-leaf. In truth, India has never been socialist unless socialism consists merely of having a large public sector and controls, and an unimpressive net of welfare measures which pale before what really socialist countries have and aren't even a patch on what out-and-out capitalist countries have put together.

And third, there is no evidence that the Government in office wants to bend in the direction dictated by the economic resolution adopted by the AICC(I) session. In his interviews, Prime Minister Gandhi has outlined an economic approach which is anything but socialist. His emphasis on modernisation and letting people get on with the job underlies all the policy initiatives the new Government has taken —in electronics, in computers, foreign trade and, of course, the budget. The entire thrust of the new Government has been towards liberalisation, efficiency, more production, better distribution.

Why, then, this apparent backtracking? Party resolutions have in the past seldom meant very much; they don't usually work their way into policies and are generally routine obeisance to the ruling ideological deity. What has probably happened is that in the wake of the Congress(I)'s electoral defeats in recent by-elections, a large enough section of the party felt it necessary to fight the unwelcome label it seems to have been stuck with of being a party for the rich and no longer for the poor.

It is a myth that the Indian electorate is taken in by words and slogans unless they correspond to its own perceptions of the reality. And, the reality is that the Congress(I) won power not because it was seen to be for the poor but because it was the only party with a leader capable of forming a stable government in the unique circumstances of the last election.

If anything, the party's nervousness reveals a lack of self-confidence. Nobody expects the new policies to have immediate results, but it would be a grave mistake not to give them enough time to run their course. And the answer to these labels doesn't lie in word-play in resolutions. It lies in down-to-earth action: in keeping prices in check, in unearthing black money, in punishing the crooked however wealthy or well-connected, and in rewarding the honest, particularly those who toil long and hard for a pittance. Economic resolutions can't feed, clothe and house the poor; only greater production, better distribution and judicious anti-poverty programmes can do that job.

If the Congress(I) is really worried about popular perceptions of its ideology, it can do no better than to pursue its policies—not resolutions—with vigour, though keeping an eye out for pitfalls. And if it believes in the policies that it has announced in the last few months then it must stand up and be counted instead. Otherwise it will not be able to play its due part in delivering the goods.

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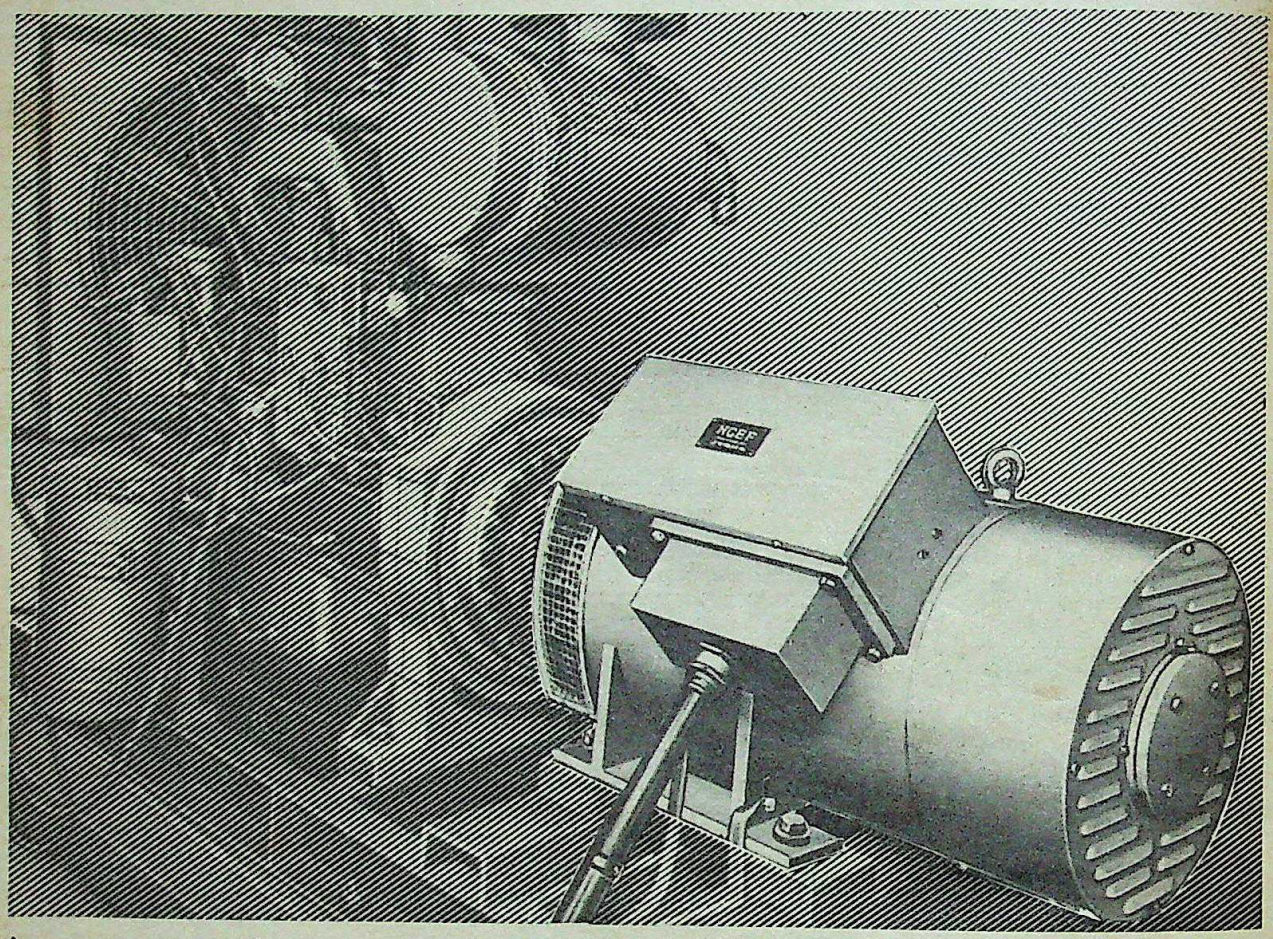

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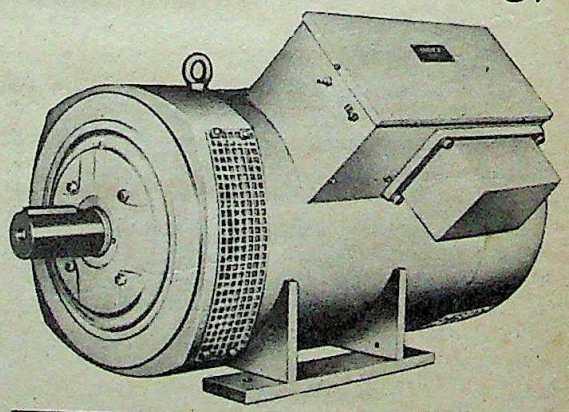

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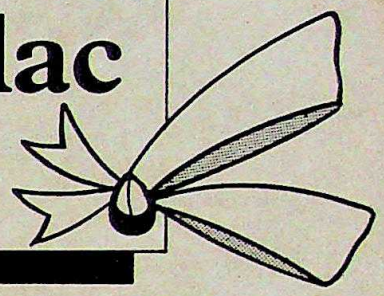

India is potentially a colossus. The citizen have great faith in the future of the Country, but past experiences have left us quite disillusioned. Many have bright and original ideas to solve the problems but there seems no way to get these across.

The new government has suddenly infused great hopes, but there are yet no signs of great happenings. Unless quick decisions are taken and implemented, much will remain a pious hope only.

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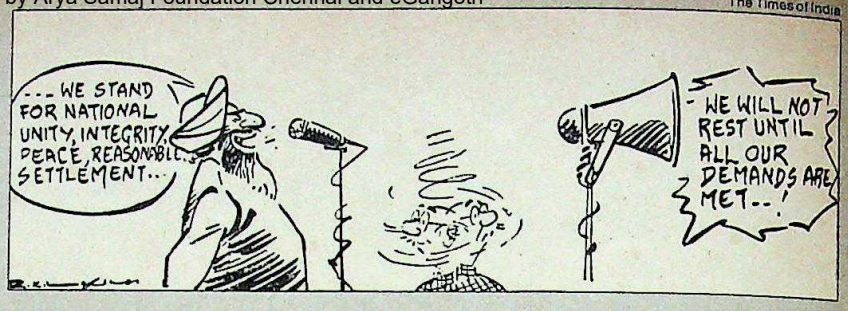

● *Who hasn't made a house? Are all the 22 chief ministers houseless? Mine is a kitchen compared to theirs.*

■ NAR BAHADUR BHANDARI in *The Herald Review*

● *I must confess that I did a disservice to the nation by questioning Farooq Abdullah's patriotism... It was a blatant lie said in a moment of anger.*

■ TARIQ ABDULLAH in *Sunday*

● *There is no use comparing me with NTR who has a different halo around him—that of a cine artiste. I am just a social reformist. Social reformists don't have a halo.*

■ BAL THACKERAY in *Bombay*

● *Let me make it clear that if there are differences between Dada and the Central leadership, I stand by the high command and will go by their wishes.*

■ SHALINITAI PATIL in *The Sunday Observer*

● *Rajiv Gandhi said that the earth shakes when a big tree falls. Surprisingly the earth only shook in Congress(I) held states and not anywhere else.*

■ LT-GENERAL (RETD) J.S. AURORA in *Probe India*

● *No people in the world are as self-righteous and sanctimonious as Tamilian Brahmins. The only way the likes of M.G. Ramachandran and Karunanidhi can cope with them is by wearing dark glasses.*

■ KHUSHWANT SINGH in *Sunday*

● *One paper said I met him (Rajiv), another said I didn't. Let them contradict each other. It is better if people think I'm out. I like to keep a low profile.*

■ SWRAJ PAUL in *Imprint*

● *The moment I find it impossible to find an academic way to resolve an issue, I'll quit—for policing a campus is not my cup of tea.*

■ MOONIS RAZA, vice-chancellor, Delhi University in *Patriot*

● *My opponents are not bothered about the interests of the players: for them the Indian Hockey Federation presidentship is just a social status symbol. I am going to revive hockey.*

■ ASLAM SHER KHAN, former Olympic player quoted in *The Telegraph*

● *If ever I happen to see a box of gold, I would faint.*

■ SUKUR NARAIN BAKHIA in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *This life of mine is a hit... when the history of Indian cinema is written, I will definitely be mentioned in it.*

■ MITHUN CHAKRABORTY in *Stardust*

● *I am a very small person... I have a small mind.*

■ JAYA BACHCHAN in *Eve's Weekly*

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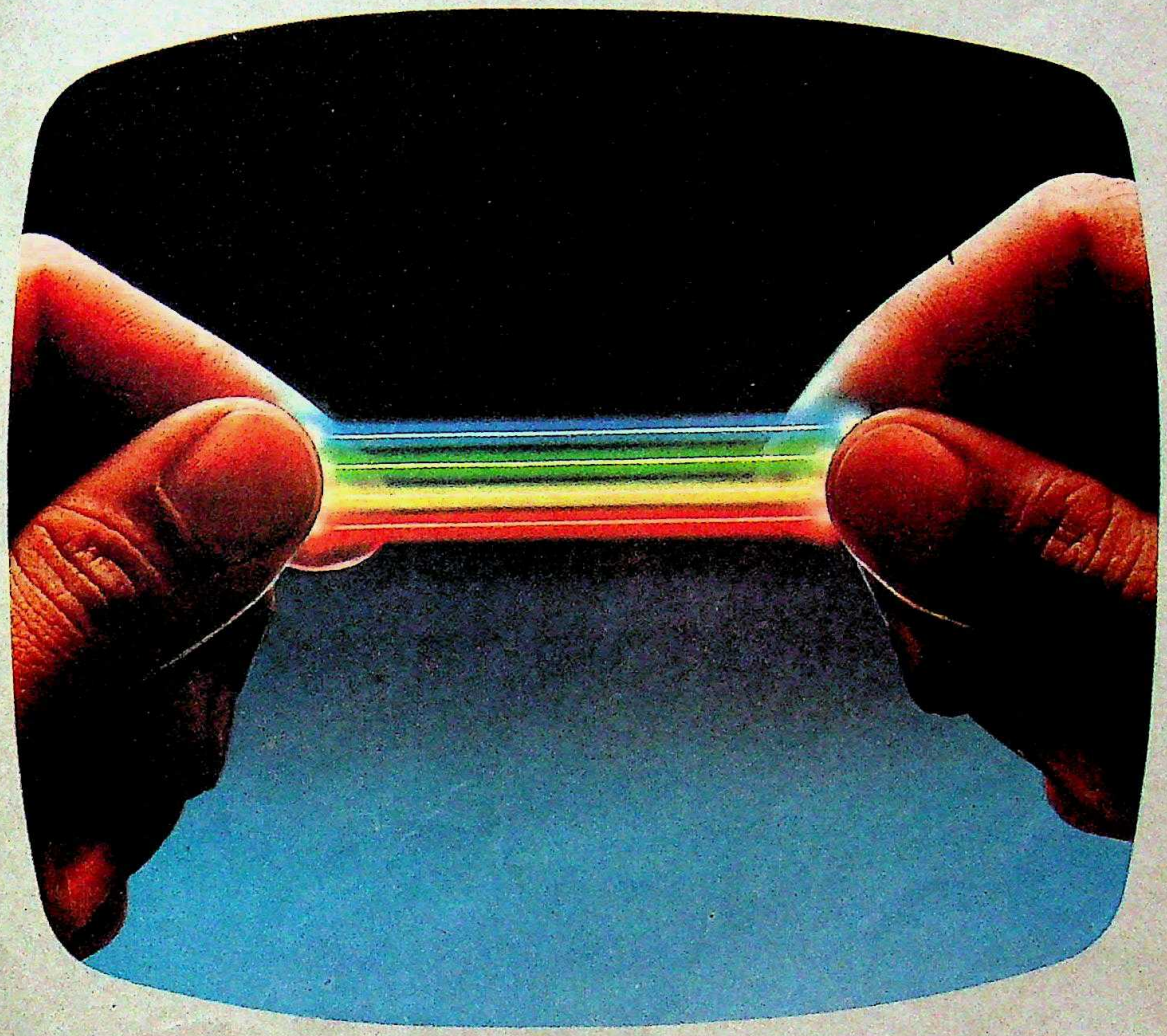

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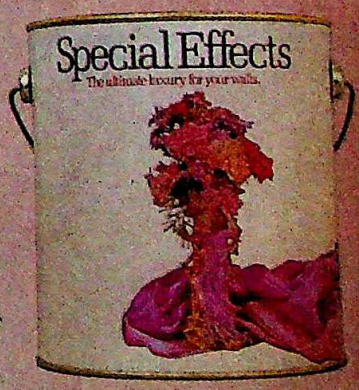

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GOLD LABEL
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NUTS AND BOLTS

■ New cars are all the rage these days and the Maruti promises to be the forerunner of a breed of India-made runabouts. However, Indians have lost none of their craze for imported glitter on wheels, as was evident in a customs case recently. Two brothers thought up an ingenious scheme. They went abroad and bought three cars of a famous make. The cars were then taken apart abroad, nut by nut and bolt by bolt, and the pieces so obtained placed in large crates stencilled 'Spare Parts' and loaded onto a ship bound for India. The papers were deliberately fudged and when the crates arrived in India the customs immediately confiscated them.

Some months later, when the confiscated 'Spare Parts' were put up for auction, the brothers were present with their bid and carted the whole lot away to a secluded garage. Two weeks and lots of greasy elbows later the cars had been put together again and were on the road, having been sold to proud buyers. It was only when the transport authority discovered that the cars had never officially been imported into India that the brothers and their do-it-yourself kit were taken into custody. Talk of Indian ingenuity.

MARBLE BUST

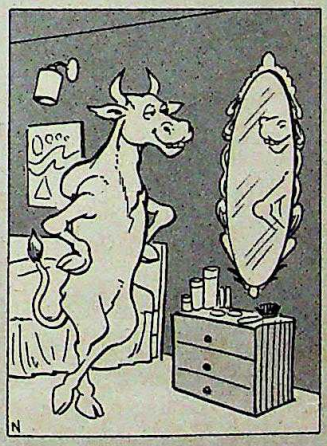
■ It was Lord Elgin who, by taking a lot of marbles from Greece, raised an international controversy over the right of a country to preserve its heritage, a controversy made considerably more interesting when Melina Mercouri added her bit of spice to the demand. A man we shall call Suraj is no Lord Elgin and a commemorative stone no Elgin marble, but the principle's the same.

Not that Suraj is a man of principle. Had he been he wouldn't have turned up with a cart on a south Delhi road and started digging up two blocks of marble placed there in memory of Nasser of Egypt. The slabs were embedded in brickwork and Suraj went to considerable trouble removing and hefting the stones onto his cart.

However, rickety wooden carts are not meant to carry solid marble. The Egyptians knew this and used the backs of slaves when they built the pyramids, and Suraj's cart collapsed. One of the blocks crashed down and broke. To cap it all, a passer-by noticed what he was up to and told the police who are now trying to find out why Suraj wanted the marble slabs in the first place.

BULL DOZING

■ Bulls have a heartening do or die air about them and the fellow who walked into Laxmi Narain's house in Palam village in Delhi was quite out of the ordinary. While Narain and the rest of the family were out, the large creature coolly strolled into the house, took a constitutional around its four rooms, and then made for the fresh air of the terrace.



What goes up must come down but that rule doesn't apply to bulls and this one found himself stranded on the terrace all dressed up and nowhere to go. Narain came back and found he had a problem. Efforts to coax the bull down did not succeed and it spent the entire Sunday contemplating the stars. The next morning, after brushing his teeth, about which he is very particular, Narain called the fire brigade.

Meanwhile, a doctor gave the bull sedatives and when the firemen and an army of villagers got to it, it was slumbering babefully. Its feet were tied with rope and Operation Bullstar began with dozens of sweaty villagers risking hernias trying to swing the bull to the ground. It wasn't easy but then nothing ever is and finally the bull was back on the grass, its eyes still tightly shut as it dreamed of china shops.

SLIGHT BLIGHT

■ Gold is out of reach and silver too, it seems, has vanished from the market. So what are the poor, deprived shopkeepers to do? One innovative merchant in the short-changed town of Akberpur devised his own unique method of coping with the tragic loss. Instead of waiting hours at banks for small change, he decided to stock up on Nirodhs instead. So much easier to get than a 25 paisa coin, and good for the country and her teaming millions too, he figured. And so his happy customers no longer went home with small coins but with little yellow packets. Before long the small town of Akberpur began to grow visibly smaller.

And all was going well —till a haughty, doughty grandame walked into the

store to make a purchase. Ac--customed to habit, the beaming shopkeeper dipped into his toffee box with an air of deep benevolence and instead of the change she was expecting, plonked the offending contraceptive into her palm. Well, to cut a long story short: the lady stormed out and the friendly neighbourhood grocer is still nursing his wounded cheek.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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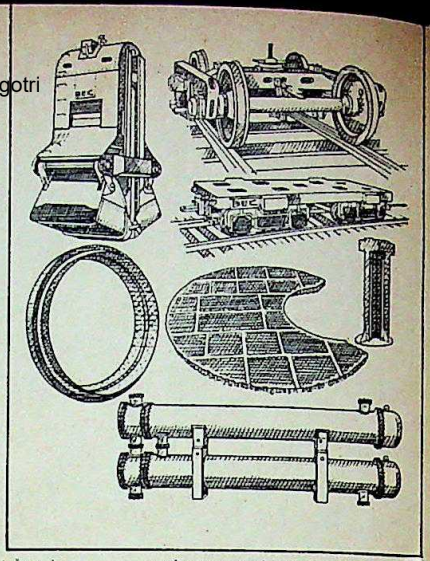

Today, BEC is a technologically advanced Integrated Engineering Complex, providing vital inputs and services to a number of major industries in the country's core sector — Steel, Mines, Cement, Power, Heavy Industries and the Railways ... to name a few. BEC has also made a mark in the international market through exports of Steel Plant Equipment to Egypt, Bangladesh and the USSR.

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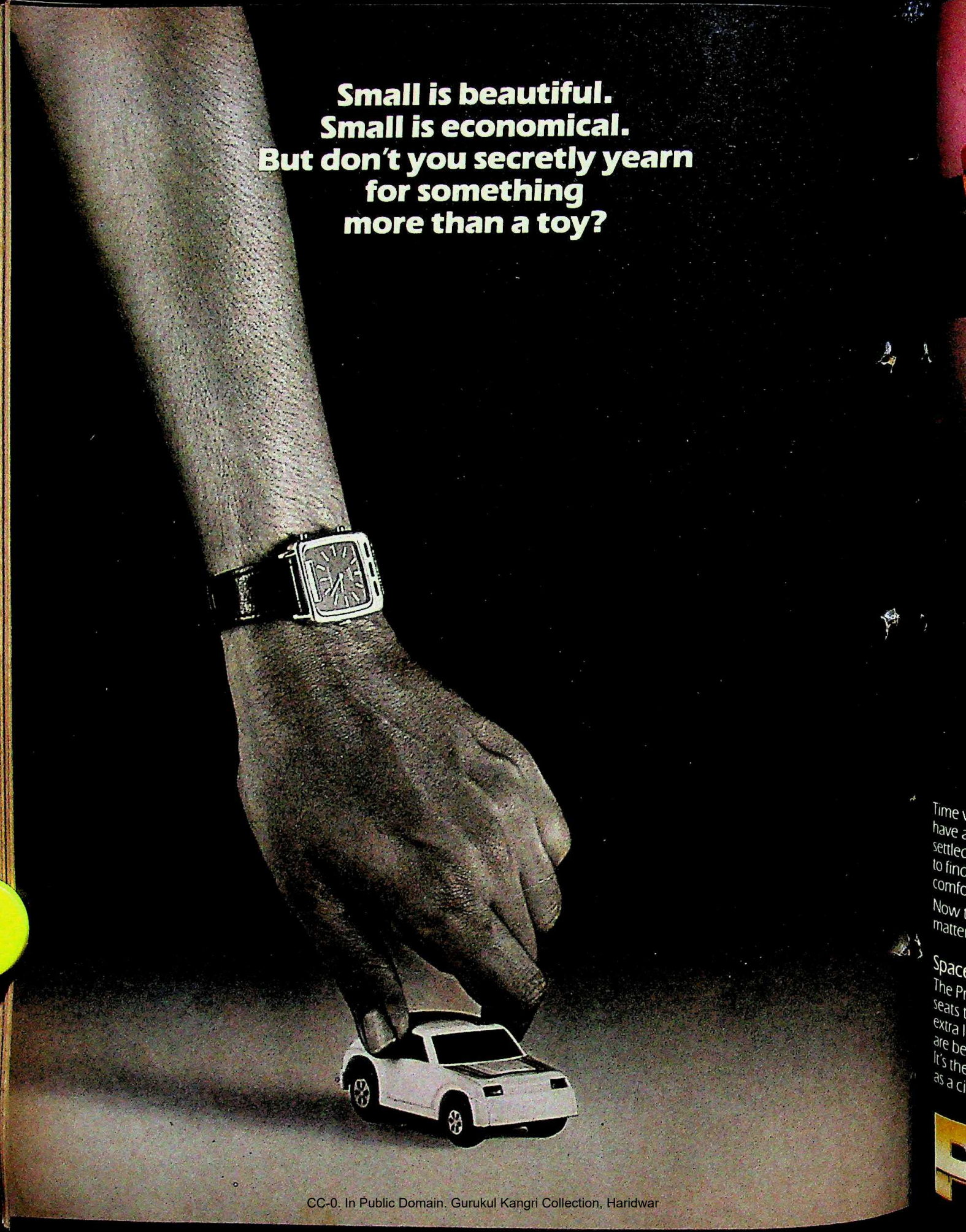

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25th

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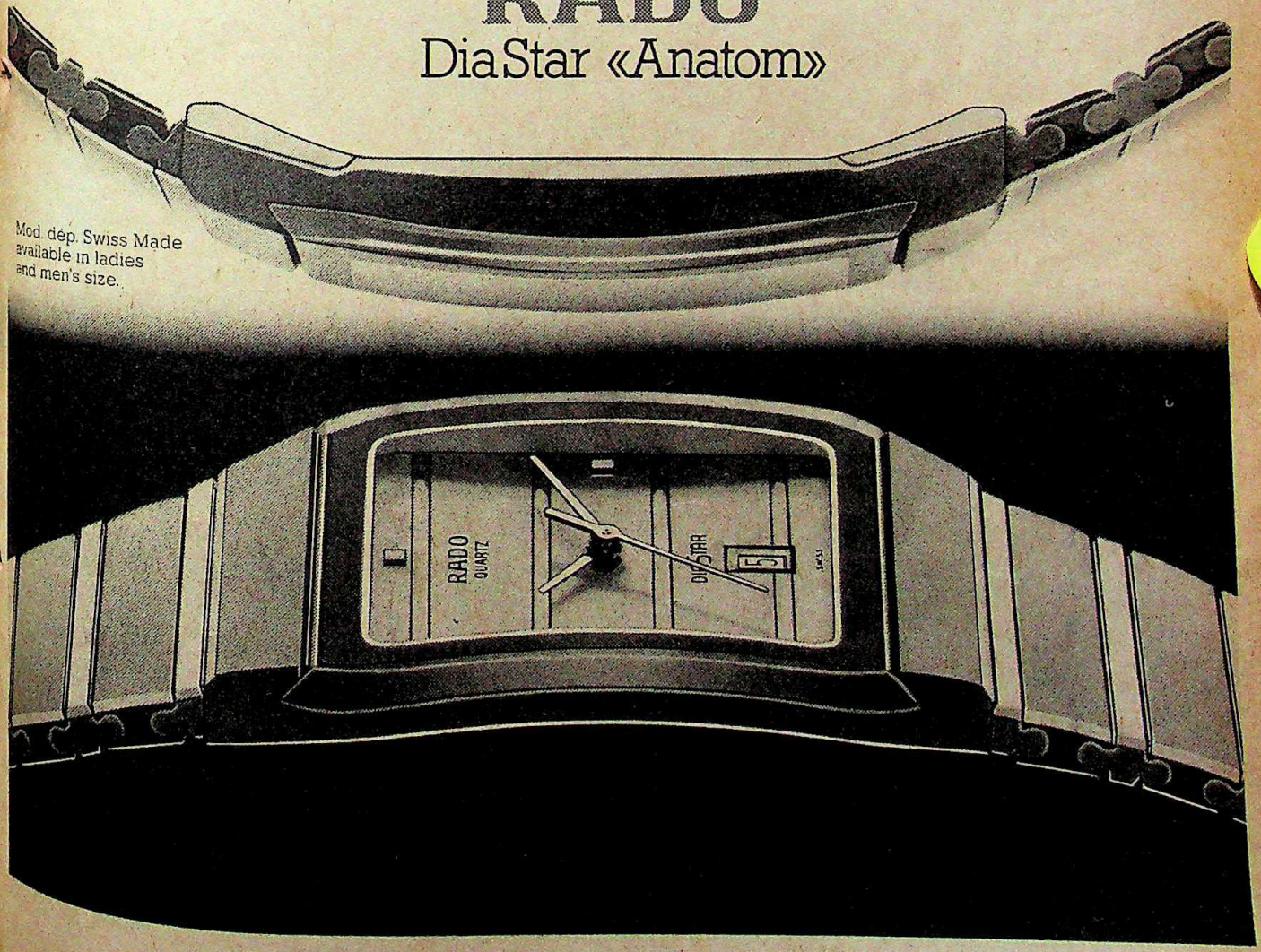

Mod. dép. Swiss Made available in ladies and men's size.

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THE PUNJAB CRISIS

The Return of Terrorism

MAY 10, 6.19 pm: Rameshwar Dayal, a 66-year-old resident of Delhi's trans-Yamuna colony of Gandhinagar, cannot recall a day in 40 years when he missed going to the temple in the evening. May 10 started out no different. But as he walked the familiar street, an explosion ripped the evening calm. "This was louder than any Diwali *patakha* and I did not know what else to do except run. Everyone else was running away," he recalls. But three of his neighbours weren't as lucky: they died when a bomb camouflaged as a transistor radio went off. It had been picked up and brought home by a child.

7.25 pm: Mukhtiar Singh, 38, a cheerful driver of the Uttar Pradesh State Roadways Corporation was preparing for the 220 km run to Ramnagar with his bus packed to capacity. "I don't even recall how exactly it happened, it was such a shock," he says, lying in a ward of Delhi's Jayaprakash Narayan Hospital. "I was just about to get into the driver's seat when the blast threw me away and I found myself in hospital," he said, still dazed 48 hours after the tragedy. His bus notched up the highest toll of seven for any single explosion on that bloody night.

7.45 pm: Vijay Sabharwal, 33, had had a hard day in the office and confesses to having been speeding home "making full use of the wide Africa Avenue" when all hell broke loose. "First I thought the DTC bus in front of me had burst a tyre and instinctively jammed the brake-pedal. But then smoke billowed from the bus, a woman shouted *khoon, khoon* (blood, blood) and passers-by made a mad rush towards the bus." The toll was one dead and six injured.

May 11, 8 am: Bhola Chowdhury, a 23-year-old fish-seller in Chittaranjan Park, the sprawling Bengali enclave

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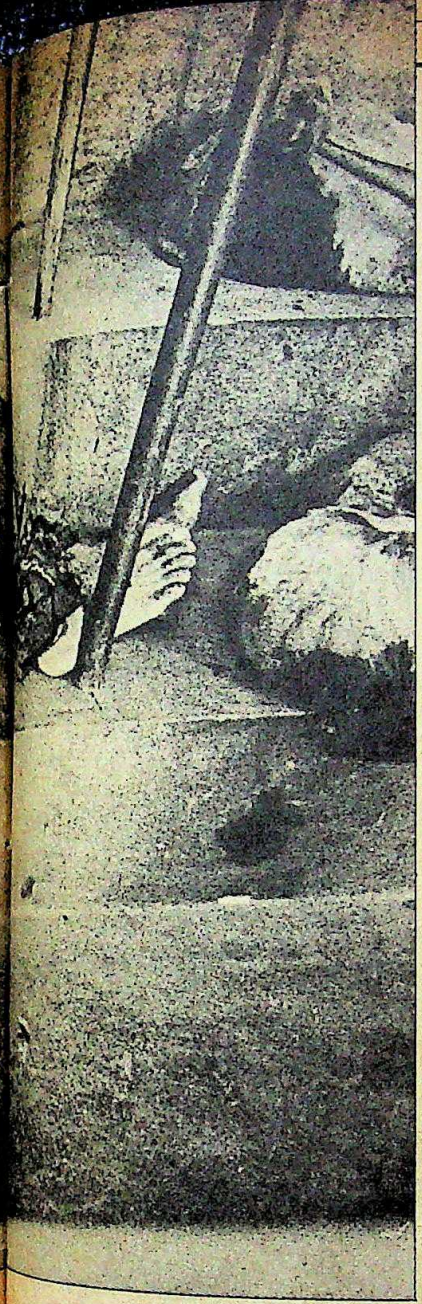
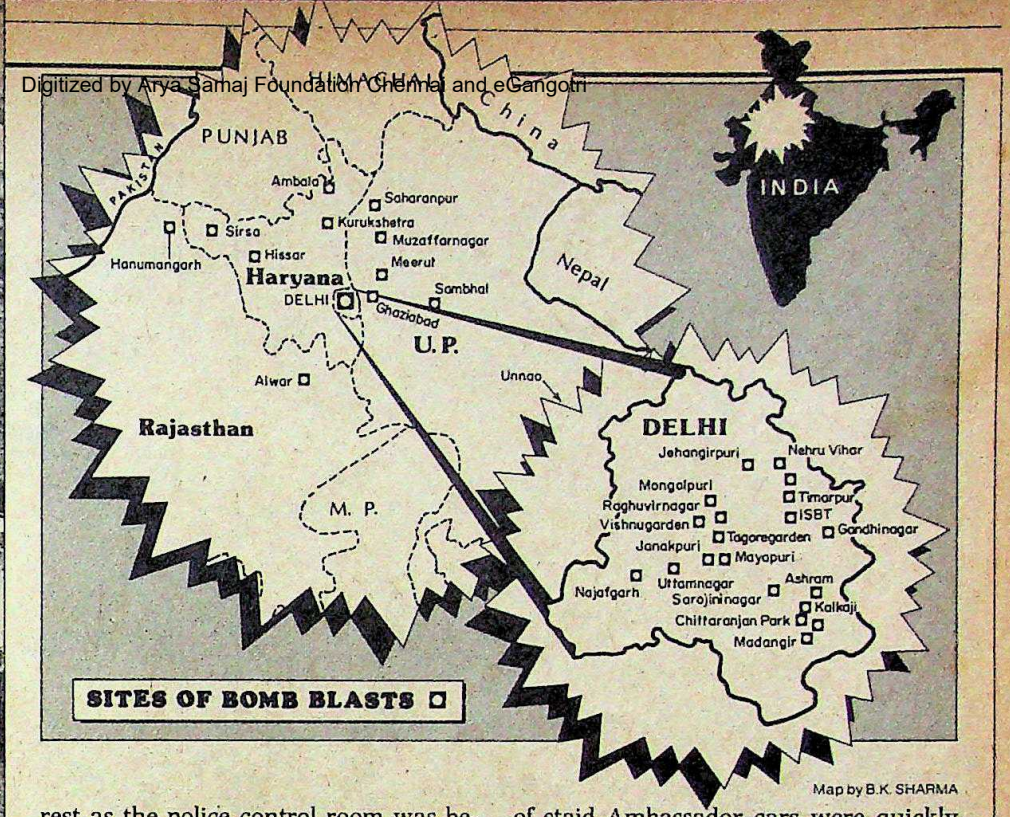


Victims of bomb blasts (above) and an injured survivor: dangerous phase



Map by B.K. SHARMA

along the southern extremities of New Delhi, had gone as usual to answer the call of nature in the empty plots behind his jhuggi. "He couldn't believe his luck, having found such a 'nice' transistor in a rubbish heap but I told him this had to be some kind of a trick as no one would throw away such a new gadget. But he didn't listen to me nor did my daughter, my dear Gudiya," recalls Bhola's brother-in-law Arjun, breaking down. His curious daughter, who turned on the radio, was among the five mangled bodies in the miserable hut.

Suddenly last week-end, Delhi became a minefield. It began with a blast at Gandhinagar which, for a while, was dismissed by senior policemen as a gas cylinder burst. But doubts were soon laid to rest as the police control room was besieged with panicky calls reporting an explosion every few minutes. Ambulances screamed through the city, fire-tenders clanged their way past the thick Friday evening traffic and the scene, as a duty magistrate now recalls, "was so much like what the Americans show you in their disaster movies."

In the melee of ambulances, fire-tenders and police patrol cars, a number of staid Ambassador cars were quickly making their way to South Block. They carried top officials rushing back to their offices to man panic stations, and ministers to attend the meeting of the Union cabinet's Political Affairs Committee called by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to discuss the second biggest crisis he was facing in his six-month rule. Soon enough, instructions were going out as crash messages on the inter-state police wireless. This time, the Centre was telling all states, there was to be no repeat of the November reprisals against the Sikhs. The army was asked to stand by to help the civil administration in Delhi and a message sent to Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal to cut short his US visit and return to take care of his communally sensitive state. Said a senior civil servant: "The prime minister told the Cabinet that the objective of the terrorists is to cause riots and we won't let that happen at any cost." Delhi's Acting Police Commissioner, Ved Marwah, who suddenly found himself in the hot seat, affirmed: "Whoever planted these bombs intended to kill innocent people. They

Photographs by RAGHU RAI

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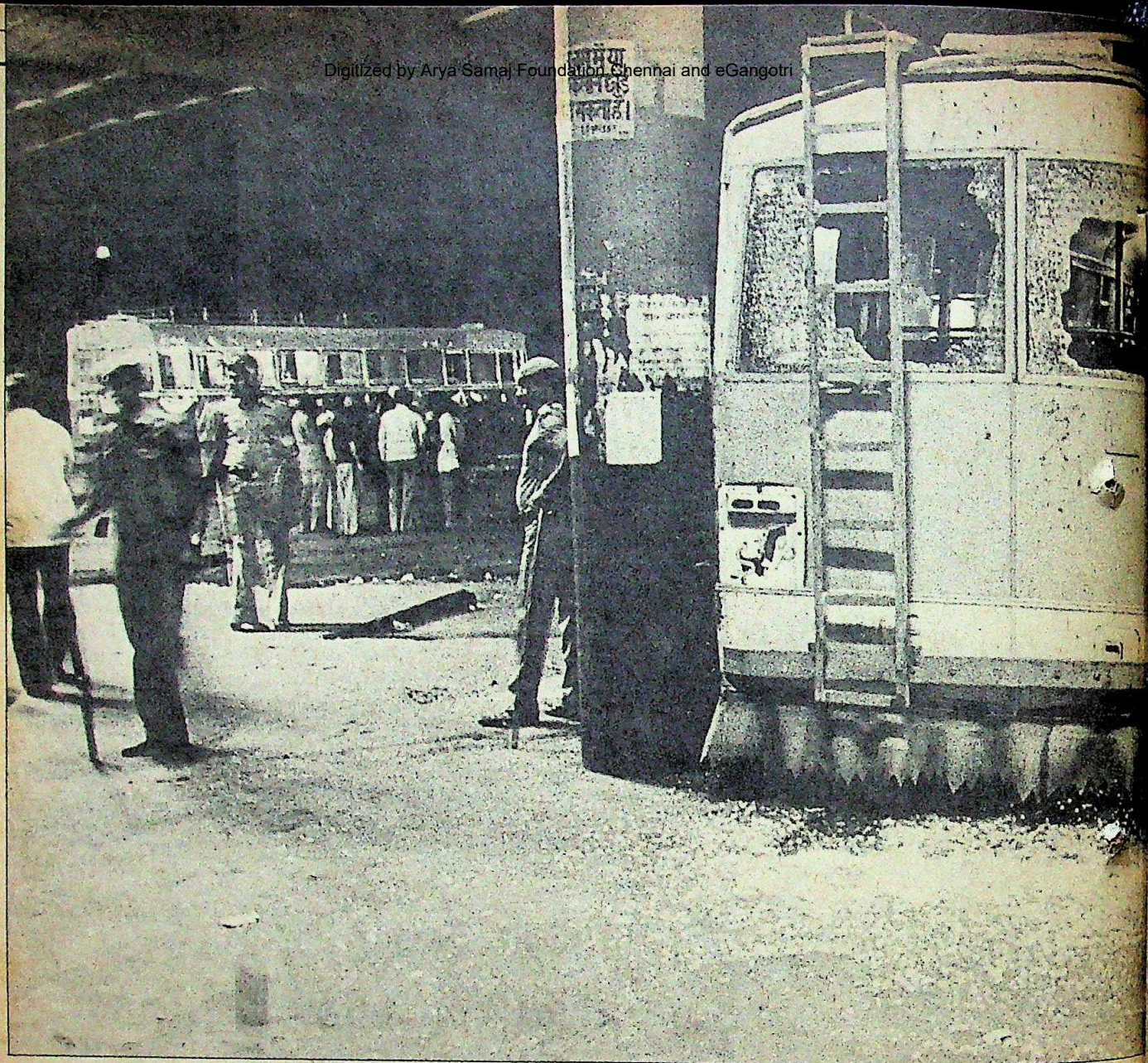

want to start communal trouble and it is imperative that we control this, otherwise we will simply be playing into their hands."

No one was underestimating the terrorist challenge this time. "This is a new and dangerous phase of Punjab terrorism and its consequences could be grim," said Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan 24 hours after the outrage began. But he was aware of the obvious implications of the new phase in terror tactics. Conforming to the pattern that has become sickeningly familiar now, the extremists wanted to sabotage the conciliatory process which seemed to be going rather steadily after Akali Dal Chief Harchand Singh Longowal's visit to Delhi—in spite of the turmoil in Akali politics set off by the sudden dissolution of the various Akali factions by Joginder Singh, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's father, and the mass resignations by top Akali leaders that followed soon after.

The bombings did two things right away: they served notice that terrorism was back with literally a bang and that those who masterminded them intended to seize the initiative just as they had in the months leading up to Operation Bluestar almost one year ago.

Second, they quickly vitiated the atmosphere and even people who were appreciative of the Government's placatory approach till then began to question it now. Delhi's dark week-end seemed to put off indefinitely the prospect of any talks between the Government and representatives of the Akalis, stalling a process that had in its own stop-go fashion been inching forward. Not only had Joginder Singh's coup denuded the Akali ranks of credible leaders, there was now little incentive to open talks at precisely the moment when terrorists seemed to have a free run of the streets of the national capital and so many other cities all over northern India.

The entire operation was extraordinarily well planned. The men behind the outrage, it seems, had studied the map of Delhi rather well. Explosions rocked colonies along Delhi's periphery keeping the police on the run. Transistor radios left by "absent-minded commuters" in the DTC buses were carried into the heart of the city where they exploded in the hands of curious, innocent passengers who picked them up to take home or simply inspect. The whole operation was cleverly designed to create panic, kill people and add that vital, nerve-racking element of unpredictability which made it virtually im-

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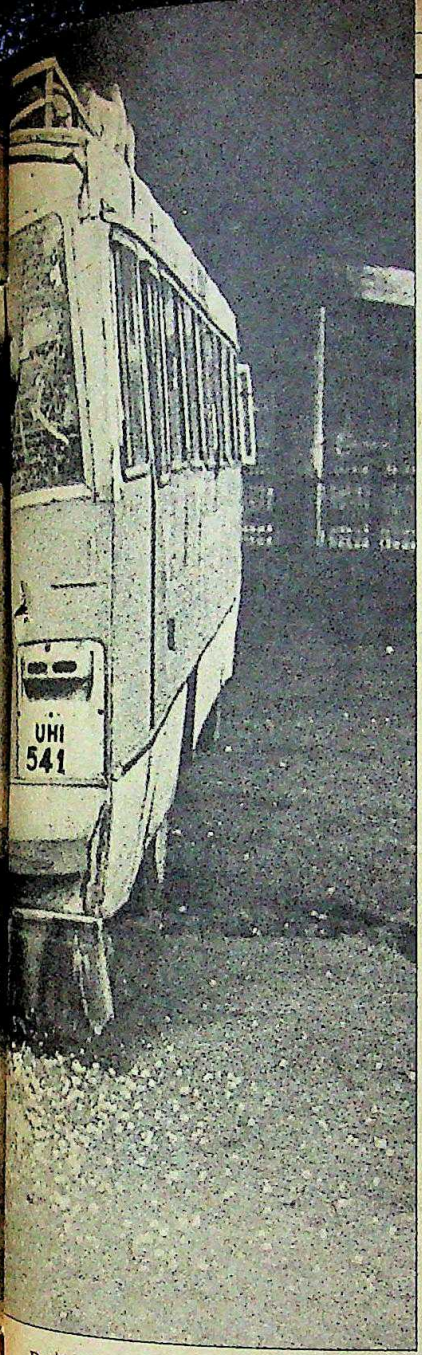

Damaged buses at ISBT (above) and a booby-trapped transistor radio

possible for the police to cope.

On that fateful May 10 evening, Delhi was firmly in the grip of the Fifth Horseman syndrome. In the east, across the Yamuna, Gandhinagar and the river bank saw two quick explosions and immediately the scene shifted northwards. The target was well chosen: the most heavily populated place in Delhi at that point of the day when thousands of commuters congregate at the Inter-State Bus Terminus (ISBT) to catch home-bound buses. On May 10, Friday, the crowds were even thicker. Thousands more were there, waiting for buses that would take them to week-end re-unions with their families. "Over 50 buses leave the terminus every five minutes between 6 and 7," recalls Tejwant Singh, a member of the ISBT staff and adds, "surely, the terrorists wanted to cause a stampede which could have killed dozens." But somehow the crowds kept their cool as scores of buses were driven out of the terminus in a steady procession and parked along Ring Road for a quick going over by the police.

Swinging in an anticlockwise direction westwards, the scene of action shifted to the Government press in Mayapuri, then Mangolpuri which saw some of the worst rioting in November and, to top it all, came the explosion that ripped apart the insides of the DTC bus on route No. 610, on Africa Avenue, in the heart of south Delhi. If the residents of the more prosperous south Delhi had any illusions about being left in peace these were shattered the next morning as transistors exploded in the colonies of Chittaranjan Park and Kalkaji, completing the ring of death and terror that gripped the capital.

On the evening of May 10, while Delhi Police officials were still marvelling at the extremists' organisational ability in creating so many incidents simultaneously in all parts of the city, top officials in the Home Ministry and Cabinet Secretariat monitored more disturbing news from elsewhere. In Haryana, a series of explosions—that stretched from Kurukshetra in the north to Sirsa in the far western corner of the state bordering Punjab and Rajasthan, left at least 10 persons dead. In Uttar Pradesh the Himachal Express brought death to Meerut city as a bomb blew up one of the compartments. There was no respite the following morning with transistor-bombs notching up more deaths in places as far apart as Ghaziabad, Unnao and Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh and Sriganganagar and Alwar in Rajasthan. Said an intelligence official, bleary-eyed from an unbroken vigil of 48 hours: "You can even see a symbolic message in the way the terrorists have kept bombs in trains leaving Delhi. It is a clear case of retaliation for the deaths of Sikhs in trains reaching Delhi last November."

THERE was, however, one vital difference this time. For the first time since extremism raised its head in Punjab about four years ago, the terrorists had decided to be calculatedly indiscriminate in their choice of quarry. As security men pointed out, a bomb kept in a bus or a train would kill anybody, Sikh or non-Sikh. Said Marwah: "Their idea was to spread panic without taking too much risk. So they picked on soft targets indiscriminately."

Just as clear was the objective behind the whole exercise. All along, since the beginning of the Bhindranwale phase, the Punjab terrorists have tried to set Sikhs and Hindus at each other's throats. They had expected the bombings in Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to revive the monster of November when hordes consumed by anti-Sikh rage —spontaneous and inspired by politicians —ravaged colonies in Delhi. Similarly, in Punjab the terrorists struck at prominent Hindu targets in Hindu majority towns like Khanna (near Ludhiana), Dhariwal in the border district of Gurdaspur and Hoshiarpur, anticipating quick mob violence from the Hindus—which is just what they need to trigger off a Sikh backlash in the Punjab countryside, something they have failed to engineer despite four years of desperate machinations.

In Punjab, to an extent, there were disturb-

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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ing signs that they had succeeded in stirring up trouble. In all three cities where they killed prominent Hindus—Khanna, Dhariwal and Hoshiarpur—Hindu mobs went on a rampage, burning Sikh shops and attacking Sikh passers-by. All three towns had to be put under curfew for days together. At Dhariwal, mobs threw two Sikhs in a canal and they barely managed to swim away to safety. But the reaction was stiffer at Hoshiarpur. State Lok Dal chief Balbir Singh who was shot dead on May 10 was also a leader of his Saini community and his lifelong association with the Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) educational movement had given him a large student following. As his body lay in the city's DAV College building mobs went berserk, lynching a Sikh home guard.

The bomb attacks coincided with inflammatory propaganda. Reports in the more shrill sections of the Jalandhar press suggested that Hindus in Punjab were gathering arms. A front-page box story appeared in *Akali Patrika* on May 11, saying that Hindus had imported thousands of German revolvers with the complicity of customs men and were storing these in temples to be distributed when necessary and that some of these arms were used by the rioting mobs at Dhariwal.

The degree of terrorist planning, as a security expert points out, goes well beyond the small time hit-and-run tactics hitherto employed. The terrorists who unleashed last fortnight's violence were obviously working to a grand design, and, equally obviously were being coordinated and controlled by some kind of a central comand possibly inspired and aided by elements abroad. Exercises are on in intelligence circles in Delhi and Punjab to trace the key leaders and officials are scanning through the lists of suspected extremists still at large.

Sources in Amritsar assert that the current spate of activity is being organised by people who escaped from the Golden Temple complex during Operation Bluestar. These include key activists like Bhai Kanwar Singh, who headed the group called Akal Federation, Sukhdev Singh Babbar, the chieftain of the Babbar Khalsa which has been reading out new hit-lists to newspaper offices on the telephone, and Balbir Singh, the self-styled secretary-general of the "National Council of Khalistan".

Besides, intelligence agencies have been trying to track the movements of people like dismissed IAS officer Gurtej Singh Brar who was close to Bhindranwale and has since been declared a pro-

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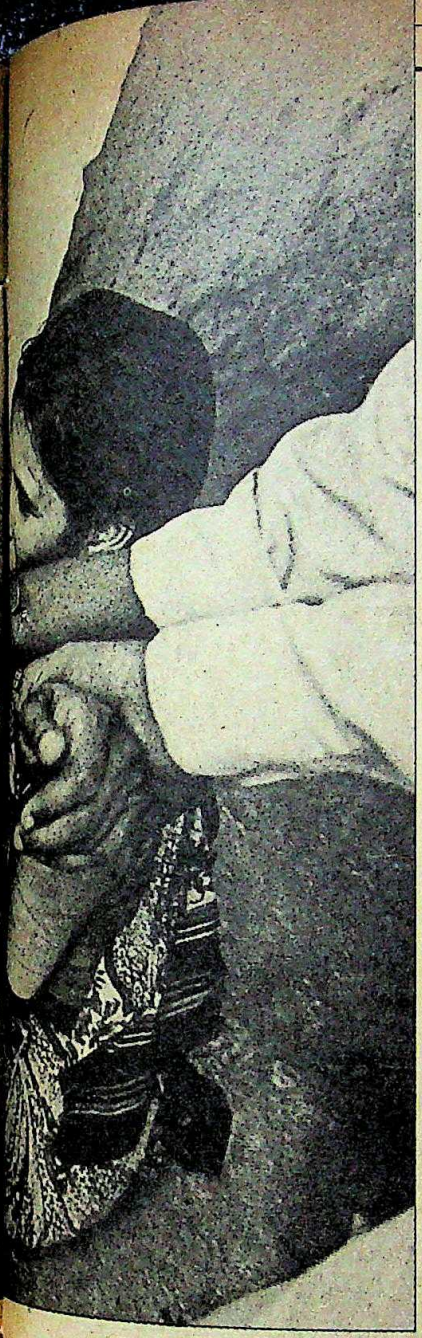


Relatives of bomb blast victims: soft and random targets

claimed offender. While confessing to a lack of precise information, practically all intelligence officials now claim that the extremists have completed their regrouping process. And they all point the finger westwards, in the direction of Pakistan (See page 108).

The loudest claims on the Pakistani connection are made by the Punjab Police. Said Director-General K.S. Dhillon in Chandigarh: "We have definite information that the smuggler-extremist-spy nexus is very active and that Pakistan is not only providing training and motivation but also commando support to indulge in killings on this side of the border." While similar assertions have often been made in the past and lack supporting evidence, Dhillon says his conclusions are based on the interrogation of a large number of suspects caught close to the Indo-Pakistan border during the past fortnight or so.

According to officials in Amritsar, of the 20 smugglers arrested in the course of the last fortnight, at least four are spies and six have close links with extremists. The more significant cases include Faqir Singh of Gurdaspur who told interrogators that he, along with Ajit Singh and Kharag Singh, crossed over to Pakistan where the group was picked up by men of the Special Services Group. After a three-hour jeep drive they were taken to a house where two more Sikh youths, Amrik Singh and Rajinder Singh, were housed. All of them were indoctrinated with Bhindranwale tapes and secessionist literature published abroad and were finally given arms with instructions to go and kill Hindus. Faqir Singh is alleged to have told his interrogators that they were looked after well but never allowed to go anywhere, and that a hefty Pakistani officer warned them that if they did not kill Hindus then their own families would be eliminated.

Similarly, in Jammu the police claim to have confessional statements of several young Sikhs including Swaran Singh and Dalip Singh who say they escorted six persons across the border. They have allegedly confessed that they were made to shave their beards and cut their hair, were given training in the use of arms, provided the addresses of link-men all over Punjab and promised hefty sums as rewards for carrying out terrorist acts. According to these two the refrain in Pakistan was that Sikhs were being exploited by Hindus, and that now they should be avenged.

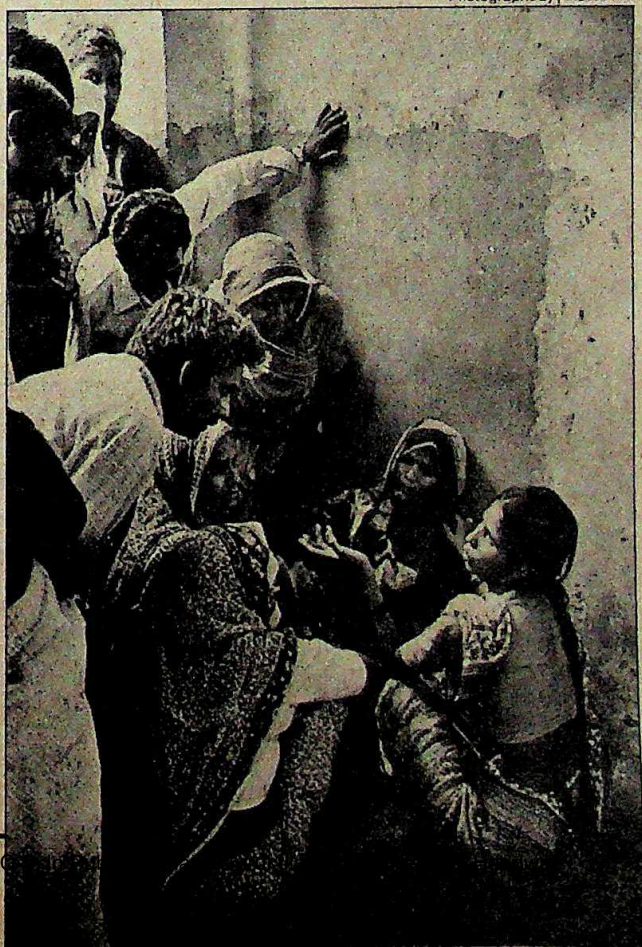
Last week, the Jalandhar police killed Chur Singh, a suspected extremist, in an encounter and recovered from him a .32 revolver with markings reading "A.M. Ibrahimji and Sons, Peshawar and Rawalpindi". To counter the challenge, various intelligence and security agencies have decided to set up joint headquarters at the border towns of Sriganganagar, Gurdaspur and Ranbirsinghpura near Jammu.

But if the intricacies of the terrorrist network baffled security officials, political observers too were no less stumped, unable to fathom the real import of the political explosions that convulsed Sikh politics last fortnight. In the space of just 12 days the Akalis had undergone three major phases of change, each one throwing the party into a tailspin. At the end of it all no one in the Akali Dal could say for sure where he, or his party stood.

It began, curiously enough on May 1 with the pro-extremist group led by Jagdev Singh Talwandi using Bhindranwale's father to stage the kind of coup that could have had Longowal and his loyalists screaming "Mayday". In a way, Longowal's troubles were also of his own making. In one of his weaker moments in early April, when he had gone to pay his respects to Joginder Singh, Longowal had given him a letter authorising him to take any steps he considered necessary to bring about *panthic* unity—unity in the faith—that much vaunted but perpetually elusive objective of Akali politics. This boomeranged on him.

Armed with a similar letter from Talwandi, Joginder Singh dissolved both "factions" of the Akali Dal, appointing a new nine-member ad hoc committee to run the affairs of the party. In this, besides Longowal, Tohra,

Photographs by RAGHU RAI



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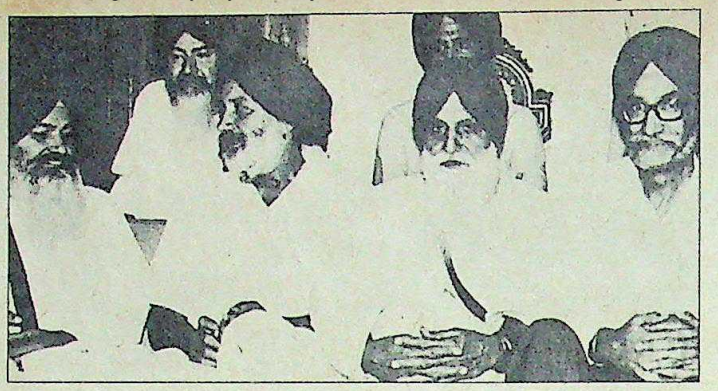
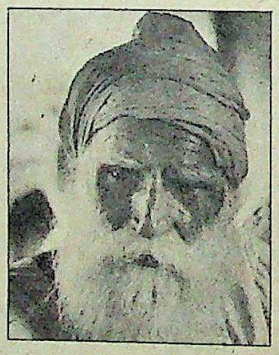
Talwandi and himself, he included his second son Jagjit Singh Rode, and the new All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) President Manjit Singh who also happens to be a brother of Bhindranwale's lieutenant Bhai Amrik Singh who died during Operation Bluestar. Besides, there was former IAS officer Gurtej Singh Brar, sacked and imprisoned IPS officer Simranjeet Singh Mann and former IFS officer Harinder Singh who has sought asylum in Oslo —the three men dismissed derogatorily as the "allied services club" by Longowal supporters.



Akali leaders (from left) Longowal, Badal, Tohra and Barnala: rethinking strategy

Initially, Longowal's reaction to the coup was one of anger and dismay. "This is unconstitutional and uncalled for," he said, and called a meeting of Akali Dal representatives from all over the state on May 17 to put Joginder Singh's formula to vote. Confident of majority support, Longowal was sure he would be able to turn the tables on Joginder Singh.

Such hopes were dashed quickly when even his key lieutenants began to advise him against a confrontation with Joginder Singh at that stage. Said former chief minister Prakash Singh Badal who is generally considered close to Longowal: "The Sikh mood, hurt and rebellious at the moment, is all for the Baba." A demoralised and disconsolate Longowal decided to call off the May 17 meeting, for once seeming to throw in the towel. Joginder Singh returned to Amritsar from his village Rode near Moga, to announce triumphantly: "The two Akali Dals have merged. There are no factions. There is complete unity and the future course of action will be announced very soon."



Tohra (left) and Joginder Singh: power struggle

Politically, it is still too early to say what Joginder Singh, now a frail 83-year-old, stands for. In fact it is also not clear whether he is now acting on his own or is being manipulated by someone from behind the scenes. But he has certainly caught the fancy of the militant Sikh youth, pushing his son's resurgent image to the hilt.

Even his rhetoric is evocative of Bhindranwale. He sits in his modest, dust-covered house which does not even have the luxury of a boundary wall and lectures endless streams of congregating youngsters. He abuses the Congress(I) constantly, saying: "It has indulged in systematic annihilation of the Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere. We are today a subjugated people trying to regain our lost pride, to heal our wounds ourselves. There is no word of sympathy for us even in the parliament." And he is equally harsh on the Akali leaders whom he accuses of betraying the panth often, adding: "Many of them are cheats." He also has little faith in the judicial inquiry into the Delhi riots. Says he: "Only a fool expects justice from a person who commits atrocities. Can the killer himself be the judge as well?"

Akali leaders find Joginder Singh's rhetoric daunting and his panthic credentials unchallengeable. Though they now hate his guts they are themselves guilty of having propped him up initially. At one time, last month, all roads in Akali politics led to Rode as each one of the senior leaders, including Longowal, met him and tried to get him to intervene on his behalf.

In this rush, many Akalis revealed how fragile their loyalties are. Badal, who has always been seemingly with Longowal, went to Rode and told Joginder Singh that he and his supporters were with him. Besides his acknowledged stature in the party, Badal commands a strong following in Faridkot district, which is his constituency and his aquiescence immediately added to Joginder Singh's popularity in the area. However, Joginder Singh spurned repeated courtship offers from Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the mercurial president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) who has manipulated Sikh politics from the sidelines for over a decade now.

Following the logic that the enemy's enemy is a friend, Badal seems to have decided to support Joginder Singh in order to neutralise Tohra who had unnerved other leaders with his populistic ploy of announcing the reconstruction of the Akal Takht. Making no secret of this approach, former development minister and key Badal supporter, Atma Singh, told INDIA TODAY: "We must get rid of this foxy, corrupt character from the presidentship of the SGPC. Only then can the affairs of the panth be put on the right track." He even went to the extent of hailing the formation of the ad hoc committee as an act "in the interest of both Hindus and Sikhs". But more than that, the Badal group thought this was its best chance of countering Tohra even if it meant going along with hardliners for a while.

It is in that sense that the terrorist bombs have strengthened the hands of the Longowal camp. As indignation over the blasts spread all over the country, it seemed that the extremists had overstretched themselves. An outrage as indiscriminate as this got most of the Sikhs upset too. Khushwant Singh demanded stern action against "the bunch of thugs" responsible for the killings and even Joginder Singh had to come out openly in condemnation of the killings—though he appended to it the usual alibi that it was the work of the Congress(I) out to defame the Sikhs.

In the changed atmosphere, Longowal threw his last hand. His Man Friday, former MP Balwant Singh Ramoowalia read out an eloquent statement in Chandigarh on Longowal's be-

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half, announcing his resignation from the presidentship of the Akali Dal. Calling himself a patriotic, peace-loving Sikh, Longowal accused "certain selfish elements within the party" of exploiting the situation by pitting brother against brother. At long last, it seems, Longowal had decided to take a clear stand against the extremists.

The changed situation had also seemingly forced Badal to rethink his own strategy. He now decided that as the leader of the Akali Dal legislature party he should follow in Longowal's footsteps. And so indeed did Tohra who proved to be a man in too much of a hurry as he, immediately afterwards, got the SGPC to reject his resignation in spite of the dissenting note from two of its members.

Longowal and his supporters were,

TRANSISTOR BOMB

Deadly Ploy

IT WAS sophisticated, but not too sophisticated, powerful yet not packing any remarkable explosive strength. It was, quite simply, an effective instrument of murder. That is how an explosives expert described the kind of device used by the terrorists in their attacks last fortnight.

Experts from the forensic science laboratories, the army's bomb disposal squad and the Special Frontier Force have all been marvelling at the simplicity of the terrorist contraption which, in layman's terms, consists of nothing more than a plastic transistor radio casing, a cylindrical, four or five-inch-long bomb connected to a nine-volt battery which, in turn, is switched on by turning the volume knob in the "radio".

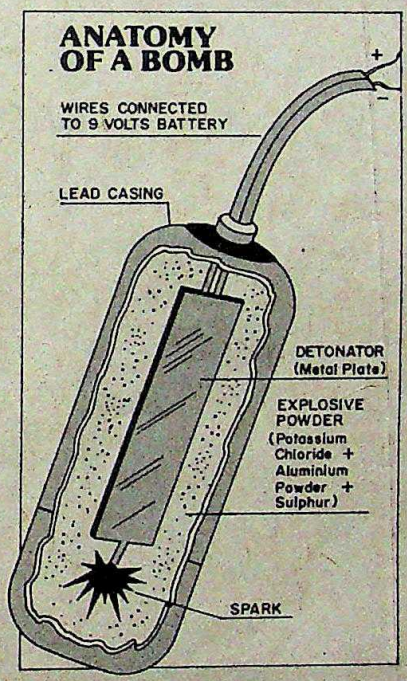
The bomb itself is a thick lead cast containing about 200 grams of explosive mix. This, contrary to earlier belief, is not of a particularly sophisticated composition. The greenish powder, according to initial analysis, is a mix of potassium chloride, aluminium powder and sulphur. More or less similar mixtures are often used to make large fire crackers used by marriage parties. But what makes the device so deadly is the thick lead casing that bursts into small splinters under the impact of the explosion causing death and injury all around.

In fact, in all the cases of explosion that occurred in Delhi, hardly any damage was caused to property. The buses in which bombs burst are intact except for some damaged seats and window-panes. Many of the huts in which the fake radios went off still stand unscathed. As an army expert said, this is a classical anti-personnel device, to some extent like the Molotov cocktail.

Experts are intrigued by the detonator used in the bomb. This is unlike the kinds of detonators used by building contractors or even ordnance factories in India. The flat metallic slab, connected to the battery with two wires, lights the fuse setting off the bomb. Experts think the detonator in the terrorist bombs is of foreign make, but its origin is unknown.

Experts also express surprise at the fact that most of the batteries in the recovered transistors are foreign-made, carrying the brand-name of Philips. Although this is not of too

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA



much consequence, as foreign batteries are often available in India, it is puzzling that the terrorists did not opt for one of the numerous local brands. While a few radio casings bear the National Panasonic logo, most others carry the unfamiliar brand-name of "Sober". However, the police are quite sure that all the casings have been manufactured locally and they have been conducting intensive interrogations at Delhi's Bhagirath Palace and Naraina markets, where hundreds of small manufacturers assemble transistor radio sets.

Some intelligence officials see similarities between the explosive device used in the week-end blasts and the ones used by Assamese terrorists to kill over 30 people in Guwahati's Fatasil market in 1982 and as many at the railway station the following year. Only those were much bigger, used casings of steel instead of lead, and were detonated with time devices connected to small clocks. If anything, the workmanship was of a higher order. Said an intelligence official: "In this case we are not worried about the expertise. The Nagas used much more sophisticated plastic explosives to blow up trains in Assam in the '60s. The worrisome aspect is tactical, of using transistors as an attractive booby-trap." However, the so-called bombs found near Parliament House were no more than bundles of explosive powder crudely tied in cloth and hessian, incapable of causing anything more than a loud bang.

In fact, the Delhi administration had been anticipating a bomb attack. As a consequence, the army had been asked to base a company of its bomb disposal experts in the capital. The administration, therefore, was not caught unaware as it was three years ago in the wake of the discovery of a much cruder device planted by Manipur's outlawed Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) in Palika Bazaar. But it was unprepared for the number of bombs.

Officials do not rule out similar attacks in the future. "It's time", said an officer, "that we developed the Northern Ireland mentality. No one will ever touch an unidentified object there." He points out that letter bombs have been used in India before.

The terrorists' idea is to create a fear psychosis. As they are now likely to adopt a different tactic, the police have advised parents to instruct their children not to pick up anything lying around. But even the most optimistic policemen concede that there can be no foolproof defence against a terrorist ploy. This indeed is one situation where the suspicious will have a better chance of survival.

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however, playing it cool. Their effort to summon a delegates' meeting on May 17 had been pre-empted by Joginder Singh. But his resignation had now given them the best possible excuse to call for a similar exercise on May 22. "I hope to God the meeting comes about, for it would clearly prove who is the leader in the Akali Dal even now," a Longowal supporter said. But even the Longowal camp realises that to the delegates, the meeting and beyond will be far from smooth.

Even if Longowal's men hold the meeting and get those who attend it to reject his resignation, it will still leave him in a far from comfortable position. In fact it will take some clever manoeuvring on his behalf to prevent a slide back to the old confused state of subservience to the extremists. The biggest threat will obviously be from Joginder Singh. Meanwhile, Tohra too will need watching. He has already opened an entirely new front by announcing the reconstruction of the Akal Takht. This plan may appeal to the Sikh hardliners but would be provocative for the Government and for the sake of communal harmony.

The coming weeks, thus will be crucial from the point of view of Akali politics. The internecine power struggle is now in a decisive stage and Longowal is waging a last-ditch battle, awaiting the outcome of the May 22 meeting (*see interview*). If he wins, it could give him confidence and ability to firmly veer away from hardliners, something he has lacked so far. But if Tohra or Joginder Singh win this, the latest battle of wits, the Government will be faced with a daunting task. Policy planners in Delhi and officials in Delhi sit with their fingers crossed.

But their helplessness with the Akali politics apart, the least the officials can do is look at their own backyard and do something about the state of demoralisation and inefficiency that plague the police and the administrative machinery.

Extremism of the kind seen in Delhi and elsewhere last week became possible because the security machinery in Punjab failed to contain it within the state. In fact they also failed to give adequate notice of such a large-scale exodus of the extremists from the state. Officials point out that while the problem will have to be finally sorted out politically, there cannot be much improvement even on the law and order front unless the morale and efficiency of the Punjab administration is improved.

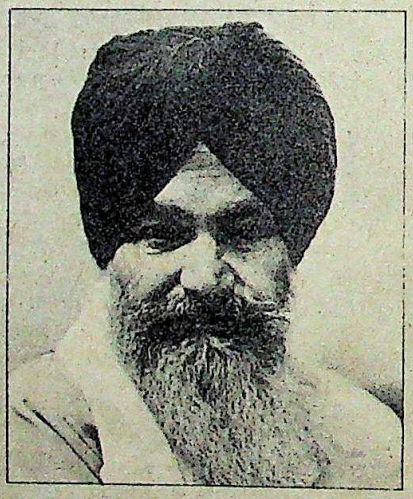
Time and again, that point has been made by top government functionaries. Former governor B.D. Pande said so and the outgoing senior advisor R.V. Subrahmaniam, an Assam veteran, stressed it in

H.S. LONGOWAL

"I don't fear anything"

ALONG with Parkash Singh Badal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Harchand Singh Longowal constitutes the quartet that has reigned supreme in Sikh politics for over a decade now. But there is one vital difference—unlike them, he is not a career politician. He was, as he says, a humble preacher for decades after "I was picked up by men of God while I was just a child and taught to be a preacher of Gurbani". His supporters also point out that neither he nor his relatives have ever held office and that he reluctantly assumed the mantle of president of the Akali Dal in the wake of a virtual anti-Badal revolt by Talwandi. Initially, the Akali veterans considered him a pliant tool hailing from the state's politically conscious Malwa region, who had an untarnished image and no great political acumen. And for some time Longowal remained the figurehead he was meant to be.

But times changed with Bhindranwale's appearance on the scene, a phenomenon which ultimately saw him and Longowal operate from the Golden Temple complex, one leading a band of armed men and the other running the Akali Dal morcha that saw over 3 lakh people court arrest. Unavoidably, however, the differences between the two grew and Longowal lived an uneasy two years of sparring. Bhindranwale frequently dismissed him derogatorily as "shanti da punj" (messenger of peace) and with his fiery rhetoric won the Sikh youth away from the Akali Dal to his camp.



Longowal: waiting game

Longowal's image suffered even further with Operation Bluestar in which he was widely accused of having surrendered to the army "like a coward". Ever since his release from detention in Udaipur two months ago, he has been engaged in a desperate campaign to rehabilitate himself. The crucial question in Akali politics thus remains what it has been for three years now: is Longowal finally down and out, or is he still holding his own?

Last fortnight the guesswork became even more pronounced. Longowal faced a coup of sorts from Bhindranwale's ageing father Joginder Singh and, initially, threatened to retaliate. But he bounced back by shrewdly submitting his resignation in the wake of the bomb attacks in various parts of the country's northern states.

Biding his time till May 22 when the district jathedars of the Akali Dal meet to consider his resignation, Longowal, on paper, commands the majority there. A confirmed bachelor, he lives in the gurudwara at Longowal village near Sangrur in Punjab and makes day-long trips across the countryside addressing gatherings and meeting followers.

Although the police have warned him repeatedly of the threat to his life, he has asked the governor to withdraw his armed police escort. Longowal is neither down nor out as Chandigarh Correspondent GOVIND THUKRAL *discovered. He tracked Longowal down to his native village Gidriani in Sangrur district and found him uncharacteristically assertive in the course of a 90-minute interview. Excerpts:*

Q. *Why did you and your senior colleagues like Badal and Tohra choose to resign? Were you scared of extremists or did Baba Joginder Singh's popularity worry you?*

A. We decided to resign our positions to help the *panth* and the Akali Dal forge unity. I am man of God who neither fears anything nor causes fear in anyone's mind. By resigning, we have shown that we do not want to cling to our posts. I had offered to quit soon after my release

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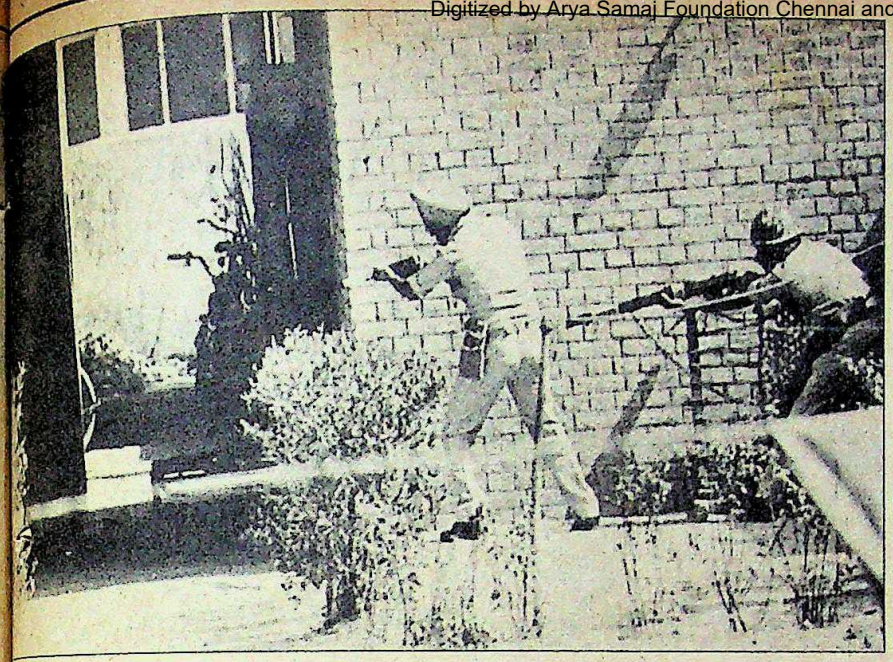

Cracking down on terrorists in Chandigarh

the report of the committee he headed on the Punjab administration. Yet, as bombs shook Delhi, the Government's reaction was of the knee-jerk variety rather than mature surefootedness. For example:

▶ R.V. Subrahmaniam was asked to resign and was replaced by S.S. Dhanoa, till now the chief secretary. P.H. Vaishnav of the Punjab cadre was made the new chief secretary.

▶ Inducted as adviser was Shiva Swarup, director-general of the Central Reserve Police Force giving the Punjab administration an unprecedented mix of two police officers (the other one is Surendra Nath) an army general and an IAS officer.

▶ In a flurry of transfers over 60 gazetted officers were shuffled. But more curious was the way transfers of the district

from jail and had asked the jathedar of the Akal Takht to nominate someone else. This renunciation of positions would infuse new blood in the Akali Dal. In this hour of great crisis, this is in the interest of the country, Punjab and the Sikhs. Please write in that order.

Q. ***But don't you think that quitting at this hour of crisis is like leaving the party in the lurch?***

A. You will see, this will make the Dal stronger. Someone who would have merely been pulling our leg is now there to guide and lead us. We accept him as our leader and let him show his worth. Baba Joginder Singh will have to shoulder responsibility. His first statement condemning the bomb blasts shows that he will have to act responsibly.

Q. ***You claim that yours is a democratic party with a proper constitution. Baba Joginder Singh is not even its primary member. How do you accept him as your leader?***

A. He has been part and parcel of the Sikh faith and will follow the policies of the Akali Dal. No one is above the programme and policy of the Dal. If he does not subscribe to that he will not be acceptable to the Akali Dal. Our programme is to fight with *lok shakti* (people power) and not with *loh shakti*, (gun power). The fight is for the unity and integrity of the country, for the betterment of Sikhs within it and for the betterment of Punjab. Make no mistake about it.

Q. ***Baba Joginder Singh made an alleged Congress(I) supporter Inderjit Singh Sekhon general secretary of his Akali Dal. Can you have faith in a leader having links with the Congress(I) which you describe as the country's enemy number one?***

A. That is true. Several people, including a lawyer, have brought documents to show this man's dubious role. He will have to go. Such people have no place in a party of martyrs.

Q. ***Do you really think that your partymen will accept Baba Joginder Singh's leadership? The district jathedars have been summoned to Amritsar on May 22 to consider your resignation. Suppose they reject it?***

A. Ours is a democratic party. The general house is supreme. Its directions will be carried out by everybody. Only the Akal Takht is above it. As for the resignation, I shall consider the issue when it comes up.

Q. ***But why did you cancel the general body meeting you had summoned originally on May 17?***

A. It was not in the interest of the *panth*.

Q. ***You often speak about the crisis facing the country. Please explain.***

A. The ruling party has been consistently following anti-people policies and dividing people on communal and caste lines. Look at what happened in Gujarat. At least there Rajiv Gandhi cannot blame the Sikhs for violence as he has been doing so far in Punjab and many other parts of the country. The fountainhead of violence in Punjab is the Congress party.

Q. ***Do you have evidence to support that charge?***

A. Are you aware that Gurinder Singh, the alleged terrorist caught by the police in Chandigarh after a six-hour gun-battle, was deliberately killed ? He told interrogators that though he had committed six murders and attacked AICC(I) General Secretary Raghunandan Lal Bhatia, he was acting on behalf of a senior Congress(I) leader. A senior police officer told me that he had unsuccessfully sought the governor's permission to arrest two Congress(I) MLA's who he thought were behind violence in the state. Let there be a judicial probe into the Punjab events by a Supreme Court judge. Let there be a national commission. We will prove our charges. Why is the Government so hesitant? Let Rajiv Gandhi take courage. It will help the countrymen understand who is against integrity. It is a pity that our protectors themselves are plundering the country and causing divisions.

Q. ***You have painted a dismal picture. What is the way out of this?***

A. The right-thinking Indians, the opposition parties and some good people in the ruling party must assert themselves unitedly, speak out the truth and fight for the unity and integrity of the country before it is too late. Let us keep the country's interest and not power politics in the forefront. Earlier Jayaprakashji had saved us. Now we have no one left with us. I have requested the opposition leaders to join hands on some programme and get rid of this party that is destroying the country.

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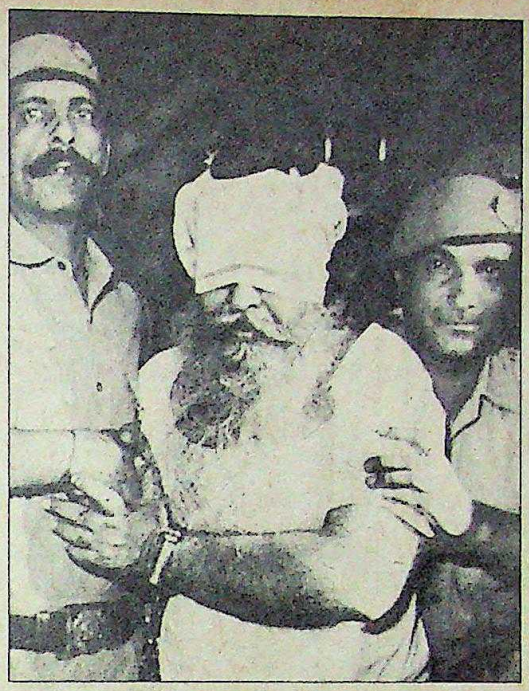
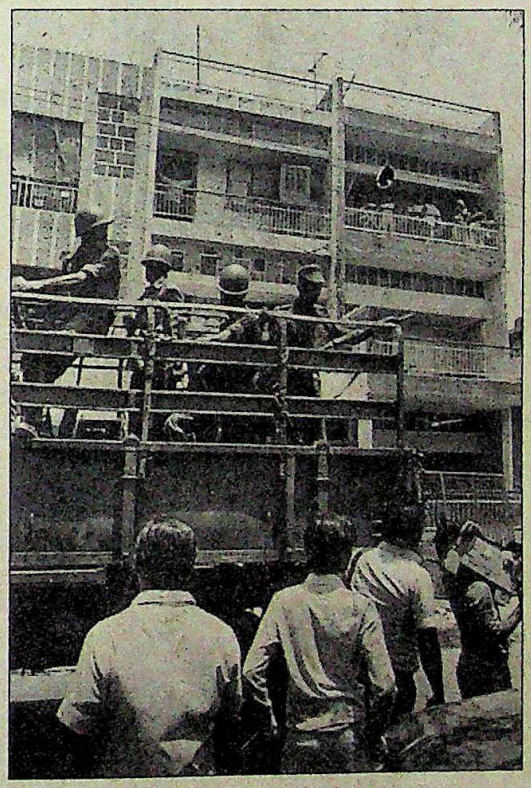
police chiefs of Amritsar and Jalandhar, Bua Singh and S.S. Virk ordered just a week back, were cancelled.

Officers in Chandigarh complain that this kind of arbitrariness adds to the insecurities of men already living under fear of retribution from terrorists. In the same vein they mention the virtual takeover of key jobs in the state by officers drawn from other state cadres. While Dhanoa was brought in from Bihar, the invasion in the police has mainly been from Madhya Pradesh. The director-general, inspector-general (intelligence) and DIG (administration) are all from the Madhya Pradesh cadre of the IPS. Now Arjun Singh's appearance on the scene has also brought in two more joint secretaries and his ADC, an IPS officer. What irks Punjab officers even more is the fact that the governor has even brought junior officers and constables for his personal security from Madhya Pradesh.

It is against this background that they consider the elevation of Vaishnav as chief secretary a kind of victory. And now with a few successes in encounters in the districts and catches at the border, they expect the Government to repose faith in them. Among the encounters, they make particular mention of the capture of Gurinder Singh in Chandigarh after a pitched firefight that left two police sub-inspectors dead.

Similarly, Delhi Police too had something to congratulate themselves about. On the basis of a tip-off from the residents of New Delhi's West Patel Nagar locality, they raided the house of Kartar Singh Narang, a prominent income-tax lawyer and arrested three alleged extremists and unearthed a large dump of explosives, including manuals on assembling bombs and gadgets that connect the lot with the recent blasts. Said a Delhi Police officer: "These people seem to be the real kingpins of the extremist network in Delhi. You may expect more breakthroughs soon." But as in the case of Gurinder Singh, here too the police seemed to be in a bit of a rush. Mohinder Singh Khalsa, one of the arrested men, died in custody and although the police blamed his death on the injuries suffered during the raid on the house it is believed that he could not stand interrogation and died.





Narang being escorted to court (top) and army unit at his residence

Men like Gurinder Singh and Mohinder Singh are much too valuable to be lost like this. Moreover, such deaths leave the Government open to the charge of deliberate murder in order to conceal facts that it could find embarrassing. It is only through careful interrogation of such suspects that the police and intelligences can hope to penetrate the extremist groups and pre-empt their designs.

There is also unanimity in all circles that terrorist activity invariably comes when conciliatory efforts seem to be succeeding, and now if the Government decides to succumb to the pressures from hardliners within its own ranks it will be doing just what the terrorists want. Summing up this viewpoint, former union minister Inder Kumar Gujral says: "The difference between the moderates and extremists in the Akali Dal is bound to continue. The Government should see how it can circumvent the extremist objective of stalling a settlement." Adds retired Lieutenant-General Jagjit Singh Aurora, in the same vein: "The Punjab problem has to be solved regardless of the terrorists. No one has control over the terrorists anyway. If a dependable leadership emerges out of the tussle between the ad hoc committee and the moderates, the Government can negotiate with it. If that does not happen the Government should make a unilateral declaration by May 20. If the Government is generous enough the people of Punjab will accept it."

In government circles, on the other hand, a few doubts still seemed to linger. "Our recent generosity and conciliatory approach should not be mistaken as a sign of weakness," said Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan. Much now depends on how the Government responds. In any plan that it works out, its biggest long-term challenge will be to prop up the moderates while the terrorists are put down in the firmest manner possible. This will not be easy, nor can anything be taken for granted considering the fickle nature of Akali politics in the past. But more than anything else, it will be the popular perception among the Sikhs of the Government's bona fides in wishing to settle the Punjab problem on terms they consider honourable that the future depends. The Government has gone a long way in trying to appeal to the broad Sikh masses. Even as it makes sure that there is no communal retribution for the action of the terrorists, it must seize the opportunity offered by the bombs of Delhi to isolate and pursue the terrorists while it battles on to win the hearts and minds of the Sikhs.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA
with GOBIND THUKRAL in Amritsar

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CONGRESS(I)

On the Back Track

THERE were three Nehrus at one place, not to speak of the Gandhi. The portraits of the Mahatma, Nehru and Mrs Gandhi, drawn to dimensions much larger than life, formed so inviting a backdrop to Rajiv Gandhi, the young helmsman of the nation and the ruling Congress(I), that the flash bulbs would not stop popping at the meeting of the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) at New Delhi's Talkatora Stadium last fortnight.

The occasion indeed called for celebration. It was the first meeting of the 695-member AICC(I) with Rajiv in the chair. The session, apart from ratifying the appointment of Rajiv as the party president last year, also marked the eight-month-long run-up to the centenary-year meeting of the party to be held in Bombay on December 28 this year.

The two-day session, which was dovetailed into a function at the Indira Gandhi Stadium marking the inauguration of the centenary celebrations, and a public rally at Ramlila Grounds where Lata Mangeshkar sang patriotic numbers, could have passed off as a mere jamboree if members had suddenly not decided to question some of the fledgling Government's new policies. The carnival spirit and the predictable bouts of eulogy to the new leader were all there; yet there were times when the mood was decidedly less than festive. The first indication that a section of partymen were reluctant to part with the vocabulary of past years, at least in official resolutions, came with the reports of great resentment at an extended meeting of the Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC) over a brief, no-frill draft economic resolution placed before it by the four-member drafting committee of the party. As it is customary, the four members, West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) Committee President Pranab Mukherjee, former Punjab chief minister Darbara Singh, Union Defence Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and AICC(I) General Secretary Shrikant Verma, had prepared the draft on the basis of policy briefings from the Union Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh. "No change was made to the finance minister's briefing at that stage," Mukherjee later said.

The draft was remarkable for its avoidance of the traditional homilies to socialism: in fact, the word was not mentioned even once. But what really seemed to have dropped like a ton of bricks was a sharp sentence which read: "Policy instruments relevant to one stage cannot be treated as permanently sacrosanct...nor are they ends in themselves." This, together with the total silence of the draft on the continuance of the anti-poverty programmes, was considered by some members of the CWC as the clear sign of a quick march to the right.

The themes that were vigorously introduced into the draft by prominent members of the CWC, reportedly led by Mukherjee, are:

▶ "The public sector is the sheet-anchor of India's progress";

Rajiv addressing delegates at the AICC(I) meet: semantic changes

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▶ "Our aim is not to acquire technology for the sake of technology. Our objective is to see that the technology to be used is relevant to our basic social and economic concerns. Our foremost objective is to apply modern technology in agriculture and in such productive sectors that employ large numbers of people";

▶ "The AICC(I) expresses concern on the unwarranted upward trend in the prices of some commodities. While seasonal factors contribute to this trend...the behaviour of prices of certain commodities indicates that some unscrupulous elements are taking advantage of the situation"; and

▶ "We must avoid heavy external borrowing and make all-out efforts to mobilise resources."

The background to the debate at the CWC was evidently prepared by a large number of party MP's—45 according to one estimate—writing directly to the prime minister to complain that the budget, and the price revision of basic items, had triggered a price spiral. The correspondents, who are mostly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, also mentioned that common people in their constituencies had become restive as a result of the price-hike. Significantly, many of them are of the Congress(I) old guard who have lost their influence after being dropped either from power or from prominence by Rajiv.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Apparently the message of their communication to the prime minister struck a sympathetic chord at the 12-member CWC, the composition of which has been changed only to a limited extent since Rajiv took over as the party president last November. "It was a frank and democratic discussion on the basic policies of the party," says R. Gundu Rao, the controversial former chief minister of Karnataka who is still a member of the CWC. But Rao, Mukherjee and others were reportedly insisting on a thorough revision of the draft economic policy so that the AICC(I) members could be reassured that there was no policy reversal on the cards. Of crucial significance is a sentence that was deleted from the draft: "The strength of the growth impulses of the economy through absorption of modern technology and through appropriate fiscal and legislative changes is imperative to sustain the tempo of industrial development."

A CWC member explained later that the term "fiscal and legislative changes" could be misinterpreted as "a signal for diluting our basic commitment to socialism". And so strong was the attachment of the Congress(I) leaders to accepted semantics of the past decade that the paragraph on Indo-Soviet relations in the resolution on international affairs was expanded to put in a few laudatory statements about the Soviet Union being "our trusted friend in varied vicissitudes". Even the political resolution of the AICC(I), proposed by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister N.D. Tiwari, restated that socialism was the "chosen path" of the Congress(I).

The mood of the session, however, was palpably subdued compared to what such festivities usually are. The AICC(I) secretariat gave out an attendance figure of 525 out of 695 elected and co-opted members, including CWC members, PCC(I) chiefs and leaders of the Congress(I) legislature parties. But even members admitted that a good section of the crowd was "fake" and "mobilised" by the local Congress(I) leadership of Delhi. Even badges were distributed not strictly according to status. What caused some heartburn amongst seasoned Congressmen was the presence of Ahmed

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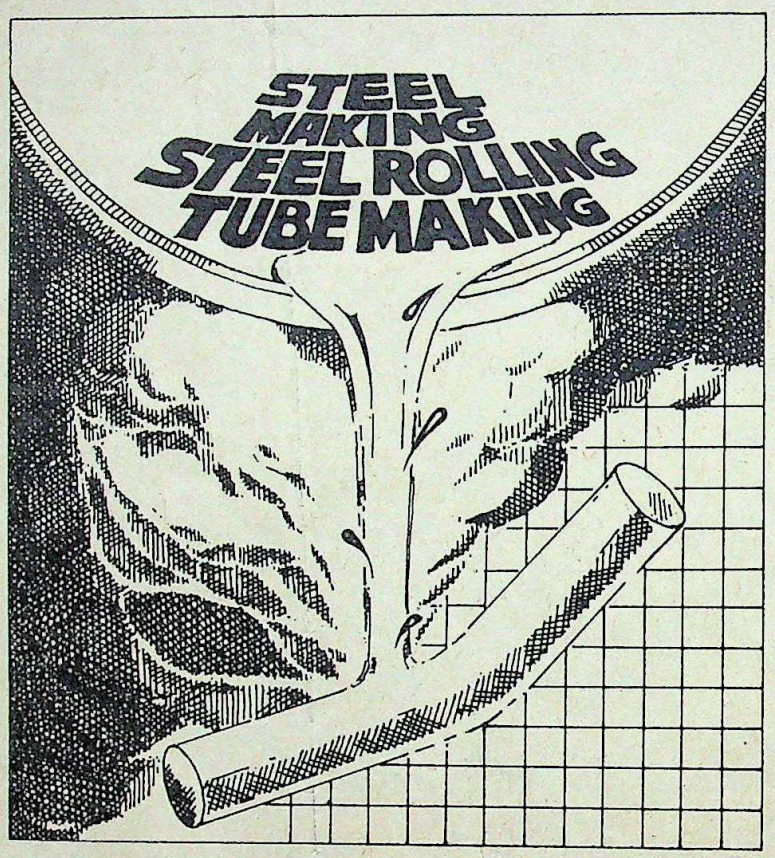

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Patel, parliamentary secretary to Rajiv, all along on the main stage at Talkatora Stadium with a badge pinned on his kurta which was meant for only CWC members.

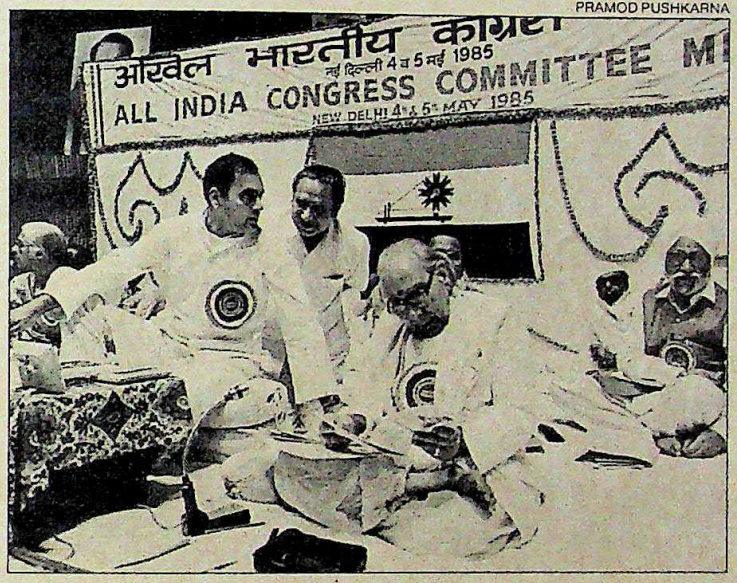
Even the festooning and putting up of arches and buntings were on a lower key. The only bright spot to the ritualistic session was a 'cultural evening' on the final day in course of which Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, MP from West Bengal, sang Tagore songs to the accompaniment of a full orchestra and Oscar Fernandez, the other parliamentary secretary to the prime minister, clearly running out of musical ideas, sang a distinctly off-key *By the River of Babylon* to the lackadaisical strumming of guitars. The public rally at Ramlila Grounds was well-attended. But there were rows upon rows of hired buses testifying to the resources of the reception committee. And taking no chances, Lata Mangeshkar was billed for the evening.

On the whole, the AICC(I) was tepid and conservative. However, the triumph of conservatism over the pulls of time is nothing new at the AICC(I). For that matter, the resolutions adopted at the Calcutta Congress in 1983 hardly reflect the policy changes that Mrs Gandhi herself had begun since her return to power in 1980—the decision to borrow from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the policy of encouraging investment by non-resident Indians being some of them. But, by accepting in toto the traditional and time-worn Congress phraseology, Rajiv gave an impression of hastening slowly, and defused the sullen resentment of a few malcontents within the party.

Though rendered almost inaudible by the din of orchestrated praise for Rajiv and Mrs Gandhi, the bitterness of the sulking Congressmen found occasional expression. K. Brahmananda Reddy, the Andhra Pradesh leader left high and dry, channelised his ire discreetly through a theoretical diatribe against "elitism" and not doing enough "for the villagers". C.K. Jaffar Sharief, former minister of state for railways, and Brajamohan Mohanty of Orissa were even more vitriolic than Reddy: both of them made bold to say that anti-poverty programmes of the party should take priority over modernisation. Finally Rajiv himself provided the soothing touch when he compared the Congress(I) to the Ganga, saying that "like the great river" the party too is a "melting-pot" of ideas.

If nothing else, the session proved that the party and its young president are not yet on the same wavelength. Or, looked at another way, it needs further remoulding if Rajiv seeks instant endorsement of his ideas—particularly on the economic front. Mrs Gandhi did not have to face this problem ever since she made public her 'Stray Thoughts' at Bangalore and split the party in 1969 to fashion it according to her own taste. When the problem arose again in 1978, she split it again.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Rajiv with Tripathi and Darbara Singh: living with the legacy

But Rajiv began with a party which he had inherited, not what he had created from below. Of late he has attempted to bring about a few stray changes in the CWC, such as inducting three new members. They are K. Karunakaran, chief minister of Kerala; Hiteswar Saikia, chief minister of Assam; and A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, AICC(I) general secretary who, however, had become a CWC member not for his party post but on his own right. Ironically, V.P. Singh, who is reputed to have the closest mental rapport with the prime minister among all other cabinet ministers, is not even a member of the CWC.

"A generational change in the Congress(I)," said Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, one of the AICC(I) general secretaries, "can begin only through fresh organisational elections." Mrs Gandhi had promised party elections half a dozen times since 1980, but never followed it through. But Rajiv announced at the AICC(I) that the list of Congress(I) members would be published before the party convention in December, and elections would take place in 1986.

Pending the party elections, which alone can enable him to drastically overhaul the personnel at all key places in the Congress(I), Rajiv is lately taking keen interest in restructuring the Youth Congress(I). His hand was evident in the manner of selection of Anand Sharma, the 31-year-old Himachal Pradesh youth leader, as the new Youth Congress(I) president replacing an over-aged and somewhat lack-lustre Tariq Anwar. Sharma's clinching qualification was that he was not propped up by any lobby in the party. Sharma's surprise appointment was followed by posting of a new and unexpected array of political beginners as general secretaries, notably M. Ramesh, only 26 and the youngest member of the Kerala Assembly, and Mamata Bannerjee, the 27-year-old MP from West Bengal. Said Sharma: "Rajivji has given me a new team to work with and I am grateful."

But Rajiv, being the president of the AICC(I) himself, cannot have the same advantage as that of Sharma. He was so entirely taken aback by the criticism by party members of his economic policies and budget that he had to speak to the AICC(I) members summoning the most persuasive of languages. Later on, Shivraj Patil explained the Government's technological policy, and Mukherjee was summoned to defend the budget.

Mrs Gandhi could always afford to take the party for granted because of her unique stature in the party as well as her ability to address the people directly, without the agency of the party. Rajiv is still the most popular leader the country has. But time alone can bring his popularity to the extent of making him independent of the party. Till then, he has to learn to live with an AICC(I) which is his legacy from his mother, and wait till the promised organisational elections sweep most of them away.

—SUMIT MITRA

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PM's SECRETARIAT

Teething Troubles

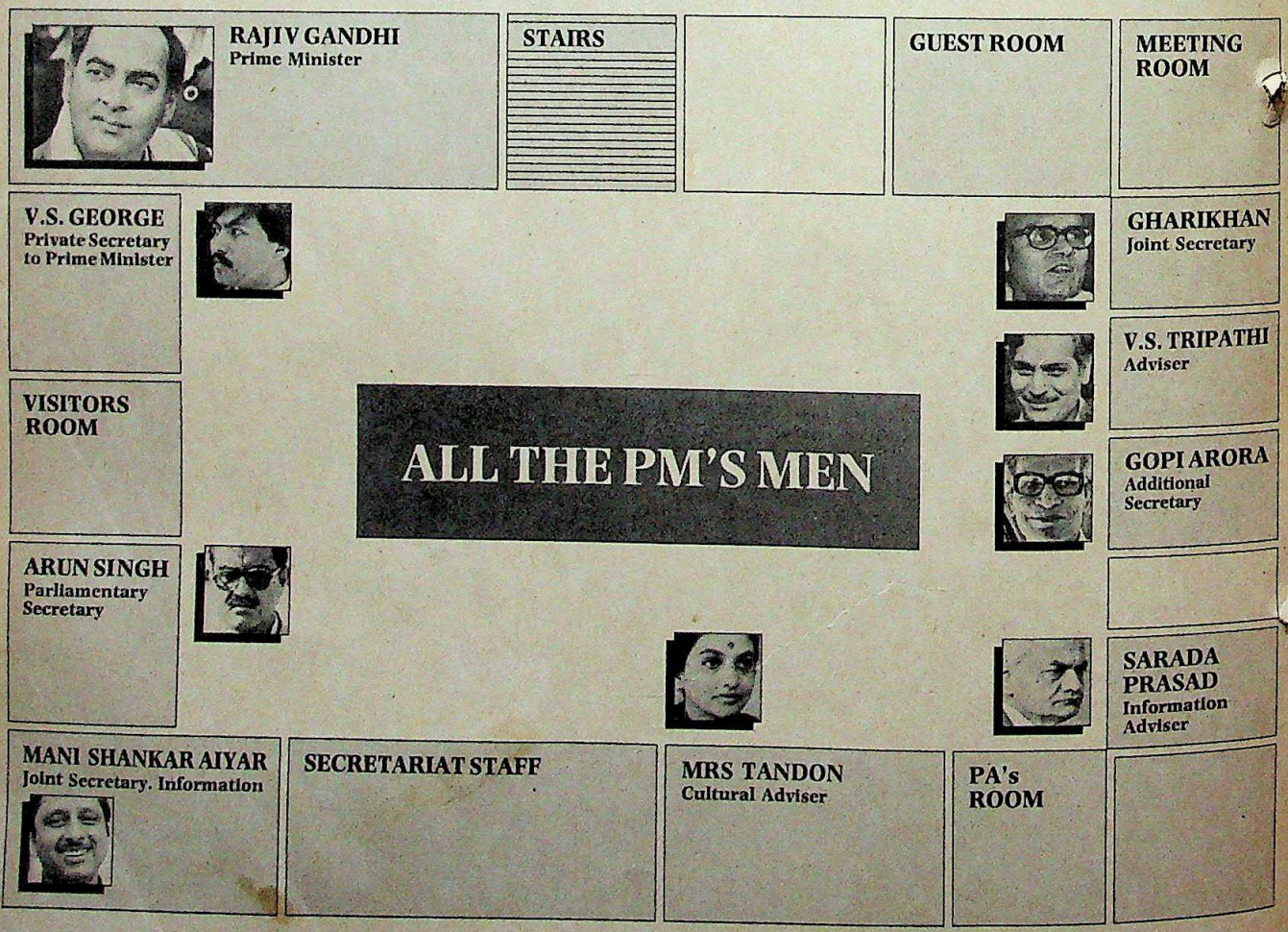
WHEN the old order changeth, it yields place to new. However, in the formidable edifice of the Union Government, which knows how to take changes in its stride, the only department quick at switching gear to match the personality of the boss is the Prime Minister's Secretariat. And for good reason. The three rows of high-ceiling rooms on the first floor of the capital's South Block are the seat of the prime minister's power, the engine-room of the Government.

Changes indeed were occurring rather too rapidly. Last fortnight, V.S. Venkatraman, the pleasant-mannered special assistant (SA) to the prime minister, who had been appointed only four months ago on the belief that the secretariat needed faceless yet rule-abiding bureaucrats rather than odd job men like former SA to the prime minister, R.K. Dhawan, quietly quit the office to shift to the safe haven of the Commerce Ministry. "The reason for my leaving the Prime Minister's Secretariat is entirely personal," Venkatraman told INDIA TODAY. But there was the inevitable 'other side' to the story: such as his lack of the knowledge of who's who in the party, and his inability to gauge the unstated preferences of his master, Rajiv Gandhi.

The man who rode into office earlier occupied by Dhawan and Venkatraman is Vincent S. George, a former pool typist of the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) who had been loaned to Rajiv when he became MP in 1981. But, probably in deference to the fact that George was too rough-hewn a replacement for Venkatraman, a man who had become private secretary to the late Lal Bahadur Shastri, his post was downgraded to that of the private secretary to the prime minister. It was really a quantum jump backwards, because the institution of the SA to the prime minister meant much more than the ability to take fast dictation.

Rajiv's broom swept deeper inside. In an announcement that took the Congress(I) circles by storm, Makhan Lal Fotedar, the high-profile political aide appointed by the AICC(I) to assist Rajiv as the party president, was nominated to the Rajya Sabha. The move looked like being preparatory to his passage to oblivion because his main work, that of safeguarding the nexus between the prime minister and the party, was promptly apportioned to Ahmed Patel, one of the three newly-appointed parliamentary secretaries to the prime minister.

Fotedar had never been a part of the official secretariat, though he was always an integral part of the inner coterie of the late Mrs Gandhi, and for some time later on, of Rajiv too. His departure, together with the exit of Dhawan in January, marked the final break of Rajiv with his inherited past. Fotedar and Dhawan had never made a harmonious team, but Mrs Gandhi had reposed so much of her trust in the tough Kashmiri politician that she had made him a witness to her personal will as far back as 1981.



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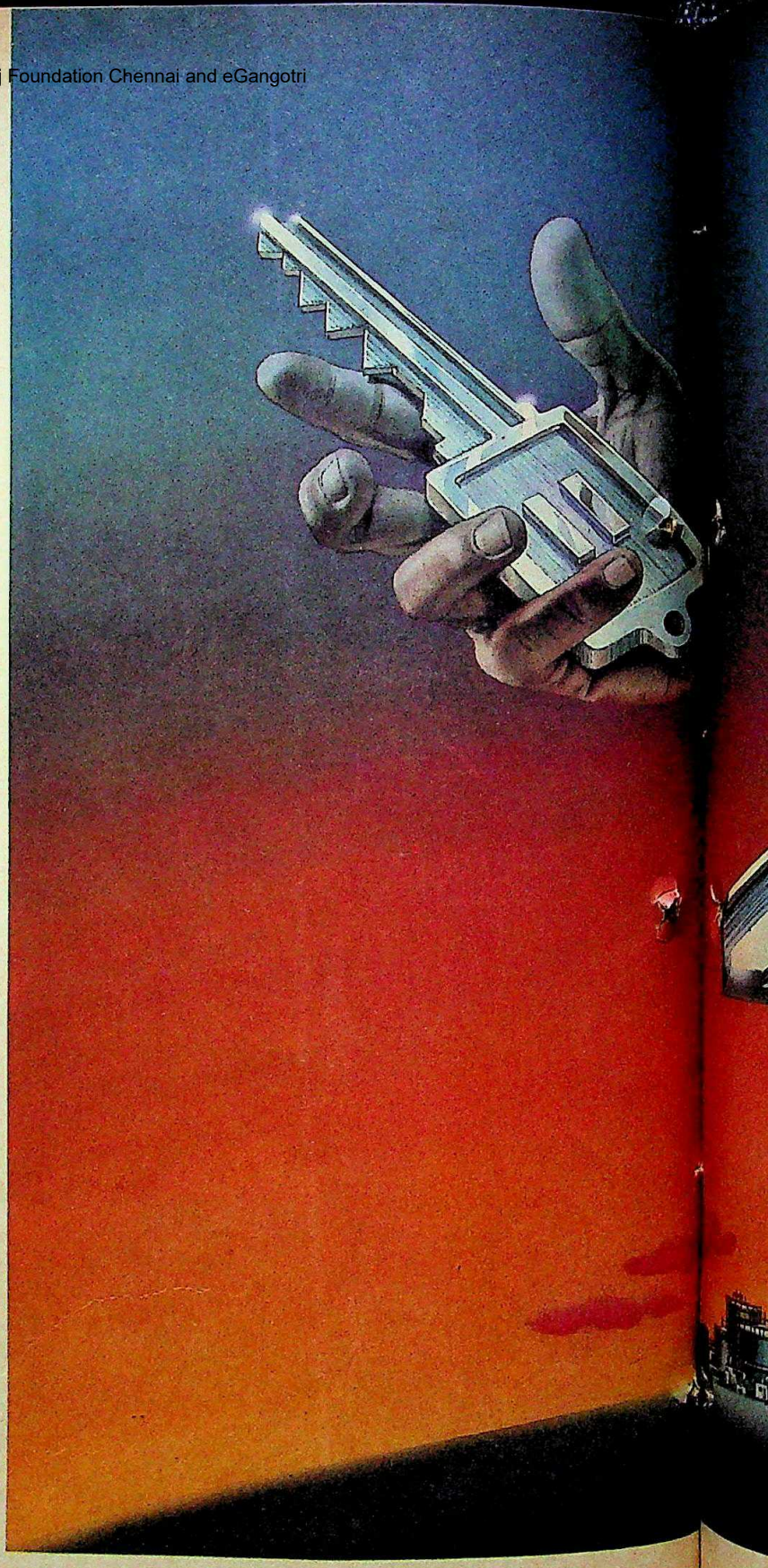

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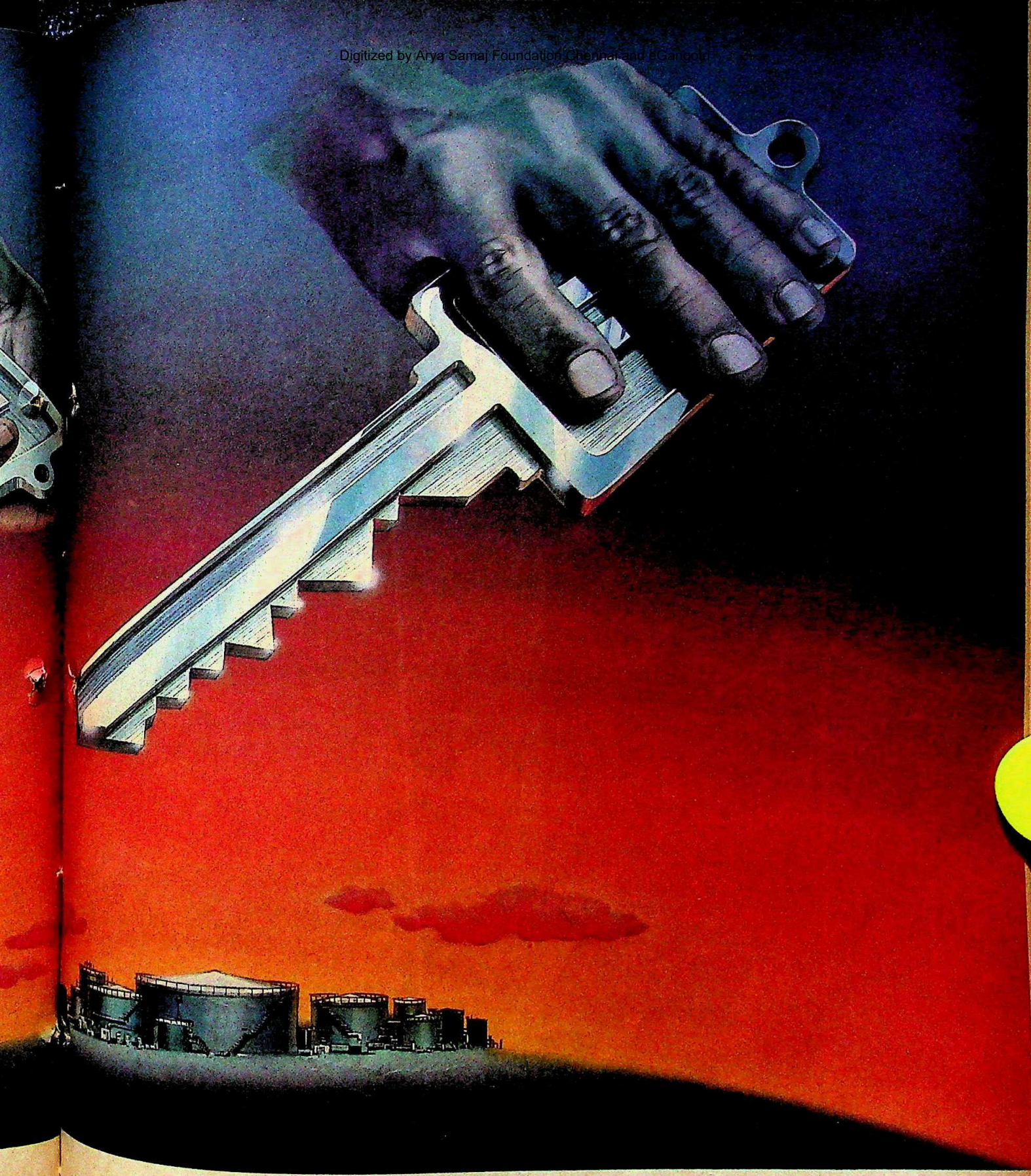

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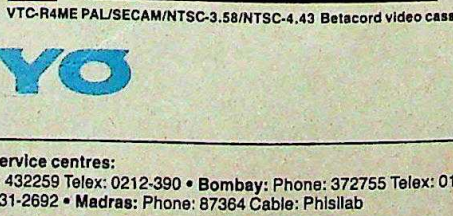

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The broom did not relent last fortnight. The last remnant from the past to be swept away was Vijay Shankar Tripathi, an ambitious Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer in the secretariat who had quit the cadre in 1983 to permanently join Mrs Gandhi's bandwagon. Tripathi's renewable contract expired on April 30. Though he really does not have much of a job in the new-look secretariat, his exit, if it comes, will remain unsung.

With the relics from the past gently but firmly put away, Rajiv's state of the art secretariat now has no civil servant at its pinnacle. This is a dramatic U-turn in policy since Shastri introduced the office of the principal secretary to the prime minister in 1965 and chose L.N. Jha, one of the seniormost civil servants of the time, for the job.

Venkatraman

Fotedar

Alexander

However, when P.C. Alexander, principal secretary to Mrs Gandhi, resigned early this year in the wake of the spy scandal, he was hurriedly relieved of his post and no other principal secretary has been appointed. The secretariat today is virtually headed by Arun Singh, the affable, Doon School and Cambridge-educated senior parliamentary secretary to Rajiv. Thus, at an unripe age of 40 and without any standing in the bureaucratic hierarchy, Singh has to coordinate for Rajiv, his childhood friend, the functions of practically all the departments in the Union Government.

With Alexander no longer there, the secretariat now is no doubt a bit less stiff upper-lipped than it used to be. Its personnel make a homogeneous team: its members are mostly in their late youth, just as the prime minister is, and many of them also share the now-familiar public school or Oxbridge orientation.

Leaving aside the prime minister, himself a Doon School alumnus, the other products of the school in the secretariat are: Arvind Pandey, son of former Punjab governor B.D. Pandey and joint secretary looking after economic affairs; Wajahat Habibullah, director at the external affairs desk; Mani Shankar Ajyar, joint secretary for information; and Arun Singh, the acknowledged master of ceremonies.

In fact, except H.Y. Sharda Prasad, the information adviser to the prime minister who holds the rank of a secretary, there is no other grey-haired bureaucrat in the secretariat, the seniormost of the remaining lot being G.K. Arora, the additional secretary who coordinates with all non-economic ministries. The team is as well-knit as any other old boys' club. It does not lack in enthusiasm. All that it lacks is maturity and experience.

The first sign of maladroitness of the prime minister's close advisers came in with the inexplicable double-mindedness with which Arjun Singh was installed the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh and then, within a day, was sent packing to Punjab as governor. This faux pas in early this year took everyone, including Arjun Singh himself, by total surprise. Though no official explanation was forthcoming for the volte face, it bred the suspicion of wavering minds.

It could still have been written off as the teething troubles of a government of greenhorns had such blunders not kept piling upon each other. But soon thereafter the Prime Minister's Secretariat took the strange decision of clearing the names of defence personnel for bravery awards in recognition of their roles in the June 1984 'Operation Bluestar'. Though the investiture ceremony saw no mention of the controversial action at the Golden Temple, the citations did. And it exacerbated communal passions at a time when moderation alone held the key to the solution of the Punjab problem. It was most probably an unconscious mistake. Still the damage was done.

The ministries cannot possibly be made to carry the can for such follies because practically all decisions of the Government are still vetted by the Prime Minister's Secretariat just as they used to be in Mrs Gandhi's time. A recent example of such mishandleing came when a new deputy chief of the army was appointed superseding two officers of the rank of lieutenant-general. Since deputy chiefs are customarily appointed on the basis of seniority, the two affected lieutenant-generals were up on their feet protesting against the decision. The Government immediately got cold feet and elevated the two generals to the rank of deputy chief, buying peace but losing face.

The political front also presented such identical spectacles of haphazard thinking. In the thick of the Gujarat agitation, B.K. Nehru, the governor, was summoned back from his holiday in Switzerland, obviously in anticipation of promulgation of the President's rule. But, as Nehru succeeded in meeting the prime minister after two days of waiting, he was merely told to proceed to Gandhinagar and stay put at the Raj Bhavan. What was at stake was not Nehru's holidays in the Alps but the Government's capacity to act decisively.

There were similar instances of such official flip-flop galore. Pranab Mukherjee, though summarily dropped from the new cabinet, and castigated by Rajiv himself for being "goody-goody" and "not tough", was made the president of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) Committee. This is despite the fact that Ahmed Patel, acting on behalf of Rajiv, had contacted a large cross-section of partyment on choosing the PCC(I) cheif, and Mukherjee was nobody's favourite.

The reins of the party and the Government were all along held tightly by the late Mrs Gandhi who pioneered the concept of combining the twin offices of the prime minister and the AICC(I) chief. Her grip over partymen was strong enough to ensure that at least party MP's did not talk at cross purposes on the floor of the Parliament. But the recent budget session witnessed the novel spectacle of ministers being heckled from the treasury benches, Congressmen attacking each other, and party MP's raising topics that could only embarrass the Government.

The most trenchant attack on the Railway Ministry, for instance, came from A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, the former railway minister who had been shunted off since the last Lok Sabha elections, to the AICC(I) as one of its general secretaries. So outrageous was the tone of the attack of Bhagwat Jha Azad, a former Union minister and a Congress(I) MP, on Abdul Ghafoor, the minister for works and housing, that the speaker had to expunge most of Azad's outpourings from the proceedings. Equally bizarre was the spectacle of K.K. Tiwari, a voluble Congress(I) member of the Lok Sabha who is often regarded as spokesman for powerful coteries inside the Congress(I), taking up the cudgel against the President of India in a criticism that lacked both substance and grace.

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Another slip-up at the top was best illustrated by the perverse error of the Government in forgetting the name of Shastri while trying to move a bill for commemorating prime ministers who had died in harness, but only Jawaharlal Nehru and Mrs Gandhi were mentioned in the bill.When opposition member Madhu Dandavate brought it to the notice of the Government that Shastri too had died in office, H.K.L Bhagat, the minister for parliamentary affairs, beat a hasty retreat, withdrawing the bill on the plea that it called for discussion outside the House. "It seems", says Dandavate, "that there is nobody at any level at the Centre who does any comprehensive thinking."

Yet there is no dearth of talents in Rajiv's inner circle, comprising his secretariat and his parliamentary secretaries, including Singh, Patel and Oscar Fernandez. Their jobs are demarcated: Singh being the conduit between Rajiv and the Government; Patel linking him with the party; and Fernandez dealing with MP's and parliamentary affairs. A proud addition to Rajiv's 'think-tank' is Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the suave Oxford-educated economist who is regarded as the lynchpin for many of the Government's recent moves at liberalisation of the economy. Arora and R. Vasudevan also make a low-key yet vigilant team that keeps Singh posted daily on matters ranging from defence to law and order. Singh undoubtedly casts his shadow on the secretariat, yet access to the prime minister is not guarded for any of its ranking members.

What is missing is the fulcrum personified earlier in the galaxy of senior servants that led the secretariat; L.K. Jha, P.N. Haksar, V. Shankar, and, later on, Alexander. An officer of the 1948 vintage, Alexander was taken on board by Mrs Gandhi precisely for his seniority and experience. It enabled him to constantly feel the pulse of the bureaucracy in India. The bureaucracy, however maligned, is the only institution that has a reservoire of collective experience to work out for the chief executive, that is the prime minister, the available options and their implications.

If the new system gets over its incipient problems and shows success, it can signal a welcome de-bureaucratisation of the prime minister's office. But if such follies as are in evidence now keep multiplying, then it is not the secretariat, or any of its executives, but Rajiv himself who has to accept the blame.

—SUMIT MITRA and PRABHU CHAWLA

KERALA

Suicide Scandal

IT MIGHT have been passed off as just another suicide death but when 36-year-old Ramani Menon was declared dead in a Trivandrum hospital on May 3 after she had consumed lethal pesticide, the shock waves were felt throughout the academic community in Kerala. Not only did the suicide raise a number of questions on the running of privately-managed schools in general, but it also disturbed the calm of the local Carmel Convent of which Ramani's daughter, Vandana, was a student —the suicide followed the refusal by school authorities to promote Vandana from standard nine to 10.

Ramani (top) and Vandana: strong feelings

Vandana, said to be a brilliant student, had been detained in the ninth standard because she was three marks short of the minimum pass mark in mathematics though she had first class marks in all other subjects. According to her father, C.B. Menon, an engineer at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, she was deliberately detained because she did not pay for the school bus donation fund and did not take special tuition classes arranged by the convent authorities. While the headmistress of the school turned down Ramani's requests, she said she would permit Vandana to sit for re-examination in the subject in June when the minimum essential test (MET) would be held.

The MET, held after schools reopen for the academic year, is conducted for failed students in all schools in Kerala. The students, however, are required to score at least 90 per cent marks in the subject they are being re-examined for. Many schools are alleged to use this opportunity to secure huge donations from students who wish to be promoted. School authorities also often arrange special tuitions for students—again after charging an exorbitant fee.

The Carmel Convent as a practice, it is alleged, fails average students in the ninth standard so they can secure a cent per cent first class result for the final year Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC). Said M.R.T. Nair, a college principal: "By not allowing average students to attend the tenth standard these convents claim they have very good coaching, which results in anxious parents rushing to the school with fat donations to get children in."

The convent authorities, meanwhile, claim that Vandana was only an average student. Said Menon: "I have been signing her progress card so far but the new progress card submitted by the authorities shows my wife's signature, which has been forged." He also alleged that his daughter was detained because she had only paid Rs 508 of the Rs 1,000 demanded for the school bus donation. Sister Rene, the headmistress who initially refused to meet the press, later conducted a press conference to clear the issue. The management, she maintained, had not collected any compulsory donations from parents though it had accepted interest-free loans for the purchase of the bus. She denied that the school authorities insisted on students taking tuition from school teachers.

The public outcry that followed the suicide was volatile. The Carmel Convent was stoned by an angry mob of college students. State Education Minister T.M. Jacob immediately ordered an inquiry into the incident. "We will withdraw recognition of the Carmel Convent if the report proves that corrupt practices existed in the school," he said.

Of the 11,726 schools in the state, 7,288 are privately run, mostly by missionaries. Though many of these schools receive aid from the Government some reportedly demand donations from teachers as well as students who wish to join the school. Two schools have been derecognised since Ramani's death. Indeed it may not be just the future of a single school that now rests on the probe, it may be the end of an entire system of education.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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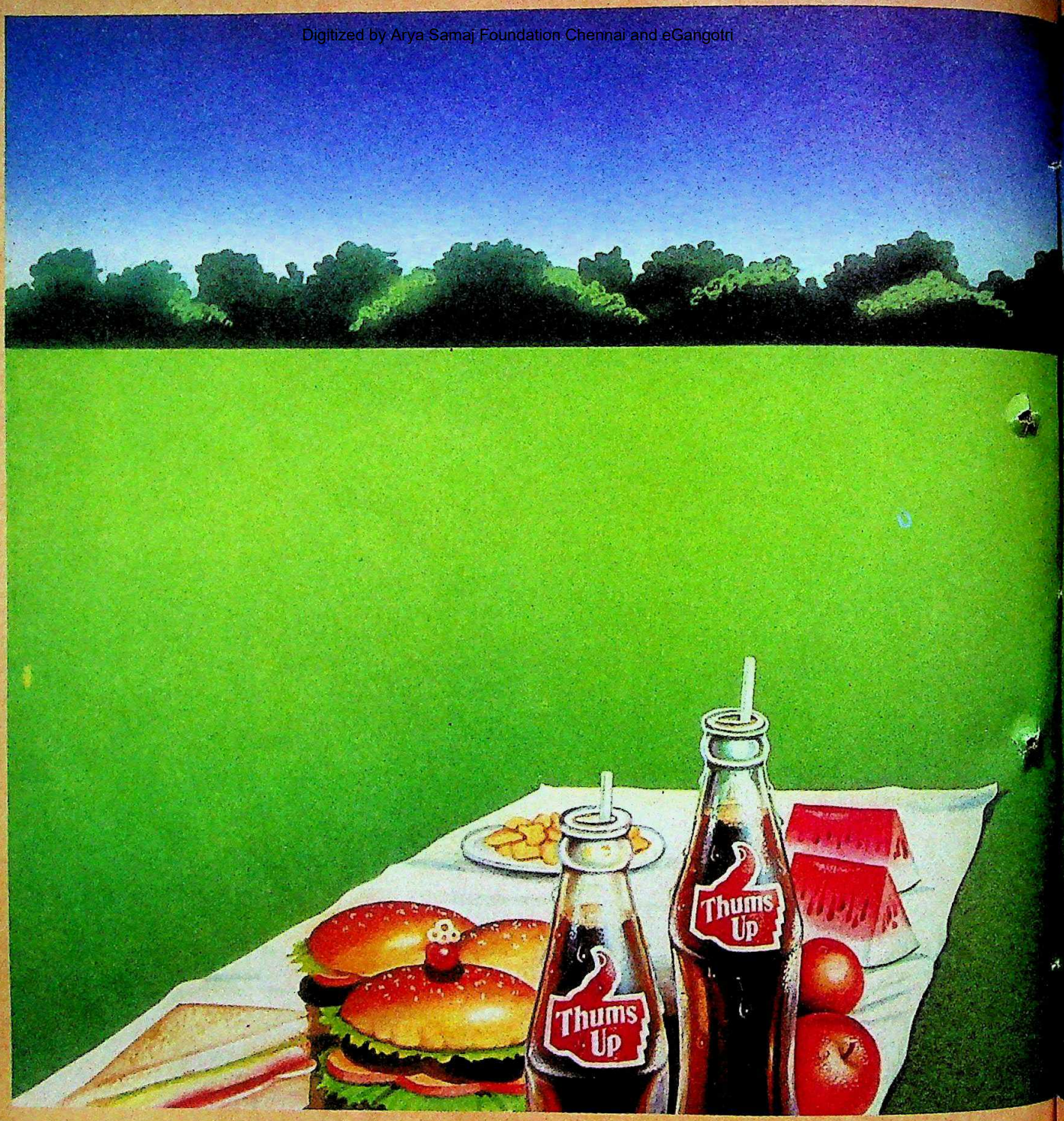

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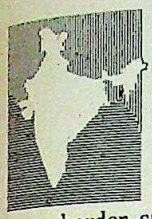
TRIPURA

Trouble Prone



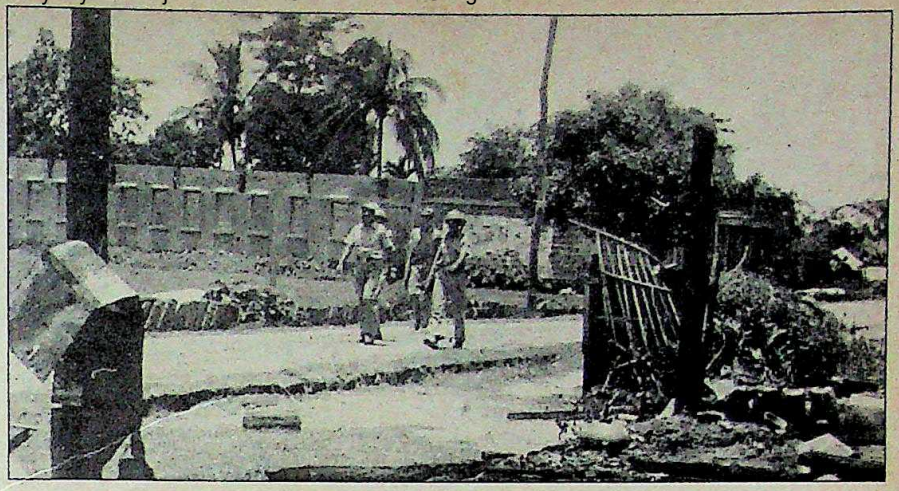
WITH its tiny size, its isolated location, its lowest per capita income, its rugged terrain and an absolutely stagnant economy, Tripura has long been an obscure border state dimly remembered only for its tangy pineapples and its Marxist Government—fire-eating but fairly inefficient. Of late, however, the state has acquired the new and doubtful distinction of being the prime trouble-spot in the North-east, threatening to remain a seat of extremist violence in the zone even after the 20-year-long legacy of trouble in neighbouring Mizoram is settled through peace talks between the Centre and rebel leader Laldenga.

The difference is: while Laldenga has accepted the Indian Constitution, the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), the underground militant group of tribals now preaching secession, believes in an "independent Tripura", freed from the Indian Union and rid of its nearly 1.5 million non-tribal Bengali settlers. Though heavily outnumbered, the six lakh tribals are well spread out over two-thirds of the state's territory.

And the TNV, though small in size, is determined enough to paralyse the state. Its activity has spurted following the announcement by the Left Front Government that it would hold elections to the autonomous district council, comprising 68 per cent of the state's area where 31 per cent of the population—mostly tribals—lives. The elections are likely in June, but the TNV guerrillas are now fully in command of the villages, the forest tracks and the roads that snake along between hills. Since an amendment to the Constitution in January this year, by which the autonomous district council in Tripura was included in the Sixth Schedule, the TNV has feverishly stepped up its activity, killing 31 men in attacks and ambushes. The objective being not to allow either the Left Front or the moderate tribals to take over control of the autonomous district council.

Bijoy Hrankhal

Though sporadic killings had been going on previously, the goriest of this year's incidents happened at the hamlet of Satraichara in the North Tripura district. On March 19, seven non-tribals of the locality had stepped into the tribal-dominated interior pockets for fishing. All seven, including a 12-year-old, were bayoneted to death. It was two days before the state police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) parties could arrive. But their arrival was greeted with further violence. On April 5, the guerrillas ambushed with deadly accuracy a police vehicle that had pulled up at the same spot: three policemen, five CRPF personnel and a Home Guard were mowed down by the TNV men in an operation that lasted only a few minutes. No one was arrested and panic was so pervasive that no witness came forward to identify the assailants.



Patrolling a Tripura street: combating extremism

This was only the repetition of a pattern of violence in Tripura. Last year, the TNV had killed 62 people, including 21 members of the security forces, but only one of its members was shot dead in retaliatory action. In February this year, its killer squads liquidated Binanda Jamatia, an important former extremist who had come overground and had joined the Marxists, in a daring action even though Jamatia was protected by the state police.

So widespread is the panic caused by the extremists in Tripura that the buses of the state-owned corporation would not ply along the roads just beyond the capital of Agartala after four in the afternoon. Forestry operations in the state ground to a halt as the TNV began selecting the unarmed forest guards as its targets. Over 60 per cent of teaching posts in rural schools cannot be filled up because non-tribal teachers do not dare go to the villages and invite the prospect of getting killed. Even the morale of the police force has sunk low: there are reports that in some areas of the South Tripura district police personnel have been generously donating to the coffers of the extremists to stay away from trouble.

The mastermind of the TNV is Bijoy Hrankhal, a 30-year-old tribal leader who in 1982 assumed control of the underground movement. Hrankhal is a Christian, a rarity among the Tripura tribals and, being a Kuki, he is ethnically a close cousin of the Mizos. Hrankhal is also better educated than his compatriots, having been schooled at Shillong's Don Bosco. He joined the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS), a moderate political party of the tribals, in the mid-'70s. But he always had his own ideas on the subject of tribal autonomy. In 1979 he met Laldenga in Delhi and was instantly converted to extremism. Around then he began putting together the nucleus of the TNV from among the ranks of the tribal poor, mostly school drop-outs of an impressionable age who were easily swayed by Hrankhal.

Before his escape to the Chittagong Hills, Hrankhal had remote-controlled the ethnic riots of June 1980 in which over 2,000 people—mostly Bengalis—were killed. But the Left Front Government of Chief Minister Nripen Chakraborty pussyfooted over his trial, and he escaped from literally under the nose of the state Government even though it was trying to placate him by offering him soft loans from the state-run rural bank. Says Nagendra Jamatia, general secretary of the TUJS and an MLA: "Bijoy Hrankhal is a Frankenstein created by the Marxists. They hoped that the Frankenstein would only kill us, but

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now he is eating his maker."

Hrankhal's *singlung* (meaning the place of work) is at Thangnang, deep inside Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and 30 km from the rebel Mizo National Front (MNF) tactical headquarters at New Lanka.

It is from their sanctuary under the benign eyes of the Bangladesh army that Hrankhal's men have been operating in the past few years. Now they have spread out to the northern borders as well, dotting the state's 839-kilometre-long international border with over 10 "transit posts", or smaller sanctuaries where the rebels can escape after operations within Tripura. The men are not many—between 150 and 200. But they have to their advantage the inhospitable terrain, the jungle cover and the inefficiency of the state law and order machinery. Says Nilmani Sarkar, a Bengali trader at Teliamura, only 43 km from Agartala: "The raj of Agartala does not go beyond the roads. If the state cannot protect the life of a witness living in a village, why should anyone come forward to give evidence?"

Ironically, the ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) is the only political party in the state armed with a strong organisation among the tribals—the decades-old Tripura Gana Mukti Parishad with 55,000 tribal families listed among its members. And the Left Front Government has a strong tribal representation: Dasarath Debbarman, president of the Parishad and veteran leader of the tribal uprising against the former rulers of Tripura till the princely state's annexation in 1951, is now the deputy chief minister in Chakraborty's cabinet.

In 1980, when ethnic hatred caused by years of tribal alienation from land first engulfed Tripura, the Centre had recommended strong measures, including deployment of the regular army. But the CPI(M), wary that it might recoil on its own support base among the tribals, resisted army deployment and instead adopted a lenient approach towards the extremists with the hope that they could be persuaded to play ball with the state Government. Of the 500-odd people arrested in connection with the 1980 riots, cases have been kept alive only against 23. A number of the those let off by the police are members of CPI(M)'s lower committees.

The Left Front's conciliatory policy towards the extremists paid only short-term dividends. The most spectacular of its gains was the surrender of Binanda Jamatia, a front-ranking extremist, with 73 of his followers to the state Government in 1983. Chakraborty himself presided over the function held to mark the surrender. As usual, the cases against Jamatia and his followers for offences ranging from murder to sedition were dropped. Jamatia was overnight made a member of the central committee of the Parishad. As long as the wave of surrenders lasted, 296 extremists came overground. The state Government employed 103 of them in its various departments, another 100 were given help to either start businesses or farm.

The party unit at the state is gripped by an insoluble leadership crisis. Chakraborty is in such indifferent health that he is often laid up in bed for days together.

THE PARISHAD can still draw votes for the CPI(M) candidates from the tribal constituencies, testified to by the fact that 15 of the 17 reserved tribal assembly segments (constituencies) witnessed the Left Front candidates gaining leads in the last year's Lok Sabha polls. But, as a Parishad leader himself put it candidly: "It is one thing to vote for a political party and another thing to turn against long-term tribal interests. After all, as long as the Left Front is in power, the security forces would not dare disrupt the tribal way of life and resort to large-scale torture, as they are doing in Mizoram and Manipur."

The front is now stridently opposing a Central suggestion that the Disturbed Areas Act be extended to the whole state and the regular army be deployed. Instead it wants three or four more battalions of paramilitary forces to be placed under its command. On April 15, the front resorted to the overused Marxist weapon—a 24-hour general strike—to stress their demand for more paramilitary forces. The Congress(I), not to stay behind, also called for a bandh on the same day—though only for 12 hours—demanding army deployment and promulgation of the Disturbed Areas Act in the state. Says Ashok Bhattacharya, the controversial Pradesh Congress(I) Committee president: "The Left Front Government should be removed in the national interest. There is no short cut to it."

That is definitely a prescription for overkill because the Marxist support base in the state is already shrinking. In 1978, the Front wrested power from the Congress by winning 56 of the 60 seats in the state Assembly. Five years later the Front's strength shrank to 39. In the 1984 Lok Sabha polls, Front candidates won in only 30 of the states's 60 assembly segments including the 15 reserved segments. Thus the Front could win only 15 of the 43 open constituencies where Bengali non-tribals are in a majority. The demographic reality of Tripura, with its overwhelmingly large settler population is such that no party can rule the state without the support of the Bengalis.

In fact the Bengalis had accepted the CPI(M) after years of misrule by the Congress during which unemployment spiralled, law and order broke down and cynicism crept into every sphere. But the wheel is about to turn full circle because the Left Front Government did nothing except provide some cosmetic relief. The Front responded to the unemployment problem by staffing the Government with more and more people—5,000 every year—but there was no concerted attempt to tap the state's potential revenue earners: fruits for canning, processing and export; high quality rubber for value-added use. The Centre compounded the neglect by refusing the licence for a paper mill, by dilly-dallying over a second jute mill and by refusing to extend the railhead beyond Dhar-

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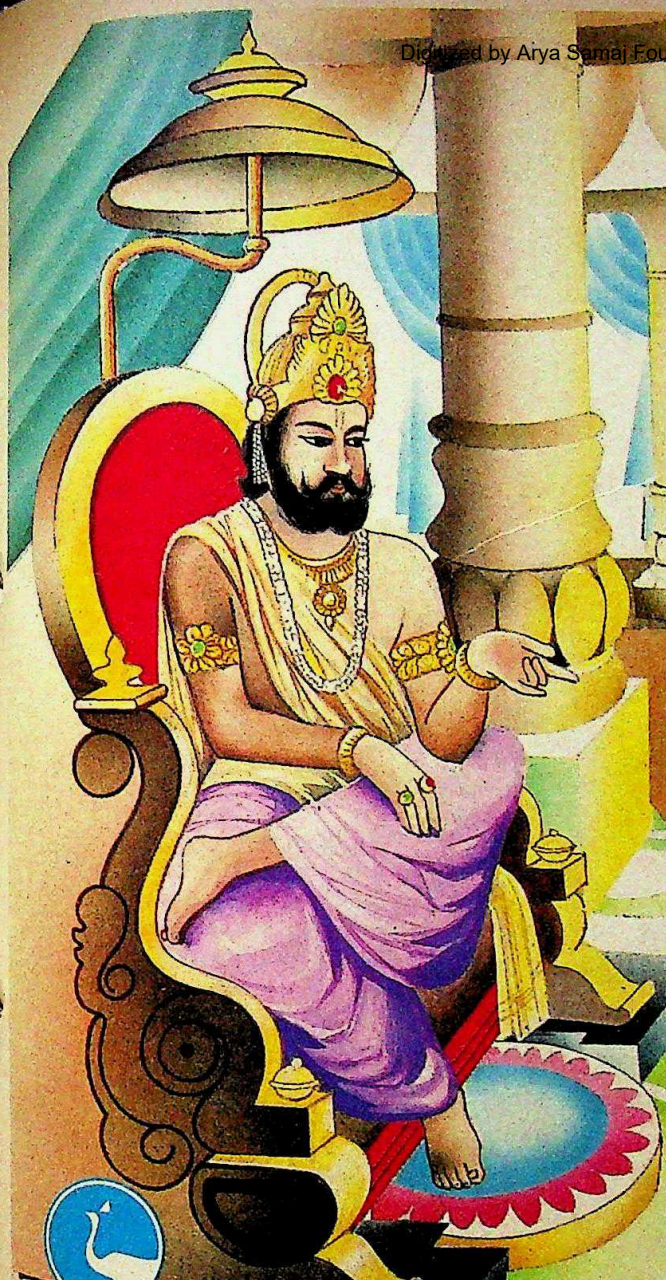

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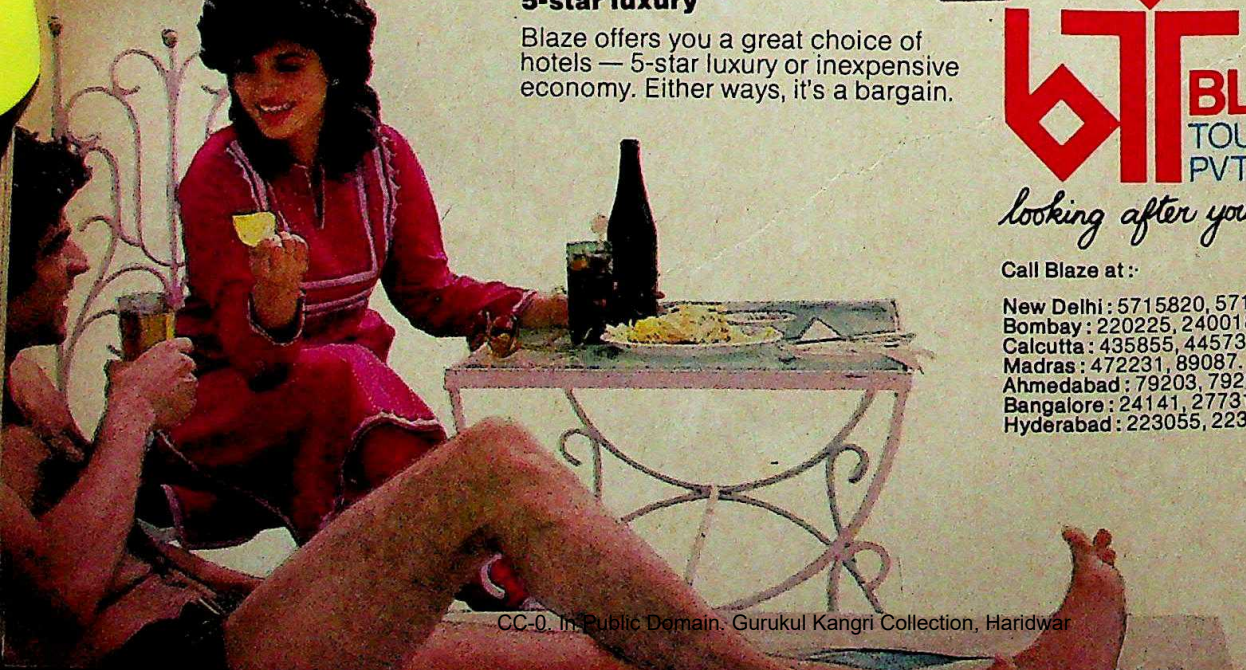

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manager, only 17 km into Tripura from the Assam border but a good 200 km from Agartala.

"Tripura has always been discriminated against by the Congress. It is more now because the Left Front is in power," says Bhanu Ghosh, the general secretary of the CPI(M)'s Tripura state committee. But, though Ghosh would be the last person to admit it, the party unit at the state is gripped by an insoluble leadership crisis. Chakraborty, its pillar as well as its architect, is 79 now and is in such indifferent health that he often has to be in bed for days together. Chakraborty, together with Dasarath Debbarman and 73-year-old Labour Minister Biren Datta, regarded as the party's "ruling troika", are in such bad health that all of them were absent from work for most of last fortnight in April. Says Bhupen Datta-Bhowmik, a bitter critic of the Left Front who edits *Dainik Sangbad*, Tripura's largest-selling Bengali daily: "The main constituency of the Marxists—the backward classes among both tribals and Bengalis—has now seen that the Left Front cannot deliver the goods and that jobs do not grow on trees. And the Marxists are too old and too sick to change now, to take bold new steps, to rise above circumstances."

With no state backing to improve the economy of Tripura, the main thrust of economic survival among the Bengalis is towards jobs and land, both of which are limited. Significantly, the acts of extremist violence are almost invariably sparked along areas where tribals have been recently alienated from their land. Hrankhal's men may not yet have mass support in the tribal areas but they are surely gambling on the tinder-box situation created in the state because of the growing pressure on tribal land, dwindling resources and the state's general stagnation.

The TNV proposes drastic remedies —like turning out all those who entered the state after 1949. The state Congress(I), on the other hand, was opposed to the very concept of autonomous district councils till very recently. Meanwhile, the CPI(M) party bosses, operating from their spick and span office in otherwise seedy Agartala are caught in a cleft stick: they are unable to reconcile the conflicting interests of the Bengalis and the tribals. Till now, the way out remains the speedy economic development of India's poorest state. If that is delayed, the state may—in a much less cheerful sense that Marx had predicted—just wither away.

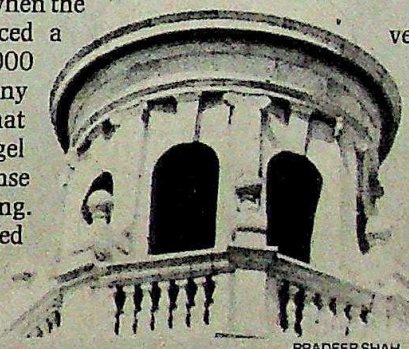
—SUMIT MITRA in Agartala

CALCUTTA

Fairy Tale

CALCUTTA's 'angel of victory' poised perkily on the dome of the Victoria Memorial, has started revolving once more. Although, typically, nobody really knows when the mechanism moving the angel stopped functioning the defect was only noticed in 1978. Last fortnight's announcement came as a pleasant surprise for the sentimental Calcuttans; the fact that a gust of wind on the wings of the angel will make it 'fly', also somehow spells better times.

But the memorial's curator Professor Hiren Chakaraborty sees the process of its rehabilitation as a fairy-tale beginning March 1983 when the trustees announced a reward of Rs 10,000 to anybody or any organisation that could get the angel going. The response was overwhelming. "We were flooded with a wide range of offers, from ordinary maistries, from companies and even foreign experts," Chakraborty recalls, leading to the problem of who would finally be selected to do the job. The absence of technical records pertaining to the mechanism only confounded matters further.



PRADEEP SHAH

The angel on Victoria Memorial: good omen

Help came from an unexpected quarter. And old British engineer, whose name the curator cannot seem to recall, wrote in all the way from Edinburgh that, among other things, the figure of the angel had been designed by an English sculptor called Lindsay Clarke and cast into bronze by George Mancini. The final three-and-a-half tonne sculpture was shipped from Cheltenham, England, to India in 1920.

Armed with sufficient information, the trustees set up a three-man expert committee in the middle of last year to choose a competent agency to undertake the repair work. Architect K.N. Pathak, structural engineer Arup Mukherjee, and mechanical engineer Madhusudan Bhattacharya, all from Jadavpur University, then settled on Jessop and Company, which waited for the monsoon to pass. There on the job, S.J. Robertson soon got into the act—he jacklifted the angel and its one-and-a-half tonne revolving shaft inserted into the dome and discovered that the years of neglect had jammed the bearings, causing the shaft to tilt by three-quarters of an inch. According to the memorial's administrative officer S.K. Dasgupta: "This was a dangerous condition since the five-tonne weight, instead of revolving, was straining on the dome which could have cracked."

It was also discovered that the mercury in the bearing case, provided to prevent lightning from fusing the bearings and dirt from clogging them, had mysteriously disappeared. The problem having been located, it took four months to set right. However, "the whole operation hardly cost us anything," says the curator. Jessop provided their services free of cost, the Victoria Memorial Trust having to pay only for some mercury and oil.

By February the angel was seen to be revolving but the trustees decided to play safe for another two months and a few more signs of movement before breaking the news. Musing over the happenings of the last so many months, Chakraborty remarks: "Now that the angel has started moving, some people are even insisting that one day the trumpet held in its hand will also blow." That will indeed be the day for Calcutta.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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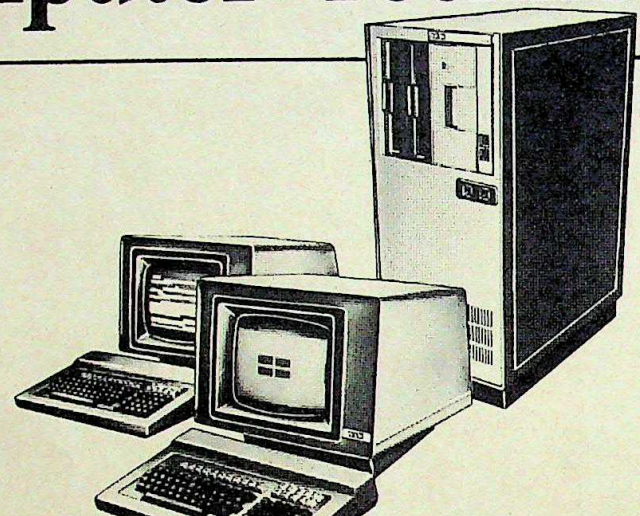

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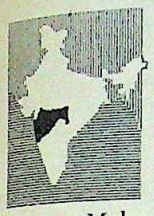
MAHARASHTRA

Fuelling Fears



THE LATE Y.B. Chavan once lamented that "Bombay is a part of Maharashtra but Maharashtra is not a part of Bombay." That sentiment is still shared by many Maharashtrians, who now account for only about 35 per cent of the city's population and consequently feel they are slowly being squeezed out of jobs and housing by a tide of outsiders. Many demands for the exclusion of foreigners have been raised in the last decade. Yet the city's non-Maharashtrian majority had no reason for worry till Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray successfully played on this feeling of resentment and triumphed in the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections last month.

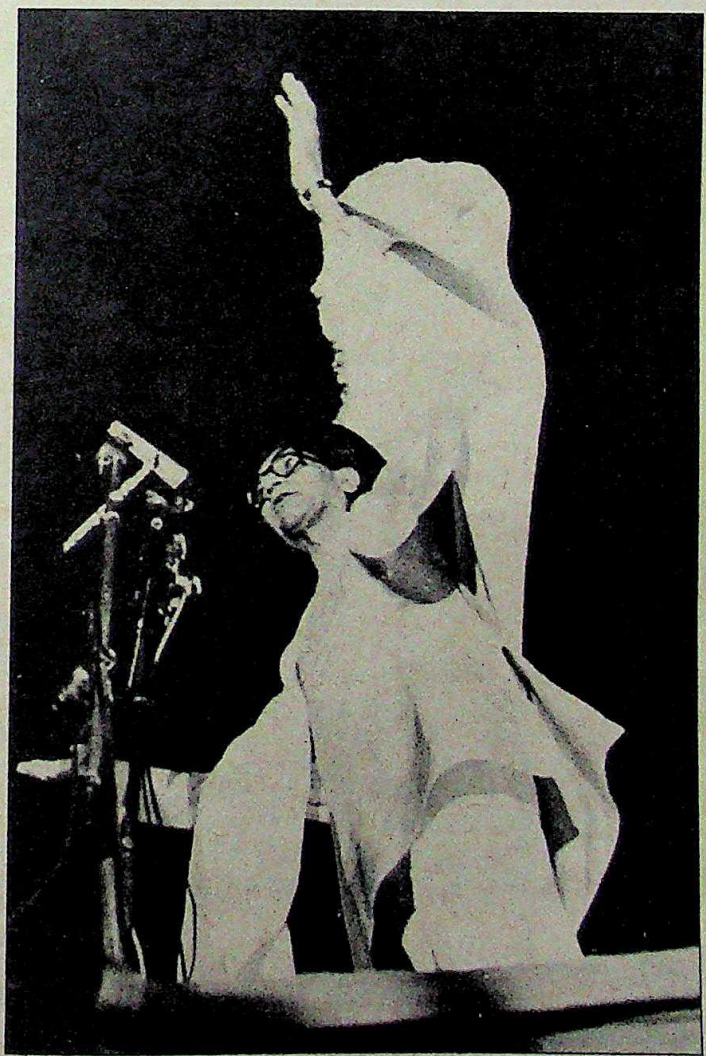
Last fortnight, Thackeray made his intentions clear. At a victory rally in the city's sprawling Shivaji Park he stormed: "All those who came here after 1974 will be kicked out." Anxiety turned to near panic when Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil seemed to publicly support Thackeray by saying there was need to restrict entry into the city. Even though Patil later clarified that he was merely repeating what experts had been saying all along his statement, coming as it did in the wake of Thackeray's threat, served only to further fuel non-Maharashtrian fears.

Thackeray's and Patil's statements raised the expected furore. In Parliament Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was compelled to state categorically that there would be no restrictions on free entry into Bombay. And Thackeray admitted in an interview that his eviction plan could not be implemented without the cooperation of the Central and state governments. He promised, however, that he would tackle the problem of unauthorised squatters on a war footing. "The BMC can do a lot if it implements its demolition programme mercilessly." As for the squatters, he says: "Let them quit the city. We won't provide them transport. Sometimes you have to use force to benefit the people."

There is no denying that many of Bombay's problems are widely perceived as arising out of a burgeoning population. Home to 4.1 million people in 1961, the city has now more than doubled its population and civic amenities today meet only a fourth of the need. Madhav Gadkari, editor of *Loksatta*, feels: "There is no alternative to restricted entry—not just from outside the state but from within Maharashtra itself. Unfortunately the whole issue has been given a Maharashtrian versus non-Maharashtrian image." And retired high court judge R.R. Bhole says: "The Constitution does not say a person can move into any house and occupy it. Ultimately the interests of society are paramount over those of an individual."

However, more liberal sections of the city's residents were outraged that the suggestion of restricted entry was even being discussed seriously. Bombay People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) president and eminent jurist H.M. Seervai came out strongly against what he termed a wholly unconstitutional measure. PUCL secretary Sydney Pinto pointed out that the cosmopolitan nature of Bombay had acted as a magnet for people of talent and enterprise, making it the biggest financial and industrial centre in India. And lawyer Indira Jaisinh, who in 1981 filed a writ against demolitions undertaken by the BMC, felt the sharp increase in the city's population was due to natural causes rather than migration.

Thackeray haranguing an audience: playing to the gallery



HOSHI LAL

But Thackeray says: "Our movement is not an Assam for the Assamese type of agitation. My call is don't share our joys only, share our sorrows also. I will accept even Muslims if they qualify." At the same time he insists that Bombay's name should be changed to Mumbai. "We will pass a resolution to this effect. We don't bother whether anyone likes it or not. Whose permission was taken before Madras was changed to Tamil Nadu?"

The only solution to save the city, as Gobind Talwalkar, editor of the *Maharashtra Times*, sees it is to launch a massive low-cost housing scheme, but in this area the authorities have been extremely negligent. And last week the Central Government's allocation of a mere Rs 50 crore for the five-year plan to improve the city, against the state Government's request for Rs 1,000 crore, only succeeded in adding to the Bombay citizens' feeling of neglect.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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GARMENTS

Material Benefits

FOR OVER 40 garment exporters from Ludhiana, it's been a rags to riches and almost back to rags story. But the story took several long years to tell. In 1972, the infamous rags case—where garment exporters imported crores worth of "rags" as raw material and sold them as second-hand western clothing—first rocked the Parliament. In 1975, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) demanded a judicial probe. In 1982, after considerable time and money had been spent on the trial, the CBI case was abruptly and noiselessly dropped by the Government. And now, 13 years after the story began, some action has finally been taken against the guilty garment exporters.

The action, some say, hardly fits the offence. Following an internal review ordered by the joint controller of imports and exports, partial debarment proceedings have been ordered against 18 of the 40 firms that had been served notice under Section 8 of the Imports and Exports Act. These include: Punjab Kesari hosiery factory, Surinder industries, Raj Parmukha hosiery factory, C.L. Jain hosiery mills, International woollen mills, TCM woollen mills, Rai Bahadur knitting works, Oswal woollen mills, Seth weaving factory, Marjara hosiery factory, Kansal hosiery factory, Ajay woollen and textile mills, Baldev knitting and weaving mills, Nagesh hosiery, Guide knitwear and Belsize knitting mills. All these firms have been debarred for a period from two to five years. Seventeen other cases have yet to be decided.

Although it has ended with a whimper, the rags case started with quite a bang. It became the national scandal of the '70s. The garment exporters were misusing their import quota to sell the rags, worth crores, directly to garment retailers in metropolitan cities. Under the Imports Handbook issued in the early '70s, the exporters were indeed permitted to import rags as raw material on the basis of their export performance. However, many of the firms doing so were woollen mills and could not possibly have used these rags as raw material. Rags are actually used by shoddy and blanket manufacturers. Once imported, the firm owners sold their rags directly to retail outlets all over the country, and why not, since what they called raw material was actually second-hand jeans and other fashionable western apparel much in demand all over the country.

Since the amount of material being shipped in daily was worth several crores, newspapers avidly followed the story and in '72, the ever-alert Jyotirmoy Bosu raised the issue in a call attention motion. At his vociferous best in the Parliament, Bosu said: "Where is the CBI, sir? It is nothing but a pocket edition of the people in power...this is nothing but a hoax." In March '73, the Government ordered an inquiry by the CBI.

However harsh Bosu's allegations may sound, they had some element of truth in them. The CBI, which set up a separate cell to investigate the case, discovered that there was more to it than met the eye. A letter of authority (LOA) given to one of the firms, Greatway, revealed

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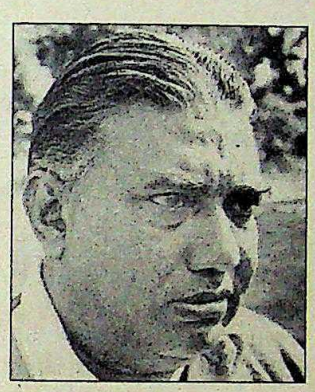
that the original licence was the State Trading Corporation's (STC) and an LOA was given to the firms. What was interesting was condition No. 4 in the letter which clearly stated: "The imported goods will be processed in the factory of the letter of authority holder."

The CBI registered 43 cases in various courts. The firms, many with influential connections, kept getting the dates of hearing postponed. Said a leading garment exporter who did not want to be named: "It was well-known that the imports were within the knowledge of the Government. Many of us attended a meeting in Delhi where a minister was also present. Not surprisingly, the minutes of that meeting actually disappeared." Other firms also testify to the fact that the Government had been in the know all along.

Some firms, like Greatway, fought the issue in court, tooth and nail. Greatway argued that since the licensee was actually the STC, it was up to it to impose any conditions about the use of imported raw material. Documents signed by S.K. Jutshi, controller of imports and exports, in fact, seem to suggest that the rags were being officially allowed in. In reality, it turned out, there was no formal agreement between STC and the garment exporters.



Bosu: starting the probe

While the CBI inquiries were still going on, Jyotirmoy Bosu, heading the PAC went into the issue separately. The PAC inquiries brought out the following facts:

- The registered exporters were allowed to import only raw wool in April 1966. Only one month later, this was changed to allow them to import raw wool and rags. "The liberalisation and the lack of proper control by STC over registered exporters encouraged the latter to bring in serviceable garments in collusion with suppliers and customs officials."
- The capacity of the shoddy sector to use rags was 11.7 million kg although imports of 15.01 million kg and 17.5 million kg, far in excess, were made. "There seems to be no check or review of the replenishment scheme under which the imports of rags were allowed to be used by those who need them."
- The committee found that the Law Ministry had been consulted on November 23, 1972 but it expressed its dissatisfaction with the opinion of the Law Ministry that second-hand clothing can also be taken as rags.
- Finally, after noting the "limited scope of the CBI inquiry", the PAC demanded a judicial inquiry by a Supreme Court judge.

That was in 1975. The CBI inquiry, however, carried on and over the years, several witnesses testified, voluminous documents were seized and chargesheets filed. The CBI was convinced that it had a solid case but at the fag-end of the trial in March '82, just before any kind of verdict could be reached, the Government abruptly dropped the case. The reasons offered: that it would not be in the interest of export promotion to pursue the case; and penal action by the department would serve the ends of justice. Moreover, a spokesman stated that according to the current policy replenishment licences are freely transferable and in view of the change in policy the withdrawal of the case becomes desirable.

So that was that, it seemed. Said an angry Metropolitan Magistrate A.K.Garg: "It is amusing that the Government should ask for termination of proceedings after lakhs of public money have been spent on investigation and prosecution. High-ranking government officials postponed their daily duties and travelled long distances in order to appear in court as witnesses and a special court was kept sitting for seven to eight years to record statements."

The 43 garment exporters, however, who had been holding their breath for those seven or eight years, heaved a long sigh of relief. If convicted—CBI was prosecuting under Section 120 B of the Indian Penal Code and Section 5 of the Imports Act—they might have had to face a two-year jail term. By withdrawing the criminal case, the Government also ignored the report of the PAC that had demanded a probe by the Supreme Court.

Now, after all these years, the denouement has come—and it is still somewhat of a relief to the garment exporters. Partial debarment for a couple of years is certainly a fate better than imprisonment in jail. Said one trade spokesman: "Public memory is always short. When such scandals come up, there is a CBI inquiry but years later people forget about it." Especially if there is a little help from the Government.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

CPI

Off Notes

BY ANY reckoning, the morale of the dissidents in the Communist Party of India (CPI) should be at its nadir. They have consistently opposed the party's anti-Congress(I) line since the 1978 Bhatinda congress, in vain; they have watched in dismay as the party entered into conclaves and electoral adjustments with an opposition more 'reactionary' than the Congress(I). They had hoped therefore that the recent electoral reverses would have induced a major review of the party's policies.

But they have been disappointed. The national council, the party's highest policy-making body in the interregnum between party congresses, has met twice this year and there is nothing to suggest that serious introspection is felt necessary. Nor have their ranks increased; they have always numbered around 20 in the 149-member council.

Yet the mood among this small group (including luminaries like ideologue Mohit Sen, parliamentarian Kalyan Sundaram and trade unionist S.G. Sardesai) is of quiet optimism. For in the aftermath of a succession of poll reverses (the party's Lok Sabha strength is down from 13 to six, and it has lost out in some of its Bihar strongholds), they are clearly pushing for a change in the party's "blindly" anti-Congress(I) line. Indeed, they already spot small but significant shifts in the party's stand. For instance, they say, the party's periodic calls for the unity of all "anti-imperialist" forces would earlier specifically exclude the Congress(I) but this caveat has now been dropped. Thus, while earlier CPI leaders would be censured if they shared a public forum with any Congress(I) leader, senior partyman and head of the World Peace Council Romesh Chandra recently addressed an omnibus peace forum meeting along with Srikant Verma, AICC(I) general secretary.

But the dissidents' cannon shot so far has been a bitterly critical document submitted by Sardesai last February which the leadership has not yet circulated within the party. It was made available to INDIA TODAY by sources other than the dissidents and is by far the most comprehensive and persuasive indictment of the party leadership. Starting with the categorical assertion, "This document rejects the present party line," the 40-page, approximately 25,000-word critique written by the ailing septuagenarian from his

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sickbed, also outlines an alternative policy. In essence, the Sardesai document states:

▶ That the CPI has lined itself behind a political conglomeration in which "pro-imperialist and reactionary" forces dominate. Says Sardesai: "During the last three years, we have joined hands with reactionaries, communalists, casteists, known US agents, to attack the national bourgeois leadership. I shudder at this monstrous crime which will make Marx, Lenin and Engels turn in their graves."

▶ That the party had become an "ideological charlatan" by supporting casteist forces like the Lok Dal. Charan Singh is described as "a notorious Jat casteist (who) hates Chamars and agricultural labourers and poor peasants, many of whom are Chamars."

▶ That the party erred in taking up cudgels for the Akali Dal against Mrs Gandhi. "We treated a communal party and its movement as a democratic patriotic force with some religious aspersions. That was wrong." He argues that all communist parties should break with parties based "covertly or overtly on caste and religion", including the Telugu Desam. (The inclusion of NTR's party in the list is interesting because the CPI had an electoral accord with it in the assembly elections.)

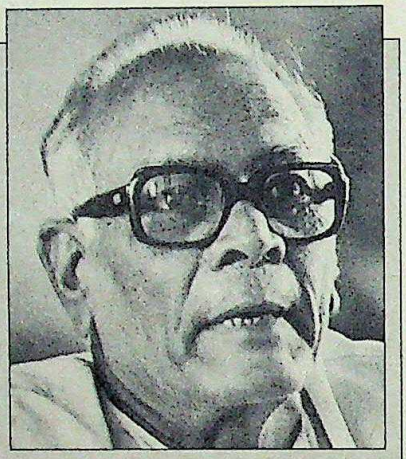
▶ That the party's original mistake was to ally with the Indira Gandhi Congress in 1971. The CPI's policy between 1952 and 1967, of supporting the progressive policies of the Congress but opposing both the Congress and its "bourgeois" policies was the right policy and should again be taken up. The point, says Sardesai, is not that the CPI should not oppose the "anti-people" policies of the Congress(I) but whether this should be done from the "anti-imperialistic and democratic" side or the "right reactionary, pro-imperialistic" side.

Sardesai concludes by saying that mass action on "anti-people" issues is the only way out for the party. The country's problems cannot be solved, he says, unless the CPI's "parliamentary activity is consciously and determinedly subordinated to direct mass actions all over the country".

This conclusion is currently the only point on which there is near unanimity within the party. Even Indrajit Gupta, MP and president of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), feels that the party has laid far too much stress on electoral politics. The party's national council even went so far as to adopt a resolution to that effect.

But the leadership is otherwise in no mood to meet the dissidents half-way. In an interview with INDIA TODAY, party General Secretary Rajeswara Rao refuted many of their contentions. The CPI, he said, opposes the Congress(I) even though the other parties share many of its defects, because it is the ruling party and can thus do more harm to the people.

Rao, a remarkably fit 67-year-old whom Sen calls a "forceful personality", was especially aggressive in refuting the allegations against the Lok Dal and the Telugu Desam. "Who says the Lok Dal is a casteist party?" he asked. "The Lok Dal is a party of backward classes, of peasants. And, anyway, does the Congress(I) not indulge in casteism?" His defence of NTR, whom Sardesai has called a "Hindu communalist", also ran along similar lines. "NTR is not a communalist. He does his own thing but so what? Didn't Mrs Gandhi go to open a Bharat Mata temple?"



Many of the dissidents feel that the party will change tracks only if Rao quits... the leadership and the dissidents have been in disagreement so long that there is hardly any dialogue between the two groups.

He was similarly aggressive when asked if the CPI saw the recent overtures by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to the Congress(I) and the CPI(M) as a sign of disapproval of the CPI. "It is the CPSU's look-out if it wants to have contacts with the Congress(I) and the CPI(M). How do we come into the picture? Are we their agents?"

It is clear that as long as Rao remains the general secretary the party is not going to soften its anti-Congress stand. It is being said in party circles that when Rao met Rajiv Gandhi in March to discuss the Punjab problem he came away impressed with the prime minister's deferential manner of talking to elders. But Rao asserts that the CPI still squarely opposes the Congress(I). "The party has changed for the worse," he says. "It is still as undemocratic—why is it supporting a ministry of defectors in Kashmir? And some of its policies on the economic field are positively dangerous."

Many of the dissidents feel that the party will change tracks only if Rao quits his post. Some press reports have suggested that at the last national council meeting Rao even offered to resign in a bid to patch up differences. But Rao denies this with his customary vehemence. "Why should I resign," he countered, "when my policies are that of the party?"

Rao does not deny, however, that his resignation has often been demanded in national council meetings. In fact, the leadership and the dissidents have been in disagreement for so long that there is hardly any dialogue between the two groups any more at party meetings; the discussions are more like slanging matches. Nor is this war of words confined to party fora. Dissidents have gone to the extent of talking to the media and bringing out pamphlets airing their differences with the party establishment. The April national council took the extraordinary step of issuing a stern note warning dissidents to desist from such anti-party activities.

But the dissidents continue to insist that the party's policies have not served its interests. Their ranks may lack numbers but not conviction. As one of them, who did not wish to be quoted, said, "In the first Parliament the communists were the largest opposition party with A.K.Gopalan as our leader. Today we have NTR's Telugu Desam in that position. What have we come to?" They will continue to oppose the party line but what success they achieve will only be clear by next February when the next party congress will be held in Patna. Till then, the battle of words will continue.

—AJAY KUMAR

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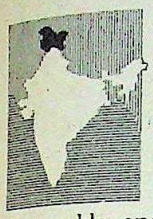
JAMMU & KASHMIR

Protest Politics

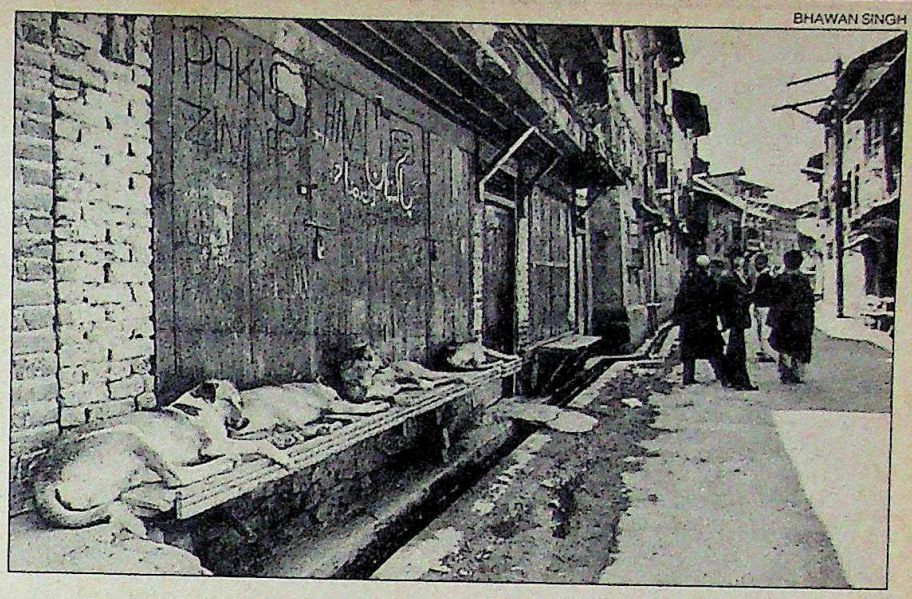


FOR Farooq Abdullah, the ousted chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, the decision to launch an agitation against the Shah Government was a final and irrevocable one. Chief Minister G.M. Shah, after meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, had left the capital with a new lease of life (INDIA TODAY, April 15). Last fortnight, the Kashmir bandh was held in response to the call for the "restoration of democracy." It was organised by the six-member opposition front spearheaded by Abdullah. Shops and commercial establishments downed their shutters and the valley assumed a pacific mantle with no untoward incidents of violence. Said a victorious Abdullah: "The people have given their verdict against the puppet Government. They have registered their protest Gandhian style. Let us see how far they can sustain this government without the help of the people."

Abdullah wasn't far off the mark. Even though the state's Deputy Chief Minister, D.D. Thakur, asserted at an informal press briefing that over 90 per cent of the shops in the valley remained open and that Srinagar shut down because shopkeepers were threatened, it was clear to any visitor that the front's call had been widely heeded. Whether this was an indication of support for its demand for the dismissal of the ten-month-old Shah Government, imposition of governor's rule and fresh elections, remains to be seen. But it also indicated that Abdullah was able to ensure his hold on the valley by organising the bandh—and keeping it peaceful.

In fact, the state Government had resorted to large-scale arrests in anticipation of the bandh in an unsuccessful effort to render it ineffective. In the absence of Chief Minister Ghulam Mohammad Shah, who chose to be in the US it was left to Thakur to take command. Governor Jagmohan was asked to return to Srinagar from New Delhi quickly and the authorities arrested over 500 workers and leaders including two MLA's. In Jammu, over a dozen political leaders holding a peaceful dharna were lathi-charged, leaving two seriously injured. Trade and commerce organisations were pressurised to abstain from the bandh and public opinion was roused against such a measure. In an effort to influence various trade organisations, ministers lectured them on the damage a bandh would cause.

BHAWAN SINGH



An empty Srinagar street: peaceful protest

Abdullah's plunge into agitational politics was prompted by a combination of factors. Emboldened by his success in the Lok Sabha elections, in which his rival, the National Conference (Khalida) was mauled, he sought unsuccessfully to talk the prime minister into dismissing the Shah Government. For over six months, he has staved off pressures from within his party to opt for a confrontation with the Centre—in the hope that the politics of postponement would finally give way to assembly elections. His resolve was strengthened by Governor Jagmohan's report to the Centre on the alleged misrule of the state.

Moreover, the NC(K) has failed abysmally to establish itself as a political party in the valley. In the last ten months there has been minimal political activity. The state Government earned the dubious distinction of becoming the only one ever to request an MLA from an opposition party to move a 'vote of thanks' on the governor's address. The reason: there is no ordinary MLA in the treasury benches because all of them are ministers and by convention, a minister cannot move a resolution. Most of the districts do not have a formal party set-up. And it was precisely this structural weakness that enabled the NC(F) to ensure a bandh even in NC(K) and Congress(I) strongholds like Anantnag, Kulgaon and Pulwama.

Opinion on whether to support the Shah Government remains divided in Congress(I) ranks. While the Mufti Mohammed Syed section, having benefited from Shah's Government, is in favour of its continuation, the opposing faction led by senior Congress(I) leaders like Trilochan Dutt feels that Shah is indulging in the very same corrupt practices Abdullah was accused of. Far from being able to contain anti-national activities, the NC(K) released over a dozen pro-Pak elements just before the Lok Sabha elections. Shah's administrative failures have, in fact, antagonised intellectuals and non-political organisations as well.

Not surprisingly then, Abdullah is determined to launch the second phase of his agitation from next month. Mass arrests apart, on the agenda is a hunger-strike to be led by his mother, Begum Abdullah. He asserts: "We will not allow the people to be governed by corrupt elements who have no mandate from the people to rule. While the people are with me and my party, only the Congress(I) is with the Shah Government."

With more trouble in the offing, the Centre has begun consultations on how to deal with a situation that threatens to snowball into a major confrontation. One section of the Congress(I) has proposed that Abdullah form an NC(F) government, with the Congress(I) lending support from the outside. Abdullah has, however, spurned the offer fearing it would undermine his personal credibility with the Kashmiris, leaving the Congress(I) in the unenviable position of being unable to play the role of an effective opposition or of a partner in the administration.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

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ASSAM

Running Out of Steam

LAST fortnight, when Prafulla Mohanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, the two battle-scarred generals of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) which had launched the agitation against foreign nationals six years ago, arrived in the capital for negotiations, they and government officials had no problem making each other's acquaintance. For they have really been talking a bit too frequently, if not fruitlessly. Mohanta and Phukan, who are president and general secretary, respectively, of the AASU, accompanied by Biraj Sarma of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and Kumud Sarma, the impetuous interpreter-cum-adviser to the AASU team, hopped from guest-house to guest-house under an inexplicable veil of secrecy. But when they met the officials, particularly Union Home Secretary R.D. Pradhan, the two parties indeed got down to talking—on a pattern that is familiar by now—in circles.

The talks began way back in February 1980, only to lapse into a dead silence after January 1983 when elections were announced with disastrous consequences. The broken line was picked up last year by the former cabinet secretary, Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib, to be followed through, after his retirement by Pradhan. Negotiators have changed; but not the basic approach of keeping the talks down to an open-ended and exploratory level. The Centre's stand has changed as frequently as that of the AASU, issues that appeared to have been sorted out have resurfaced again, and what had seemed to be the end often turned out to be the beginning.

This time round, the talks became futile as soon as the Union Government told the AASU representatives that it was in principle opposed to the denial of voting rights to anyone, not to speak of some one million settlers whose disenfranchisement is being sought by the leaders of the movement. This is a reversal of what Rao Sahib had suggested: he gave the impression that the Centre might disenfranchise for five years those who had moved across from Bangladesh for the period between an agreed cut-off date in the '60s and March 25, 1971. The talks bogged down then on what would be the 'cut-off date': Rao Sahib said it could be in 1967, but the AASU insisted on June 16, 1965, because that was the date when some administrative orders prohibiting illegal entry of East Pakistanis had been issued. And Rao Sahib favoured five years' disenfranchisement whereas the AASU said it should be for 20 years. And since the talks were 'informal', with nothing put down on paper, the Government has now taken back what it gave earlier. "The idea of disenfranchisement is a tricky one: the validity of all intervening elections gets a knocking in that event", said an official.

Thus the talks were deadlocked practically at the same stage where they had begun more than five years ago, with the Centre not budging from its early stance that it would not accept the responsibility for either deporting or disenfranchising people who had crossed over before March 25, 1971—the day India and the new-born state of Bangladesh entered into an understanding that regulated the flow of people across their boundaries. And now the AASU and the Centre are talking with their wires crossed.

Phukan (left) and Mohanta: clinging to the past

What has really changed in the interim is that time has taken its toll on the movement that had once paralysed the Brahmaputra valley, raising the bogey of long-drawn ethnic strife in one of India's farthest but sensitive corners, stalling the democratic process, and leading to a protracted bloodbath that climaxed with the massacre at Nellie in 1983. It was begun by a generation of students who have now passed into their middle youth, though their leaders are still clinging on to the campus life with the hope of staying on in the political limelight.

Nothing emphasised the generational changes more poignantly than the formation with Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia's backing in March of the All Assam Elected Students Representatives Union (AAESRU). The AASU described it as "a handiwork of the chief minister and Congress(I) agents". But the boot was clearly on the other foot because the AAESRU was formed by student leaders who were recently elected in union elections: 82 elected union presidents or general secretaries of Assam's 168 college unions have already defected to it.

On the other hand, Mohanta and Phukan were elected to the AASU leadership as early as 1979. The rules of the AASU say that only six months' extension can be allowed to the office-bearers in 'special circumstances' after the expiry of their one-year term. But elections in the AASU have been held up for years on the plea that the leadership of Mohanta and Phukan was indispensable in the context of the movement. Mohanta, though registered as a lawyer, lives at the students' hostel of Guwahati University because he is enrolled for his master's degree in law. Phukan, also a hostel inmate, is not even a regular student. Many of the AASU office-bearers are still in the post-graduate department of the university entirely for political reasons. At any rate, had the university authorities not been pliable, they would not have ad-

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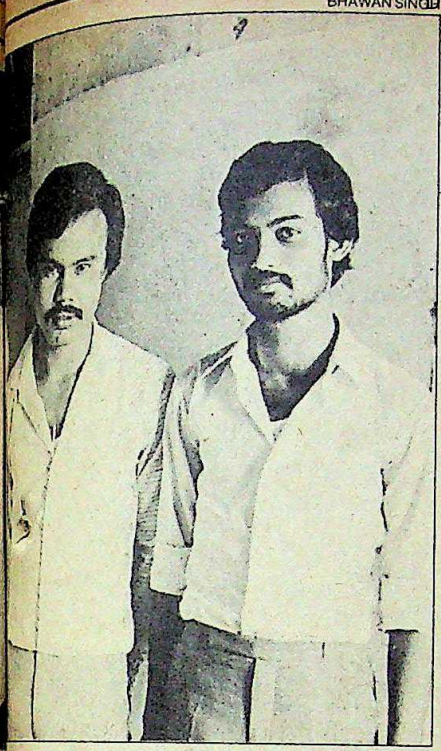

AAESRU office-bearers: the new force

mitted some of them to higher classes because their academic records are not very good.

"The present leadership of the AASU has little moral right to represent anyone. It neither represents all Assam, nor is it legally unionised", said Saikia with the confidence of the winning duellist commenting on his fallen victim. But the formation of the AAESRU has clearly knocked the bottom out of the AASU claim to speak on behalf of the entire state. The Muslims had left the AASU early in 1983, realising from the experience of Nellie that the movement was indeed being led by forces that could be dangerous for a religious minority. Now the revolt of the AAESRU, with the abundant representation of Nepali, Bengali, 'other backward classes' (OBC) and tribal students in it, has put the AASU back to its real constituency: the 'true blue' Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley who are a hopeless minority of Assam's 1.46 crore population.

Gone are the days of the sudden and total 'janata curfews', announced at short notice; also gone is the element of fear in the heart of the minorities in Guwahati city as well as in the villages and small towns. The AASU's abiding existence in public life is not yet challenged, but it is no longer the law unto itself that it once was. Mohanta, Phukan, AASU adviser Lalit Rajkhowa: they are all now a gentler lot, perhaps sadder too.

The Congress(I) has applied a two-pronged strategy to subdue the AASU. It has used both pressure tactics and also maintained an atmosphere of cordiality in order to take the sting away from the movement. Saikia has all along been the Congress(I)'s 'mailed fist', dealing shattering blows at the AASU and the leaders of the movement he has consistently thought to be "mischievous". At the same time, however, no efforts were spared to win the militants over. Nripen Goswami, a fire-eating leader of the Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal, a constituent of the AAGSP, joined the Congress(I) last year, and is reputed to be the main organiser of the AAESRU. Desertions from the AASU have been frequent lower down at the district level. And most significantly, the old belligerence of the AASU towards the Centre has worn thin.

The man who has put on a smiling face on behalf of the Centre is Bhisham Narayan Singh, the Assam governor whose proven skill at mediation had earned him the crucial role of the intermediary between Mrs Gandhi and Charan Singh at a time when their temporary alliance caused the downfall of the Janata government. It is Singh who carried the bouquet from Mrs Gandhi to Charan Singh as the first gesture of Mrs Gandhi's intention to split the Janata.

Saikia (left) and Governor Singh: the carrot and the stick

Bhisham Narayan Singh, even operating from within the constitutional confines of a governor, has rebuilt the bridge between the Centre and the AASU. He has met the AASU boys privately, and has been a conduit between them and the Centre. Unlike Saikia, he is a soft-liner who is believed to advocate the line of changing the heart of the militants. At the main *bihu* festival in Guwahati last month, the organisers, admittedly sympathetic to the AASU cause, did not invite Saikia but made it a point to welcome Singh warmly.

Saikia's methods are demonstrably more tough. When the AASU had given the call for a boycott of the Republic Day parade, and some of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) contingents from different schools had actually failed to turn up, Saikia immediately got the schools de-recognised. Even last month, avenging the insult of not being called to the *bihu*, Saikia organised a parallel *bihu* where the most distinguished guest was A.K. Antony, the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) general secretary in charge of the north-eastern state units.

The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, conferred with both Saikia and Singh recently in a bid to formulate a strategy for Assam which possibly combines the carrot with the stick. Nor is there any possibility of Rajiv accepting the AASU's main political demand—that of the dismissal of the Saikia Ministry on the ground that too few people had participated in the 1983 assembly elections that led to the installation of the ministry. The AASU still sarcastically refers to it as the 'so-called government', but the ministry has given back to the people what they desperately needed: peace. And a normal economic life. The per capita income of the Assamese, which had dipped to the low level of Rs 533 (at 1970-71 prices) in 1981-82, at the height of the movement, has moved up to Rs 580 now, an all-time high. Last year witnessed a 20 per cent rise in employment in the organised private sector. Examinations have become punctual and the different communities have at last been reconciled to living together.

There are clearly not many takers for the grandiose AASU plan to either disenfranchise or deport lakhs of Assam's recent settlers. As Saikia says: "Which is their next port?" On the other hand, the AAESRU has come up with its own demand that instead of deporting or disenfranchising anybody, 80 per cent of the assembly seats and jobs be reserved for the "original people" of Assam who had come in before 1951. "We only want a weightage to be given to the original people in jobs and in the democratic set-up, but let everyone who came to Assam before March 25, 1971, stay on here," says Dudu Datta, the young president of the AAESRU. But the AASU is still likely to be on the scene, though more as a historical relic. And the more its leaders talk, the less they seem likely to achieve.

—SUMIT MITRA

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WEST BENGAL

Test of Strength

THE WEST Bengal Congress(I)'s modest headquarters in central Calcutta's Wellesley Square, after seven years of virtual disuse, is once again bustling with activity. Till recently the haunt of a few Congress old-timers, local lads and the occasional leader with time to kill, the office since last fortnight has been transformed into a campaign centre of a party preparing for its first major battle: elections to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

It is not just that the newly revamped state unit of the Congress(I) has been spurred to action by its unrelenting political rival, the Left Front, the change also reflects a new style of functioning demanded by the party high command. The new look is accentuated by the West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) Committee's new leader, former finance minister Pranab Mukherjee, and the prominence of men like Ajit Panja and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, who have long been in the state's political shadows.

The Left Front's decision to hold the Calcutta Municipal Corporation elections after almost 16 years was prompted by a desire to test the emergent leadership of the state Congress(I). Determined to prevent further erosion of its existing political support and alarmed by its debacle in the last Lok Sabha poll, the Marxists are on the look out for an opportune moment to hold a snap assembly poll. Congress(I) leaders like Priya Ranjan Das Munshi are convinced that the Marxists do not intend to wait for another two years before going in for the elections scheduled for the early part of 1987.

The logic is obvious. Currently, as Pranab Mukherjee admitted after his party lost all the three seats in the April assembly by-elections, "the CPI(M) still has tremendous hold in the state's rural areas". Moreover, as Left Front chairman Saroj Mukherjee pointed out, "the people of the state are no longer swayed by the sympathy wave and are withdrawing their support from the Congress(I)". Should the Marxists win or get half the seats in the municipality, their obvious course would be to go in for a snap poll later this year or early next year.

The CPI(M) strategists, says a leader of one of the smaller front constituents, have argued that even if the Congress(I) does come to power in the municipality with a slim majority, it would still be ultimately advantageous for the Left Front. "The present dissensions within that bourgeoisie party will plunge the municipality's administration into chaos and disillusion the electorate," he says.

BHAWAN SINGH

Munshi (left) and Pranab Mukherjee: the conflict within

Dismissing this contention, Ajit Panja, the Congress(I) leader in charge of the municipal polls, says: "If we win the municipal polls it will be only the first step." The party, says Panja, is ensuring that respectable candidates from all sections of society are nominated. Whether the party will succeed in choosing proper candidates and ensuring that rival interests do not abort its chances of success, however, remains a very big question.

Till just a couple of days before the last date for filing nominations, the PCC(I) headquarters had been deluged by almost 900 applications from party hopefuls. This worked out to almost six candidates for each of the 141 municipality seats. The entire situation has been further complicated by the emergence of two major rival blocks within the PCC(I) within days of its formation. This time it is not the long standing rivalry between the two former Union ministers—Pranab Mukherjee and A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury that has engendered the rift. Ironically, the two have actually united in an attempt to counter the influence of the rising star of West Bengal Congress(I) politics—Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

On April 29, Pranab Mukherjee met Somen Mitra at the residence of former Nadia district Congress(I) Committee president, Ananda Mohan Biswas, to form a front against Das Munshi and his mentor, Union Law Minister Asoke Sen. Subsequently, Ghani Khan Choudhury also affirmed his support and now with Subrata Mukherjee also in their group, Pranab Mukherjee is working to ensure that Das Munshi's connections in New Delhi do not unduly affect state politics.

The suggestion that Pranab Mukherjee could be replaced by Das Munshi is countered by WBPCC(I) Treasurer Rajesh Khaitan: "Pranab is the real choice, otherwise it would mean playing around with a volatile state like West Bengal, which cannot be the high command's intention." Nevertheless, Congressmen openly talk about Pranab Mukherjee's inability to constitute district committees or make any major appointments.

Dissensions within the PCC(I) are further compounded by old rivalries. Satya Ranjan Bapuli, soon after his appointment as a PCC(I) committee member resigned because his old rival, Gobinda Naskar, was also given a berth in the committee. Arguing that he did not resign in protest, Bapuli says: "I merely cleared space for the induction of another leader from my area who, I felt, would be able to better serve the interests of the party." The leader Bapuli had in mind was Monoranjan Haldar, the Scheduled Caste MP from Mathurapur, who despite having considerable support in south 24 Parghanas was not given a berth in the committee.

Indeed, inadequate representation from the state's rural areas in the PCC(I) leadership has worried a large section of the party leaders. From three north Bengal districts, for instance, there is only one local leader in the PCC(I). Such imbalances and the formation of rival blocks do not augur well for the party in West Bengal. In the circumstances, Das Munshi's remark last fortnight that groupism would not affect the party's fortunes could turn out to be too sanguine.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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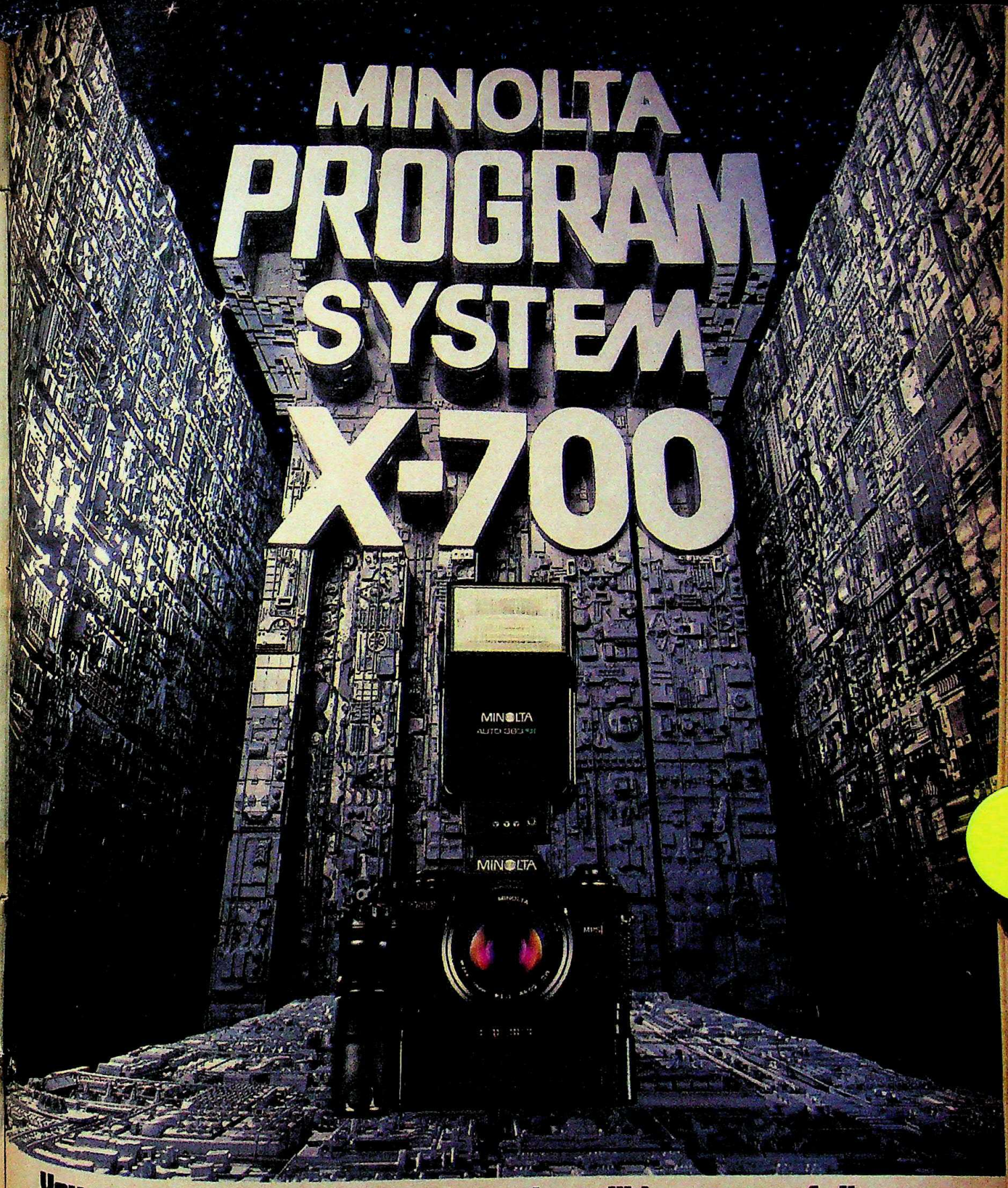

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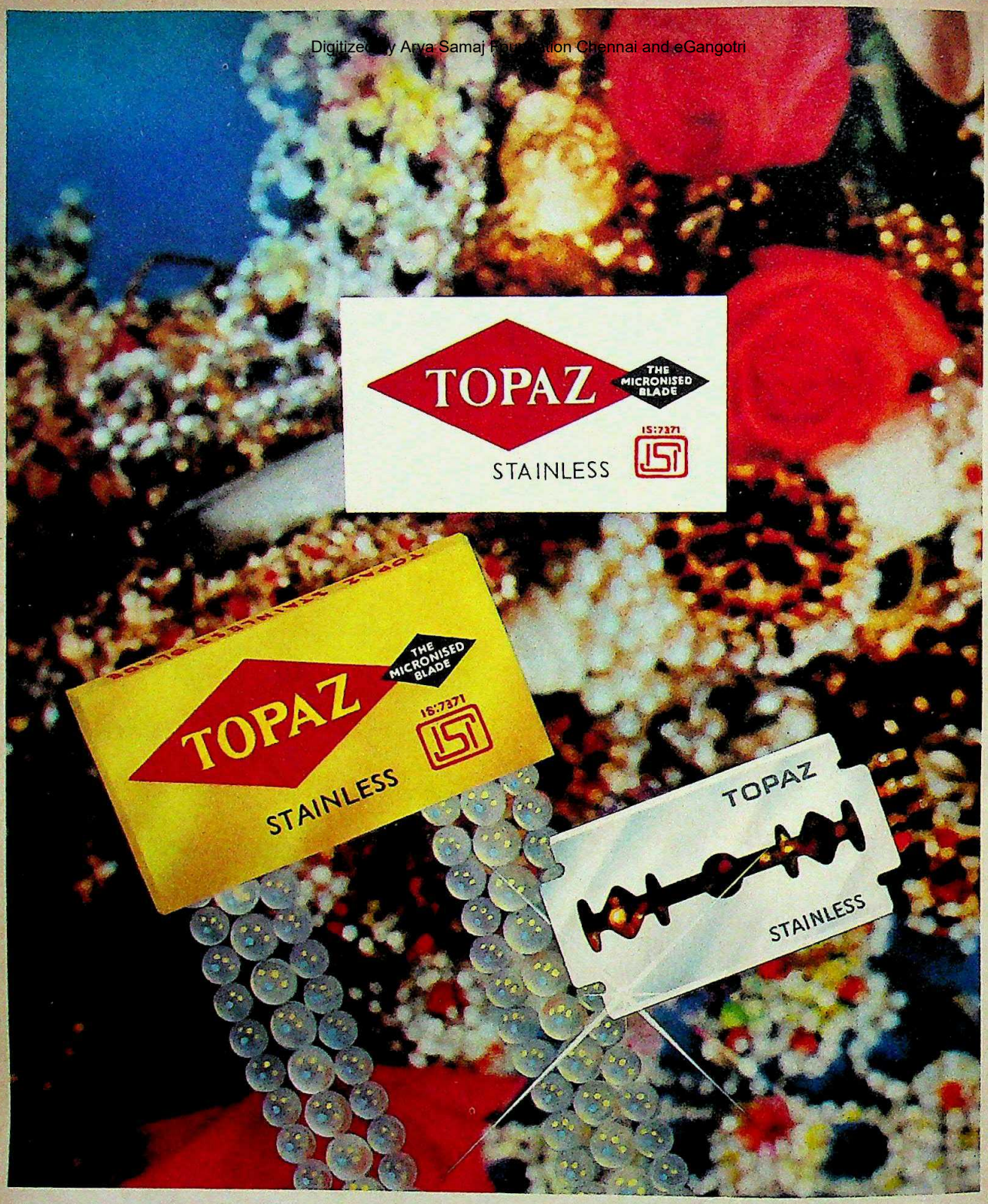

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ORISSA

The Family Fall-out

FOR SIX years Orissa Chief Minister Janaki Ballav Patnaik has been performing a remarkable feat: keeping his family and his state together, not an easy task to accomplish when a ministry is dominated by family members who don't see eye to eye. Now his empire is falling apart and the chief minister can only look on helplessly. The blows came one after another: first, the disastrous results of the assembly by-elections last fortnight—where Patnaik's candidates lost all three seast, including the coveted Khurda seat, and the very next day, a high court judgement that labelled Niranjan Patnaik—a close relative of the chief minister and No. 2 in the cabinet—as a "habitual bribe-giver". Niranjan resigned but by that time an irreparable split had already occurred in the ruling family clique.

Patnaik has survived setbacks in the past but this time, said a party source, "he is facing a family coup and the finale of the whole drama might turn out to be a political tragedy." The dramatis personae in the family drama are Patnaik, his influential wife Jayanti, Basant Kumar Biswal—the "super chief minister" who was suddenly deposed by the high command on the eve of elections—and Niranjan. The power struggle that climaxed last fortnight has been going on for a long time now between Biswal and Niranjan. Both enjoy immense clout with the chief minister: Biswal has been close to the family for 30 years and Niranjan's younger brother is Patnaik's son-in-law who also runs the newspaper *Sambad*.

The judgement that brought about Niranjan's resignation was over a vigilance case filed in April 1979 in which a mining officer Shashi Bhushan Kar was found guilty of accepting a bribe of Rs 2,000. At that time Niranjan was running iron ore mines at Joda in Keonjhar district and the bribe had been given to Kar by his manager. It was found that the manager had also been paying a monthly bribe of Rs 1,000 to the mining officer. The lower court found Kar sole guilty and sentenced him to one year's rigorous imprisonment. The officer appealed to the high court, and last fortnight, Justice B.K. Bahera of the Orissa High Court, in his 47-page judgement, stated that "bribe-giver was as much a party to the crime as the government servant who took the bribe".

An offended Niranjan immediately sent in his resignation to the chief minister on the grounds of "political propriety". Patnaik first tried to protect Niranjan by delaying the acceptance of his resignation. That is when Biswal and his group moved in and under their pressure, Patnaik finally accepted the resignation. Biswal and Niranjan have been at loggerheads for the past three years, each creating a personal following in the party. Biswal blamed Niranjan when he was denied a party ticket and never forgave him for that. Jayanti Patnaik openly sided with Biswal but Niranjan was in the privileged position of being No. 2 in the Government. When the crushing high court judgement came, Biswal saw his chance to move back to power.

(From left) Niranjan Patnaik, J.B. Patnaik, and Biswal: power struggle

When Niranjan handed in his resignation, Patnaik rushed to the governor and consulted both Advocate-General Gangadhar Rath and the Law Minister Gangadhar Mahapatra. Rath stated that the indictment of Niranjan was "unwarranted". That sparked off another controversy. Two more cases were filed in court by citizens—one, a contempt case against Rath for calling the high court observation "unwarranted" and another against both Patnaik and Rath, for disclosing official secrets as the advocate-general's advice was supposed to be confidential.

By that time, party legislators—divided into Niranjan and Biswal groups—also moved in. One group headed by chief whip Sheikh Matlub Ali urged Patnaik not to accept Niranjan's resignation since he was urgently needed to assess the drought situation in the state. This statement was published in *Sambad* and signed by 10 legislators. Meanwhile, Biswal trying to prove that he had a greater following, arranged another statement signed by 18 MLA's and eight former MLA's criticising the remark of the advocate-general.

Through all this the chief minister decided to keep a tactful silence. His aides declined an interview with INDIA TODAY, saying: "He is not available, he is sick". The signs however were clear enough: Biswal was growing in power and seemed slated to become party president from party treasurer. At the AICC(I) session in Delhi, Jayanti openly consulted Biswal while Niranjan was cold-shouldered. Party officials disclosed that Biswal was also instrumental in getting Jayanti a Lok Sabha seat. His ploy apparently was to compel Patnaik to ask Rajiv Gandhi to rehabilitate him or else, to tender his own resignation as chief minister.

Biswal has clearly made himself quite indispensable to the chief minister. He has tried, and apparently to a great extent succeeded in convincing Patnaik that his political survival, in fact, depends largely on him.

Niranjan, on his part, is trying to move the Supreme Court to expunge the offending remark against him in the high court judgement, but it is doubtful if he will succeed. He has been in trouble before. In 1981, the Opposition filed a case against him on the grounds that Niranjan was supplying iron ore to the state Government which amounted to a corrupt practice under the People's Representation Act. At that time, Niranjan transferred the business to one of his brothers and won the case on a technical ground, but this time round it seems unlikely that he will come out that easily. The hapless chief minister has also offered to appeal against the judgement. Obviously he is still trying to maintain a balance between the demands of his two powerful relatives, Biswal and Niranjan. But in doing so, he may just topple over himself.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

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SHUKDEV BACHECH

At a relief camp in Bapunagar: caught in the crossfire

GUJARAT

Continuing Violence

CASTE wars, communal conflicts, the people versus the police—at least one of them, and mostly all three, has held centre stage in Gujarat for the last three months. The turbulence which began as an anti-reservation stir in February has taken several baffling—and deadly—turns, with the toll rising to 103. Last fortnight promised mayhem as usual. First the state Government employees threatened to go on strike against the roster system but had the thunder stolen from them when their colleagues, the panchayat employees, actually struck work; the promised negotiation with the anti-reservationists did not come off; the Madhavsinh Solanki Government and the police, still suspect in the eyes of the people, proved unable to prevent random stabbings and arson. The resilient city of Ahmedabad was limping back to normalcy. Curfew was all but lifted in the volatile walled city and two of the five relief camps were closed when suddenly an explosive situation developed in the walled city and gave the crisis yet another alarming turn.

Late on the night of May 8 communal clashes mysteriously erupted in the Muslim-dominated Dariapur and Kalupur areas. One of the eight killed was sub-inspector M.T. Rana who was shot dead when he went up on a roof. The shooting, unusual in communal clashes, indicated that there were caches of private arms, and the police launched a thorough combing operation. Predictably, complaints of harassment poured in from residents and two Muslim Congress(I) MLA's threatened to resign if an inquiry was not ordered into police "atrocities". They were mollified with the promise of a party inquiry but the situation in the walled city was not so easily contained.

In spite of a dusk-to-dawn curfew, 14 cases of stabbing were reported on May 10. Tension mounted as rival bandh calls were given by anti-reservationists and Muslims—the former to mourn the killing of Rana and the latter to grieve for their dead. The Rangila police station in Shahpur was attacked by a mob. Panic stricken Muslims migrated to the relief camps in the city's outskirts. Lt-General Ranjit Singh Dyal, chief of the southern command, flew to the city from Pune for the second time in 10 days. Finally, on May 12 Solanki did what the harassed citizens of Ahmedabad had long been demanding: he handed over control of the walled city to the army.

But Operation Black Bull could not have had a more inauspicious start. By the end of the day, half the city's 2.5 million population was living under an indefinite curfew and still 19 people had died in stabbings and firings. Private arms were being freely used and the portents were ominous.

The fresh communal flare up took primacy but Solanki's Government had its plate already full of problems. Top of the list was the strike by the state's 156,000 panchayat employees who have been demanding a phased abolition of the roster system which guarantees accelerated promotions to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled/Tribes (SC/ST). Abbas Patel, general secretary of the Panchayat Employees' Confederation spearheading the strike, says the panchayat employees are the worst sufferers of the roster system because the reservation quota is abnormally high in districts where the SC's dominate (like Mehsana) or the ST's are in a

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majority (like Dang).

But Patel speaks only for the *savarna* (higher) castes. Feelings run equally strong among the SC's/ST's. As Janbandhu Kosambi, 45, president of the Gujarat Dalit, Adivasi, Baxi Panch and Minorities Pro-reservations Karamchari Samiti, says: "We will not let the Government modify the roster system without taking us into confidence. The roster exists because the quotas are not filled." The samiti wants the roster system extended to the 85 backward classes identified by the Baxi Commission in 1976. Clearly, the have-nots are far more aware than they were in 1981, when Gujarat was last buffeted by an anti-reservations agitation. Warned Kosambi, "We will not let the Solanki Government forget that the massive mandate which elected it was due to its January decision to increase reservations in colleges by 18 per cent."

That decision may not be the only one the state Government may regret. Reportedly, the state Government bought peace with its employees by promising to release the report by a commission headed by H.T. Sadhwani, a former chief secretary, to look into the anomalies of the roster system. Solanki had headed off the 1981 agitation by appointing the commission and promised to implement its recommendations with retrospective effect, government employees claim. The report was submitted two years ago and high caste government employees, obviously aware that the report was in their favour, have been agitating for its release while the lower caste employees, equally aware of its contents, have been warning that the Government cannot expect to take them for granted.

The former's keenness is understandable. The report had not been released till late last fortnight but INDIA TODAY managed to get a copy of it. The Sadhwani Commission has made three main recommendations: that SC/ST employees also should put in a minimum period of service before they become eligible for promotion; that if in any of the four classes of government service the SC/ST quota of jobs is filled then the roster system and the carry forward (by which reserved promotions not filled are added to the next year's quota) should be suspended, and that if any SC/ST officers get priority in selection grade posts under the roster system then that many posts should be created for the unreserved categories.

Even as the state Government stalled on releasing the Sadhwani Commission report, Home Minister S.B. Chavan advised the state governments to refrain from increasing the reservation quotas till the Centre could work out a consensus on reservations for the backward classes. The announcement was greeted with relief in Gandhinagar with the state Government confident that the anti-reservation agitation would now be called off since its January decision had been put in cold storage for an indefinite period. Negotiations with the students' Navrachna Samiti and the parents' Vali Mahamandal, who are jointly spearheading the agitation, were awaiting the former's state-wide convention on May 13 but it was definite that the agitation, though muted last fortnight, would be called off. "The Central Government's decision makes no difference," Shankerbhai Patel, president of the Mahamandal, said. "We are still demanding that the Government give us a promise that reservations will be totally abolished by 1989." The feeling was echoed by Gaurang Shah, spokesman for the Navrachna Samiti, who points out that since the Centre's concession did not come during negotiations it would be difficult for the samiti to claim victory and persuade its followers to call off the agitation. Shah, who could not find a venue for the samiti's convention for four days as organisers did not want to displease the state Government, has another reason to carry on the fight. "If we bow down now then state terrorism will become a fact of life," he says.

There was more good news for the anti-reservationists from Delhi. The majority of a five-member constitution bench of the Supreme Court, which addressed itself to the whole issue of reservations following a Karnataka Government petition, felt that economic backwardness and poverty, and not caste, should be the criterion for reservations. Reflecting the widespread ambivalence on this emotive matter, the judges delivered five different opinions running into 202 pages, but refrained from giving a common guideline. Chief Justice Chandrachud feels reservations should continue for the next 15 years after which a means test should be applied. O. Chinappa Reddy observed that reservations had "engendered a spirit of self-denigration among the people" where there was a race to claim that "we are more backward than you".

Governor B.K. Nehru said over radio and television that the police had behaved in a manner "unbecoming to a uniformed service".

The Gujarat Government, meanwhile, was talking with different voices. Governor B.K. Nehru said over radio and television that the police had behaved in a manner "unbecoming to a uniformed service", an admission that neither Solanki nor Chavan had conceded. It was later learnt that Nehru's admission was inadvertent—he had overlooked adding that the police were working under great provocations. Meanwhile at the AICC session in Delhi, Solanki, after accusing the Opposition yet again of being behind all the violence, charged that a "secret meeting" had been held in Bombay where the anti-reservationists had conspired with some "foreign forces" and representatives of the Opposition and resolved to spread the agitation to other states. When asked by a pressman to identify the conspirators, he snapped: "Why ask me, ask Madhu Mehta?" Apparently, he was referring to one of the public discussions that Mehta's Hindustani Andolan periodically holds. This meeeting had been addressed by Gaurang Shah and Shankerbhai Patel.

Once again, Solanki was tilting at windmills while the state teetered from one crisis to another. Fired by his ambition to see the state's backward castes at the top of the power structure, heady with his sweeping mandate in the elections, lonely at the top and compelled to depend on the advice of the Machiavellian ex-home minister Prabodh Raval and still to regain his equilibrium after the arrest of close friend Mrugesh Jayakrishna on smuggling charges, Solanki seemed to be staying in power only because Delhi was preoccupied with Punjab. But it was becoming increasingly evident that if a healing touch was to be applied to Gujarat, Solanki was a stumbling block.

—AJAY KUMAR in Ahmedabad

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Tarnished Image

FORTUNE is widely believed to favour the brave, but in the verdant hills and valleys of idyllic Jammu and Kashmir it pays to be related either by blood or political impulse to those pulling the strings. Chief Minister Ghulam Mohammed Shah and his 18 cabinet colleagues were instrumental in pulling down the Farooq Abdullah government on the very grounds that now, ironically, loom large before them: charges of large-scale nepotism and corruption. The matter peaked last fortnight when President Zail Singh, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and Home Minister S.B. Chavan each received a memorandum detailing irregularities supposedly committed by the state Government to the eventual advantage of leaders of the National Conference (Khalida). Included in the list of beneficiaries was Shah's son.

The charge that the Shah Government has been pushing financial assistance to the Tycoons group of industries owned by the chief minister's second son Muzaffar, 30, and three partners, is perhaps the most serious of the numerous allegations listed. According to the memorandum, state departments and public sector undertakings are being pressurised into providing not only financial support but generating orders as well for Tycoons, which peddles anything from bricks to barbed wire and is an agent for Delhi and Bombay-based consumer product companies.

Floated in 1980, Tycoons came into prominence in March this year when it was permitted to purchase over 3,000 tonnes of coal from the state-owned Kalakote mines at a price 25 per cent lower than the prevailing market rate. According to official sources, the entire consignment of 9,000 tonnes was sold at Rs 375 per tonne to Tycoons and two other companies, Srinagar Coal Traders and R.D. Traders, as compared to the earlier rate of Rs 514.50. The deal, clinched without floating formal tenders or advertising in the newspapers, followed a situation in which the coal lay unsold in the mines and authorities were unable to pay their employees. While coal traders claim that all three dealers would make a profit of over Rs 60 lakh, a Tycoons partner Din Mohammad Wani claimed: "We bought the coal from the mines at a price at which it was available to everybody and they did not show any favour to us."

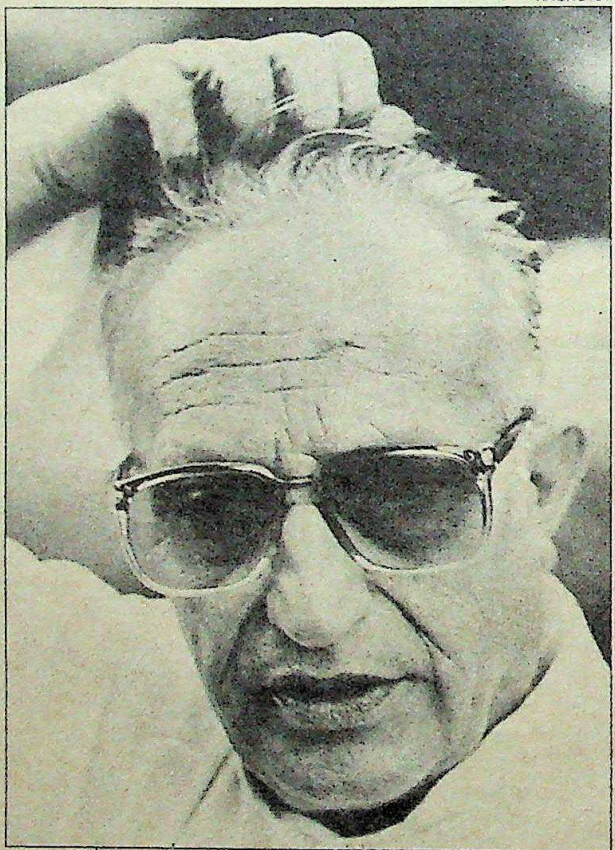
But the deal was not all that simplistic, as borne out by the comment of fellow partner Altaf Ahmed. Admitted Ahmed, 30: "I was sitting in a hotel in Jammu when I was informed that coal was available in the mines. J&K Minerals who owned the mines were not in a position to pay even the telephone bills. I placed an order for 3,000 tonnes and gave them an advance cheque for Rs 2 lakh." However, neither he nor mines officials were able to explain why the entire stock had been sold to only three dealers when others were ready to buy at Rs 450.

Coal is not the only carrot. To go by a documented memorandum of the Jammu and Kashmir Bank Employees Union, Tycoons has found free and liberal favour in the matter of loans and in fact raised the money for its coal transaction from a nationalised bank. Operating on nine different bank accounts, Tycoons, as on March 31, 1985, had bank loan arrears of over Rs 23 lakh, doubling its position of a little under Rs 12 lakh last year. Even as its repayments were pending since 1981, in February the company was extended the rare facility of a trust account by the Jammu & Kashmir Bank in which it was sanctioned an overdraft limit of over Rs 10 lakh to buy coal. Ignoring the trust account stipulations that the borrowed amount be repaid after sale of the coal consignment, the company managed to up its coal account arrears from Rs 5 lakh last year to Rs 10.55 lakh this year. When some officials and unofficial directors of the bank started scrutinising the accounts of this company last month, they were summarily dismissed (*see box*).

Denying these allegations, Wani says: "We have no money to repay the loans. Everyone accuses us of grabbing government orders. But only we know how we are able to sustain our business in which we made massive losses from the beginning." Ahmed goes on to elaborate: "Only because the chief minister's son is our partner is our company attacked."

The Government has also been accused of dubious dealings in the sale of resin. Against a prevailing market price of Rs 11 per kg, the Shah Government is alleged to have allotted some 27,000 tonnes of the commodity to four major and 20 small-scale units at an astoundingly cheap Rs 5.58 per kg. The Sheikh Abdullah government had, in 1979, reached a 10-year agreement with some local industries to supply this scarce commodity at Rs 2.60 per kg, with a price

RAGHU RAI



Chief Minister G.M. Shah was instrumental in pulling down Farooq Abdullah on the very grounds that now loom large before him: charges of nepotism and corruption.

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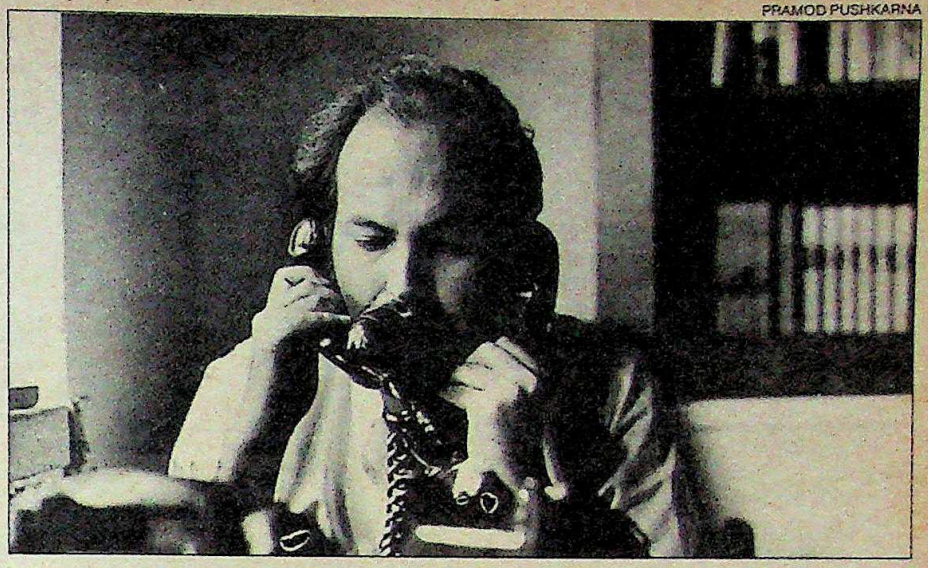
review after five years. When the time for review came up in October 1984, resin consuming units were asked to quote their prices. While the small-scale industries offered to buy the stock at Rs 7.50 per kg, the state Government prevaricated and appointed a resin allotment committee to recommend prices. For reasons that are unclear, the committee recommended that resin be sold at Rs 3.90 per kg excluding taxes and Rs 5.58 including taxes to the original allottees and 19 others. Says National Conference (Farooq) General Secretary Sheire Nager: "The state Government has lost over Rs 10 crore in taking this blatantly partisan decision," adding that even extraction cost was higher than this selling price. However, Industry Minister Sana-ullah Dar maintains that "we have got Rs 5 crore more from this decision. If we had not given resin to them, they would have gone to court and we would have lost even this money."

The Congress(I) too has been hewing chunks of its benefits for supporting the Shah Government. Thanks to the inexplicable decision of Maruti Udyog Limited to appoint a second dealer in a city where bookings came to hardly 1,500 and thanks to the clout enjoyed by Maulvi Ifteqar Ansari, leader of the 26-member Congress(I) Legislature Party, his cousin Zaffar Hussain has been blessed with a plot of land to construct his showroom. The piece of land, allegedly belonging to the Durganag Trust, was made over by a cabinet decision on October 22, 1984, after which the Revenue Department issued a formal approval stating that sanction was accorded to the lease of state land "for a period of 40 years on payment of premuium equal to the market rate prevalent in the vicinity to be determined by the deputy commissioner, Srinagar, plus the usual ground rent".

The land use of the plot was then changed from "establishment of government offices" to "commercial" and Ansari went on to start a business venture, Ansari Motors, together with Ifteqar's brother Abid. Durganag Trust moved the court for a stay order on construction on the plea that the land had belonged to it for the last 80 years. Said S.K. Kaul, president of the trust: "We have been robbed of our land by the state Government. They don't care for even stay orders and are indulging in illegal activities to keep themselves in power."

The state Government and Ifteqar

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



BHAWAN SINGH

BHAWAN SINGH

Muzaffar (from top), Wani and Ahmed and Tycoon's office: preferential deals

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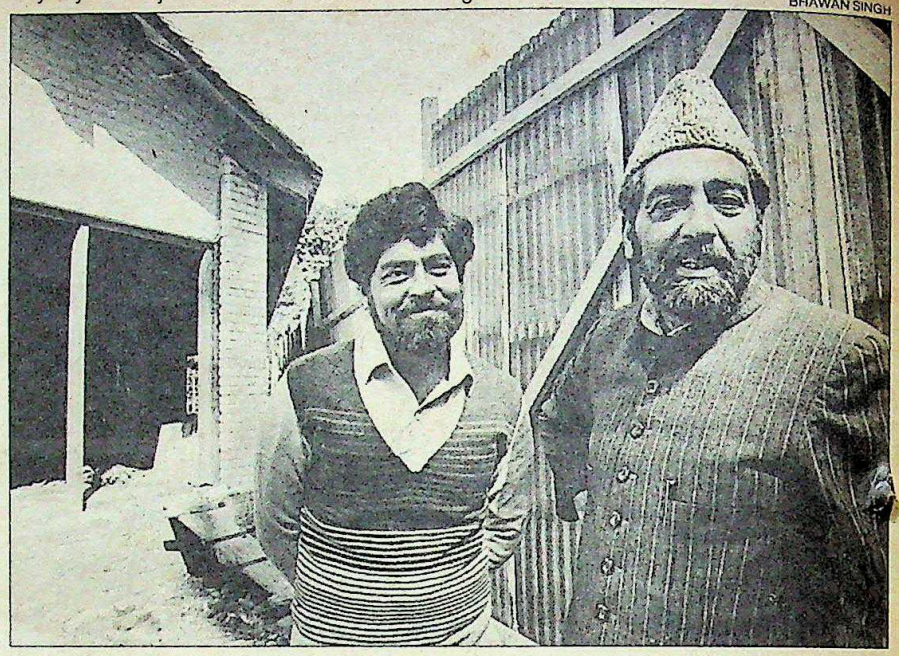
brush aside charges of underhand dealings. "The distribution of Maruti cars is a public requirement," said Deputy Chief Minister D.D. Thakur, "and the state Government has to ensure that this public issue is performed in the state without any hurdles. The Maruti car belongs to a premier public sector undertaking and if someone demands land from us to sell the product, we have to give it to him." Added Ifteqar: "No favour has been done me. I have paid the market rate. I am being maligned because I represent pro-India forces in the valley."

If the question of land allocation is a matter of purely political expediency, the charges levelled against the Shah Government in the case of appointments to various posts spell a show of unqualified goodwill towards friends, relatives and

BHAWAN SINGH



Abid and Ifteqar: Ansari brothers fringe benefits

J&K BANK

Bizarre Battle

IT'S A bizarre battle and the parties involved no less imposing than the Shah Government and the non-official directors of the Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd. The battle is over a seemingly simple question: who should be the new chairman of the bank? While the state Government is determined to appoint S.M. Din—the controversial managing director of the state-owned Jammu & Kashmir Financial Corporation (JKFC), the nine-member board of directors has rejected Din's nomination outright on the basis of several complaints of financial irregularities that are pending against him in the state's Vigilance Department.

The state Government must have strong reasons for wanting Din as chairman since it is certainly going to great lengths to ensure his appointment. Last month, when the board refused to ratify the cabinet's decision, the state Government removed all the five non-official directors during an extraordinary meeting of the shareholders of the bank. The removal posed no problem: the Government has 90 per cent voting rights. But the non-official directors bounced right back with a stay order from the court against their removal from office before the expiry of their term. Said Sheikh Nazir, an elected board member: "The Government seems to be in a hurry to remove us because we will not approve either controversial appointments or irregular loans to the friends and relations of the rulers."

Nazir is perhaps right in his allegation. Din does not have an exactly lily-white record. A highly controversial bureaucrat, he advanced loans to various political leaders during his tenure as general manager of the bank. These included the chief minister's son Muzaffar Shah and leader of the Congress(I) legislature party Maulvi Ifteqar Ansari. It was during Din's tenure that Ansari's firm, Ansari Carpets, received an initial loan of Rs 30,000 which was later raised to Rs 7.50 lakh in 1980. The loans have not been cleared so far. In 1980, Din is also alleged to have helped Muzaffar with his newly-floated Tycoons Enterprises by advancing loans which also remain uncleared today.

In fact, Din's last two years in office as general manager were largely spent distributing loans without proper security to various pro-National Conference and Congress(I) leaders and in appointing their relatives to sensitive posts. Finally, in 1980, various trade unions presented a detailed representation against Din to the then chief minister Sheikh Abdullah who forwarded it to the Vigilance Department. For over two years, the Vigilance Department took no action. The employees union again represented to Abdullah's son and successor Farooq in 1983. He sent it to the Home Department for further investigations. Before any investigations could be completed, however, Abdullah was toppled and Din sent on deputation to the JKFC as managing director. There too, he is alleged to have appointed the sons of certain cabinet ministers as loan officers of the corporation.

On January 18, 1985, to clear the way for Din's new appointment as chairman, the state Government issued an order appointing him as one of the directors of the bank. Banking officials disclose that a person against whom vigilance cases are pending cannot normally be appointed a director in the bank where he has served. In Din's case, this practice was ignored and once he was appointed director, the state Government also devised a new way to bring him in as chairman.

Out of the blue, it decided to implement its policy of terminating the services of those who were re-employed after retirement. In this case the axe was to fall on Mohammed Amin, the serving chairman who was on re-employment and whose term was due to expire only next year. Interestingly the Government decided to recommend Amin's termination and Din's appointment on January 30, 1985, the very day a meeting of the board of directors was to be held. Said Jalil Ahmed Khan, commerce and finance secretary: "The state Government has taken a policy decision to

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acquaintances. These charges have become so strident that even Congress(I) leaders have started resenting the manner in which ministers and leaders of the NC (K) have been indulging in favouritism. Bhim Singh, MLA and leader of the Panther's Party, filed a writ petition in the Jammu & Kashmir High Court alleging that "thousands of persons have been appointed throughout the state without (the holding of) any interviews or procedures or without any reason or classification whatsoever in total disregard of the merit of the deserving candidates. None of the posts was filled through the so-called recruitment boards."

In fact, the Shah Government abolished all district-level recruitments soon after it came to power, and evolved its own system of appointments through ministerial recommendations. A case in point is the appointment of the sons of Education Minister Ali Mohammed Naik and Industry Minister Dar as loan officers of the state-owned Jammu & Kashmir Corporation. Appointed by a letter dated March 19 on salaries over Rs 2,000 these two fresh graduates got their jobs against the claims of senior officials within the organisation and for which five years' experience as accounts executive is required.

ALTHOUGH Dar comments that he will "quit not only politics but even the state if it is proved that I have influenced the selection of my son", the writ petition now lying before the judge lists six other specific instances of nepotism. They are the appointments of:

- Housing Minister Ghulam Mohammad Badrawahi's son as deputy secretary in the secretariat, superseding the claims of five others, and a son-in-law as deputy general manager in the state forest corporation;
- Revenue Minister G.N. Kochak's nephew as deputy secretary in the Law Department;
- Excise Minister Gurbachan Kumari Rana's sister as a social welfare officer although she is not a subject of Jammu & Kashmir, and her husband as deputy commissioner (food), Jammu;
- Hospitality Minister Jagjivan Lal's brother-in-law as assistant director, hospitality and protocol.

As Professor Rattan Lal, a senior teacher and active member of the Naya Kashmir Forum, points out: "The powers of recruitment have been usurped by the ministers and their offices and residences have been practically converted into employment agencies. In many cases the ministers are issuing orders of recruitment when in fact they should have been done by the departmental recruitment boards." Things have rarely been at such a low ebb, but it is significant that the Government has not responded with a

cancel the order of re-employment issued in the past and in this context they have also decided that Shri S.M. Din should be the next chairman of the J&K Bank Ltd." Curiously enough, Din was also due to retire in May this year.

Jalil Khan requested the chairman to place his letter for "consideration" before the directors. But when the board met in the evening the same day, it rejected both the resolutions moved by Khan. Neither did it approve the termination of Amin's services nor the appointment of Din. Even the Reserve Bank of India's(RBI) nominee on the board M.M. Kalwani voted against Din's appointment. Ultimately the board resolved to ask the state Government to send in three names from which it would choose one as chairman.

The state Government took that decision as an insult and decided to teach the non-official directors a lesson. Two days later, Chief Secretary Mir Nasurulah and Finance Secretary Khan requisitioned an extraordinary meeting of the bank's government shareholders. Surprisingly, the bank's chairman was not asked to call the meeting, but the two officials summoned it themselves on March 25, 1985 and put on the agenda: the removal of all the non-official members who had voted against Din's appointment.

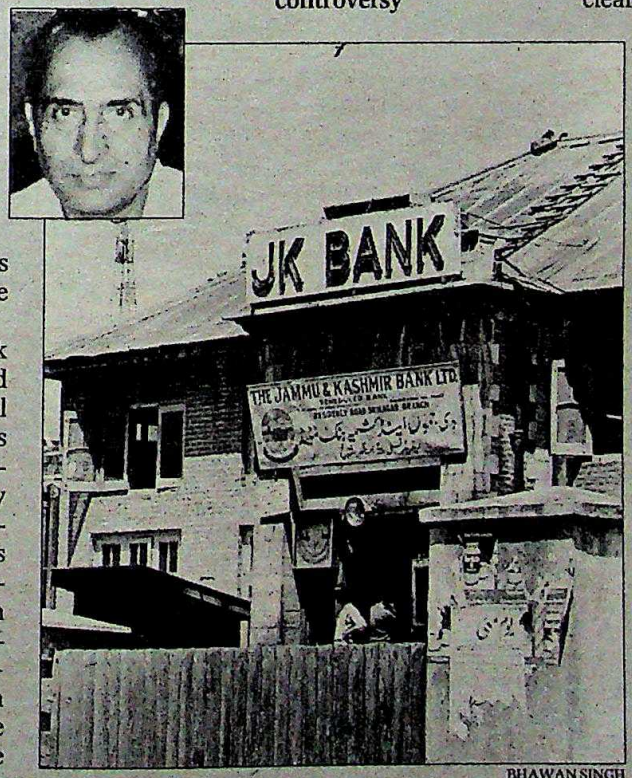
When the meeting was held, the Government inducted new directors who were either Congress(I) men or National Conference (Khalida) activists or else those who dealt with the bank as businessmen. The state Government justified its decision with a simple statement. "We took this unpleasant decision of removing the non-official members of the J&K Bank's board," said Deputy Chief Minister D.D. Thakur, "because they were responsible for obstructing the normal functioning of the board."

Sheikh Nazir and the others who were removed from the board went to the court and received a stay order. But even then, the Government carried on clearing the desk for Din's appointment. On April 6, 1985, the Finance Department wrote a letter to the Vigilance Department demanding all the details on the cases still pending against Din. A section of the bank staff alleged that this was being done so that all cases against Din could be dropped and the way completely cleared for his appointment as the chairman of the J&K Bank.

The RBI, however, has chosen to concur with the board's point of view and has asked the bank to send it a panel of names of which it will tick one as chairman. While the moves and countermoves are being made in the Srinagar valley, Chief Minister Shah has been away in the US. He will return to his state on May 20—and then, the bank battle should take its most interesting turn.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

J&K Bank and (inset) S.M. Din: seat of controversy



BHAWAN SINGH

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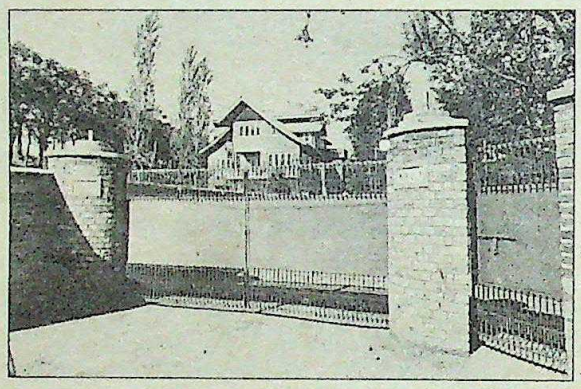
reply in the high court to Singh's petition. And the chief minister has since ordered that appointments be made through recruitment boards.

There is little doubt that money has flowed the way of obliging individuals connected with the state Government. During Shah's 10 months in power, the Government and its various public sector undertakings recruited 4,000 persons for various posts without first advertising or holding interviews. In the process they added Rs 8 crore to the Government's wage bill in spite of the existence of an overdraft of Rs 28 crore from the Jammu & Kashmir Bank. Consequently, there were allegations that over Rs 2 crore had been shelled out by aspirants. A teacher appointed for only one year admitted to having paid Rs 5,000. Of the 400 teachers recruited recently, over 60 lack the mandatory educational qualifications. Frustrated youth set the education department's office in Srinagar on fire last fortnight when they discovered their names missing from the list of successful candidates—some of whom had not even appeared for the interview. Education Minister Naik said that it was "normal to appoint teachers on an ad hoc basis but have been appointed on merit".

But time has proved that merit is, in fact, the least consideration. And it is not surprising that this is a negligible factor in the matter of admissions—particularly to medical colleges. In stark testimony to the muddle, admissions to over 50 seats in the post-graduate course at the Government Medical College (GMC), Srinagar, have not yet been finalised although admissions opened in September 1984. Admission rules lay down that due weightage be given to marks obtained in the MBBS exams and performance at the interview, with some seats reserved for those having served in rural areas. No mention is made of those having served in rural areas abroad. The bombshell was dropped four days before the tests and interviews were to be held. An order dated November 22, 1984, and signed by J.P. Kesar, commissioner and secretary for health, said: "For seats reserved for field category candidates... rural service abroad, certified as rural service by the concerned medical authority and endorsed by the Indian embassy, would also be taken into account."

Once more, those affected went to court. Charging that the order was passed in order to accommodate the relatives of ministers and bureaucrats, 38 junior doctors filed a writ petition in the high court challenging it. Those who were likely to benefit from the new amendment were named as:

- Manzoor Ahmed, nephew of Ghulam Ahmed, principal secretary to the chief minister;
- Khalida Rasool, daughter of Ghulam Rasool Kar, ruling Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member;
- Amjad Abbas, brother of Maulvi Ifteqar Ansari, Congress(I) leader.



Bungalow allotted to G.M. Shah's sister: conflicting claims

All three, the petitioners stated, had worked abroad—Manzoor in Pakistan, where he had also studied, Abbas in Iran, and Khalida in the Gulf. The high court stayed the order. The Government, for its part, has not yet released the list of admitted candidates.

Health Minister Mahboob Beg admitted that the Government would hold re-tests in two weeks. Maintaining that this decision had been taken by the cabinet, he remarked that he had received some complaints about the manner in which brilliant students had been poorly graded in the tests. The junior doctors remain unmollified. Says Dr Ranjan Kachru, a petitioner: "How can the whole list be scrapped on the basis of one or two complaints? Obviously they have ulterior motives." Doctors also question the validity of government commenting on the work of professionals. As a senior GMC doctor said: "The complaint should be sent to us for follow-up action. They didn't bother to do so. Why?" As for Beg's reassurance, another doctor retorted: "He has to ignore the order or face contempt of court... Now we will have doctors with MD and MS degrees."

One more aspect of the state Government's influence came to light last month when Bishambar Dass Mangotra complained in writing to police that he had been evicted from a palatial house in exclusive Gogji Bagh and that the house was now occupied by the sister of G.M. Shah, and his nephew instead. Mangotra claimed that he had been living in the house for 20 years and that the house had originally been leased to Ram Lal Gupta in 1941 for 40 years. In 1981, Mangotra applied for transfer and extension of the lease in his name in accordance with the rules governing such cases in Jammu & Kashmir. No action was taken, even on a second application in 1982.

Meanwhile the widow of Gupta's son laid claims on the 4-canal property and house, leading to a government probe. The consensus had been, according to Mangotra, that it should be given to him. While the case was pending in court, the Shah Government moved into the act in September 1984, allotting half the property to the lady and claiming the rest and house for itself. Mangotra then obtained a stay from the high court. Leaving the matter in the hands of his advocate M.H. Beg, Mangotra left for Jammu on holiday. He claimed that during his absence Shah's sister and nephew accompanied by 20 other members of the family, assistant commissioner (Nazool), Srinagar, and a posse of 60-80 policemen moved into the house. According to Mangotra, "The assistant commissioner told me that he was carrying out his operation under the directions of Muzaffar Shah, the chief minister's son." But a state government officials commented: "Nothing illegal has been done in this case and no one has pressurised us".

If indeed there is little pressure and less that is illegal in the state of Jammu & Kashmir, Shah and his coterie will be hard put to offer convincing arguments for the fact that more and more organisations are seeking redressal through the court or sending representations with their woes to the Centre. The Centre, for its part, seems to be resting content on the explanations it has called for from Shah over the last two months. But Shah last fortnight was in the US, and as the charges reach a crescendo, it is, ironically, the image of the Centre that is being irreparably tarnished, and not that of the state Government—which, in any case, was writing on a smudged slate. —PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

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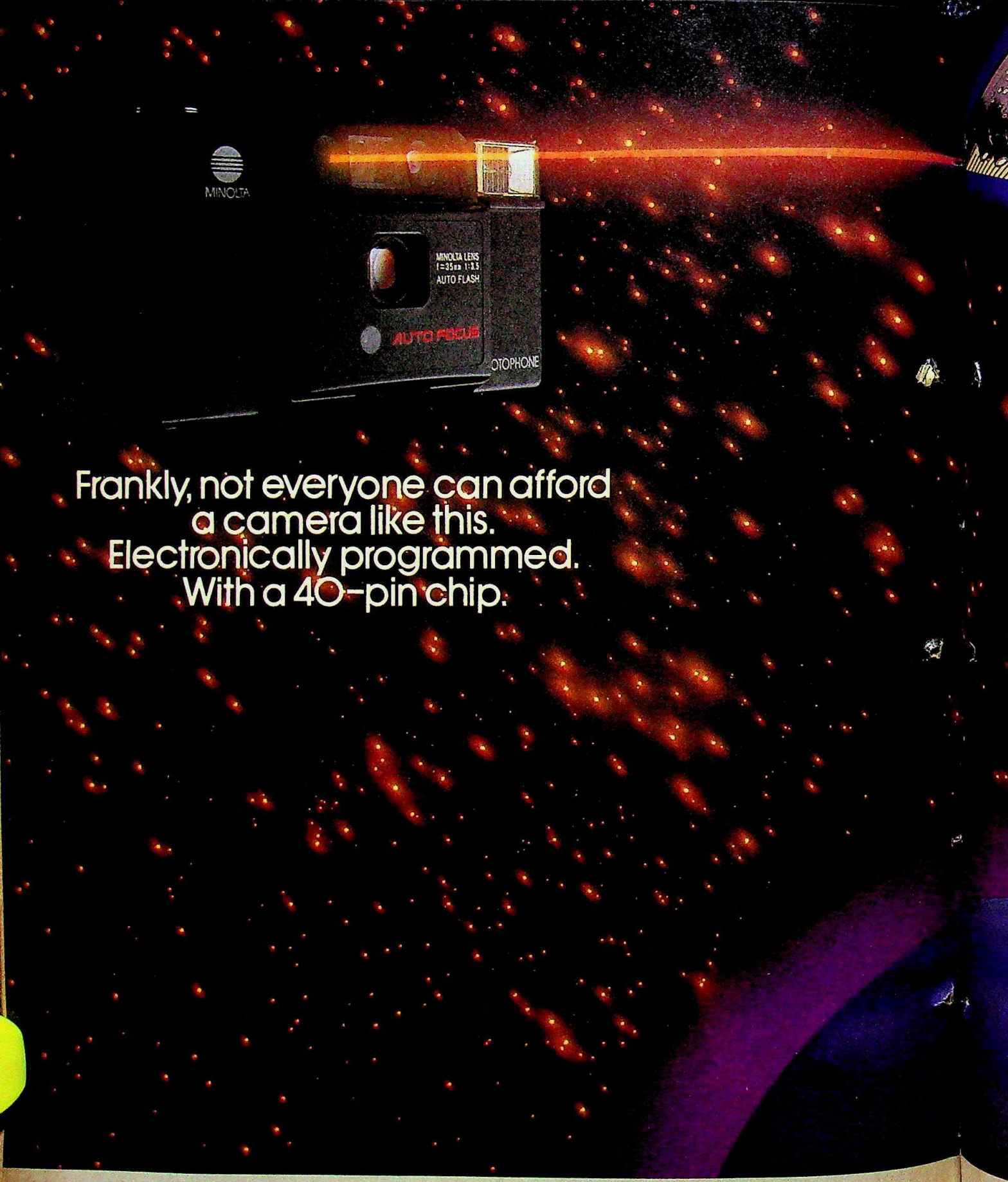

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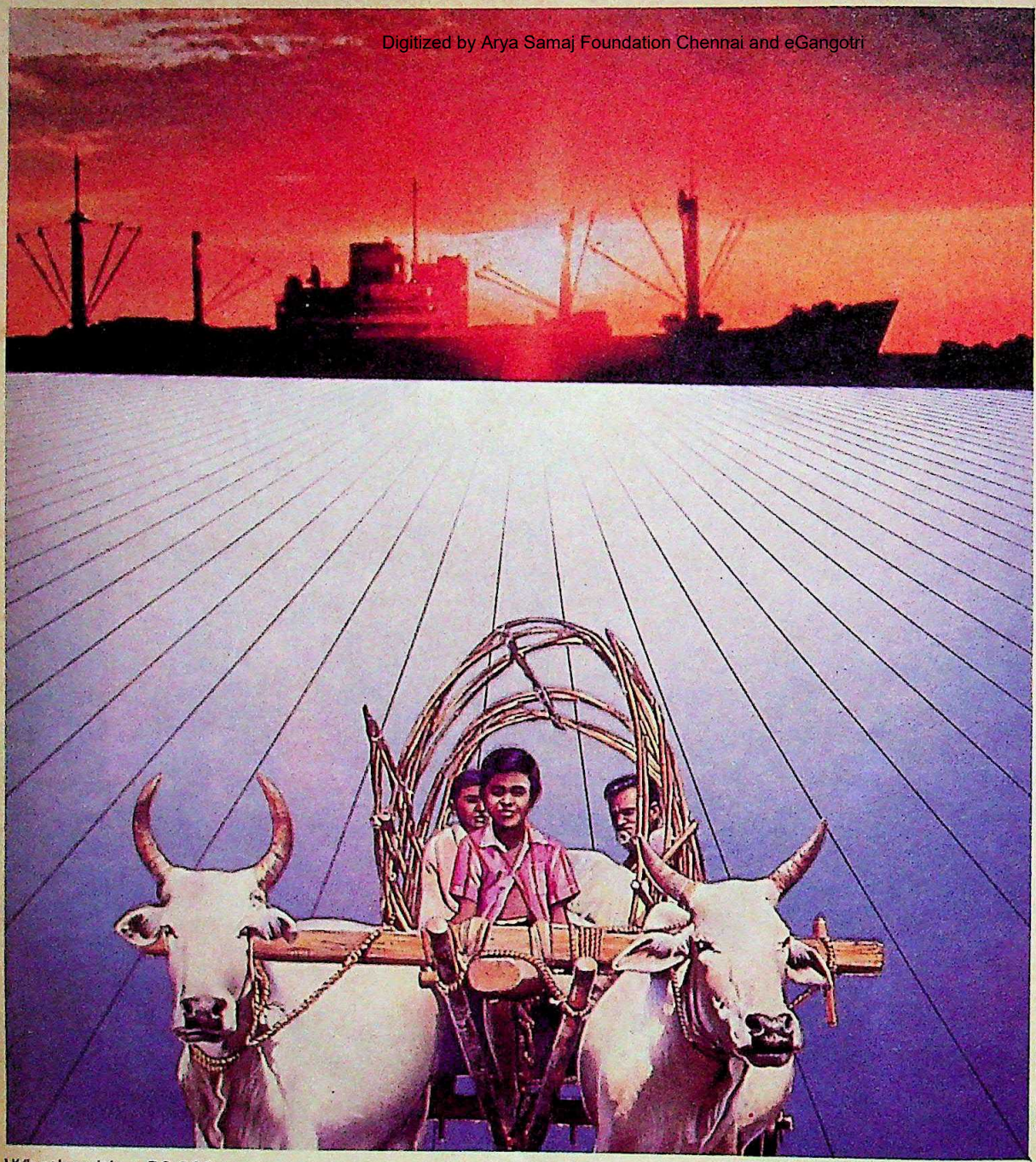

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SAYAJIRAO GAEKWAD

Death of a Jet-setter

AT THE resplendent resort of Cannes, the *creme de la creme* of international cinema had gathered for the world's most prestigious film festival, a luminious assemblage of movie stars, producers and directors gathered to cast a critical eye on the best that international cinema had to offer. But barely a few miles away was unfolding a real-life drama that was more horrific and spine-tingling than a Hitchcockian plot adorned with the lurid trappings of a Brian de Palma. In a village in the ultra-chic resort of Cagnes-Sur-Mer, lying spread-eagled on his pink-sheeted bed in a pool of blood with a kitchen knife in his throat and surrounded by candles he had lit, lay the body of Sayajirao Pratapsinh Gaekwad, a member of the erstwhile Baroda royal family.

The son of the second wife of the late maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao's gory death appalled not only the elegant citizenry of Cagnes-Sur-Mer but also sent shock waves across the lush Cote d'Azur. Habitues of the plush nightclubs and casinos of Cannes and Nice and owners of the luxurious yachts berthed in Juan Les Pins and Monaco read with disbelief the news about the gruesome death of "Princey".

For years, the 40-year-old hedonist had been a conspicuous figure in the ambit of the international jet set: tall and dark and flashing priceless family jewels, Sayajirao frequented the smartest nightclubs and restaurants. His handsome face, extravagant life-style and impeccable French accent were so familiar in the more exclusive European watering holes that he was fondly and universally known as "Princey".

As dramatic as was the way he lived his life, so was its end. One of his closest friends, a painter named Maguy, who had the keys to his 10-room house named Je t'aime (I love you), discovered his body last fortnight surrounded by the burnt-out candles he had lit to illuminate his last moments. The French police quickly ruled out the possibility of murder: there were no signs of intruders or a physical struggle nor was there any evidence of robbery in the well-appointed house.

But if the French press expressed surprise at the suspected suicide, friends and relatives in India, where he was born, and France and England, where he spent most of his life, were not. In recent years, the high-stepping and opulent life-style had run out of steam and the fluorescence of his nocturnal image had dimmed considerably. He was also a homosexual—he was a chronic frequenter of gay bars and his experiments with drugs had made his life both reckless and outlandish. He favoured bizarre, multi-coloured trousers and tops,

Sayajirao Gaekwad in his villa on the Riviera: sad and savage life

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covered himself with shimmering jewellery and once dyed his hair green. He had also painted his Austin a metallic purple to match his favourite ensemble—a violet leather outfit. Recalls Usha Rathore, a granddaughter of the erstwhile maharaja of Burdwan who lives in London: "He arrived in Bombay in 1974 with a French boy-friend in tow, lived in the best suite at the Taj Mahal Hotel, threw tantrums for not getting champagne in the Coffee Shop at 3 a.m. and had a little troupe of page-boys in white silk following him around." Rathore adds that he came to India to find himself an Indian wife but in reality the only woman in his "sad and savage life", as another friend in London puts it, was his mother, Sita Devi, who caused a scandal in the mid-'40s when she left her Muslim husband to marry Sayajirao's father after a brief encounter at the Bombay racecourse. The maharaja reciprocated her affections by transferring large sums of money and a great part of the fabulous hoard of family jewellery from the Baroda state treasury to Sita Devi in Paris.

Sayajirao was only three when Sita Devi whisked him off to Paris in 1948. There the duo ensconced themselves in a grand apartment in the Avenue Victor Hugo. Elderly Parisians still remember the elegant parties that were thrown there in the late '60s where champagne was served in solid gold urns with armies of liveried servants in attendance. Mother and son used to book the entire Maxims nightspot and arrive in a white Rolls-Royce. "Everybody who was anybody flocked to their parties", recalls a French aristocrat who was a neighbour and grew accustomed to being driven around by Princey in the Rolls and fed delicious curries and the ripest of mangoes.

THE GOOD times lasted till the money ran out. Sita Devi's health rapidly deteriorated and she has been virtually bedridden in a Paris flat in recent times. Several times in the last few years, Princey was mugged in Paris streets for the flashy jewels he always sported and in 1973 he moved into the small picturesque village called Haut-de-Cagnes where he started frequenting the local bars. The fact that he was adored by the local residents was apparent in their reactions to his death when contacted by INDIA TODAY. "Princey never talked about his royal pedigree, he was such a gentle soul but he was still an eccentric bird," says one resident. He lived alone in the villa among dwindling objets d'arts and had recently become addicted to cards. Sometimes he would bestir himself into sudden spurts of activity inspired by changing moods.

For a while, he even worked as a bartender in gay bars in Nice and St Tropez and his homosexual tendencies left him with few friends. Coupled with his declining fortunes and overcome with depression, Princey's drinking bouts grew in proportion. Says a local waitress who often waited on him: "He had a prodigious capacity for champagne and, more recently vodka." In recent weeks, he talked often about death. Adds a friend who recently saw him in Cannes: "He seemed genuinely depressed about the future, about his mother's illness and the lack of funds." In one such moment of depression, Princey evidently succumbed to the call of the past, drawing all the curtains in the house—and on his wasted life.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in Paris and SUNIL SETHI in London

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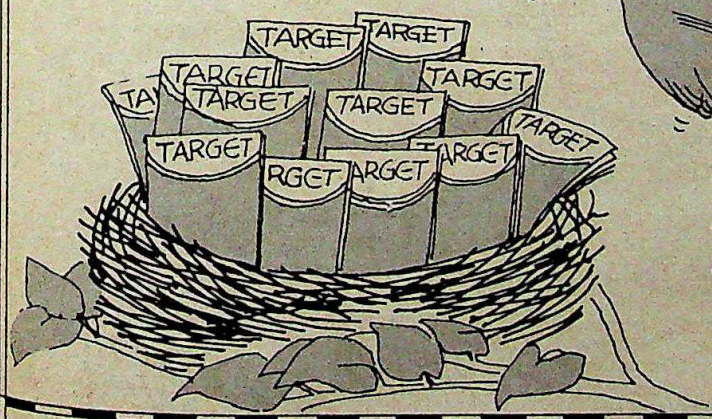

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BLOOD BANKS

Trading in Blood

DELHI'S Guru Datt, a craggy-faced unemployed textile worker, practises a gory profession. He sells his blood for a living, 12 to 13 times every month. It is no wonder that 34-year-old Guru Datt already looks nearer 50; his sunken, lustreless eyes bespeak a life that appears to be fast ebbing away.

In Madras, a 38-year-old coolie, Chelladurai waits patiently in line outside the blood bank of a government hospital. He too sells blood to supplement his meagre wages from manual labour. Chelladurai does not realise that his weak and emaciated state is the result of all too frequent blood-letting. Nor does his neighbour in the queue Kathirvelu; after throwing up his job in a shop the starving Kathirvelu was lured to the door of a commercial blood bank by the promise of easy money. Kathirvelu, at 21, is an early entrant into the ranks of professional blood sellers. But the blood banks catch them even younger. Like 13-year-old Naushad, a rag-picker of Chandni Chowk, Delhi. Having sold his blood three times in the past four months Naushad is on his way to becoming a professional blood seller. He may never grow into manhood.

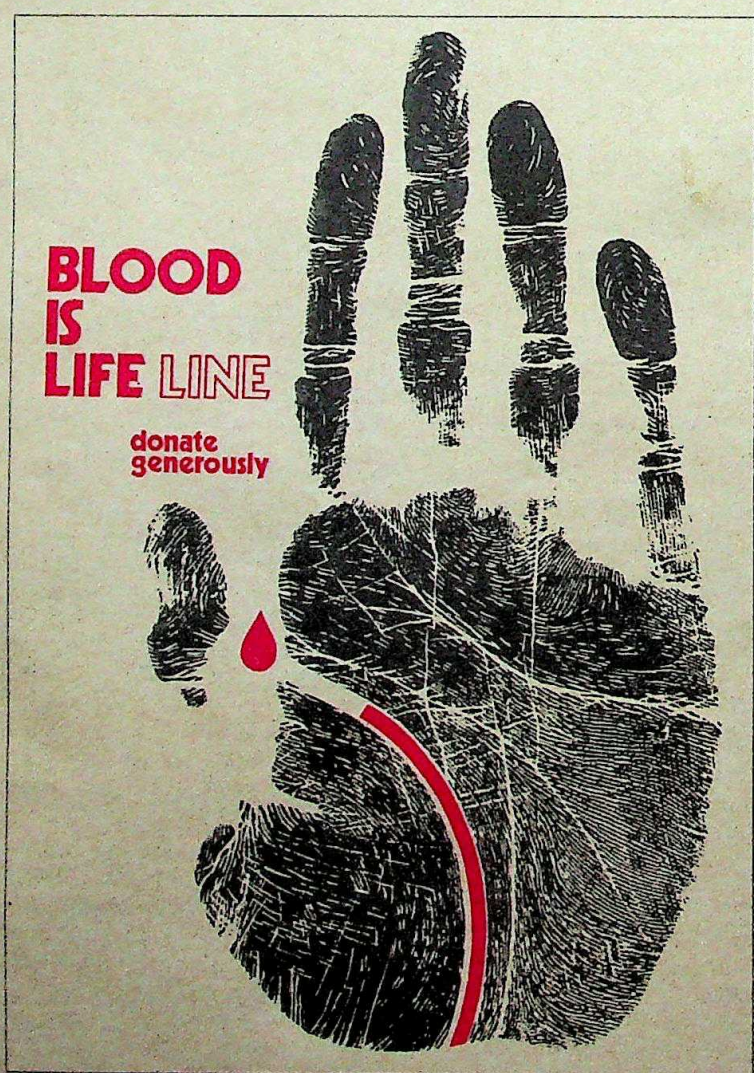
All over the country there are many Guru Datts, Chelladurais and Kathirvelus; their weakness and helplessness is being exploited by privately run blood shops euphemistically called commercial blood banks. People like Guru Datt and Chelladurai are also the reason why so many hospital patients in this country contract hepatitis (jaundice) after a blood transfusion. Most doctors are not willing to face up to the harsh truth that professional blood sellers—indigent, diseased, drug addicted or just plain criminals—are walking repositories of infection. The blood they sell often carries this infection into the veins of critically ill patients, thereby jeopardising their chances of recovery.

The blood trade abounds in malpractices, profiteering and a callous disregard for the health of the blood donor and recipient. How else would it be possible for professional blood sellers like Guru Datt to sell blood 12 times a month when only one blood donation is permitted in three months. A tacit conspiracy between professional donors and commercial blood banks allows the former to lie about the state of their health, and the latter to avoid testing the blood for the germs of disease. To illustrate this nexus the Secretary of the Blood Donors Welfare Association, Jagdish Bhardoj, alleges that the association's executive member Nand Lal, a TB patient, regularly sells blood and it is accepted without demur by Delhi's commercial blood banks.

All commercial blood banks are not uniformly guilty of malpractice, but some hair-raising stories are narrated by professional donors. Guru Datt swears that on a couple of occasions he himself has been bled for two or three bottles at one sitting by a private blood bank near Connaught Place, outside which he and other donors recently demonstrated for higher rates. The blood bank owner vehemently denies this charge, but last month's agitation by the blood sellers opened a Pandora's box of charges and counter-charges and allowed onlookers a peek into the capital's murky blood trade. At one end is the blood seller, or professional donor, and at the other end the commercial blood bank. In between are a host of intermediaries, doctors and hospital staff whose collusion with the private blood banks makes it possible for the business to thrive. And thrive it does, what with buying blood between Rs 15 and Rs 50 a bottle and selling it to patients for anything between Rs 100 and Rs 400 a bottle. The rates for blood may vary from city to city, but everywhere it is a profitable business which has made wealthy men of blood bank owners. One such person in Bombay reportedly specialises in taking beggars off the streets, bleeding them and exporting the blood to the Middle East. Ten years ago, Bombay was chosen by some multinational companies to set up blood fractionation plants to process the blood of professional donors and export the products. The Government banned any export of blood products following an uproar in Parliament.

The way some blood banks function is best illustrated by an incident in Amritsar. A person walked into the blood shop outside the gate of

A blood donation poster



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the emergency ward of the V.J. Hospital and asked if O–RH Negative blood was available. The attendant in the shop said yes, it was available. Was it stored in the grimy dilapidated refrigerator standing in the corner? "No," said the attendant, "we don't believe in storing blood. I will send my assistant with you to our bleeding centre on Lawrence Road and they will give you *taaza* (fresh) blood drained from a donor in your presence." True enough, a mile away several poor unemployed persons were milling outside the bleeding centre waiting to be bled for Rs 40. The blood shop attendant extolled the virtues of warm blood as proudly as a milkman may boast of freshly extracted milk from a cow.

Desperation is the key ingredient in blood transactions. Desperate for money, the poor blood seller agrees to be bled. At the other end, desperate relatives of the patient agree to pay any amount for the blood that is needed. There are no moral qualms about charging inordinately high prices for blood of a rare group.

Tragically, patients and their relatives are either unaware of the hazards of diseased blood or, at wit's end, they will take any blood that is available. And the blood most readily available comes from the denizens of the city's skid row. Whether it is Delhi or Bombay, Bangalore, Madras, Hyderabad or Amritsar, blood sellers like Guru Datt or Chelladurai usually hang around the public parks, dharamshalas, railway stations and bus stands. In Delhi the main hang-outs are Company Bagh, Red Fort, Old Delhi Railway Station and the inter-state bus terminal. Guru Datt describes how he was introduced to the blood trade. He was sitting in Company Bagh several years ago when the *dalal* (middleman) of a blood bank approached him and said, "If you need money I can get it for you". The curious Guru Datt followed the *dalal* to the blood bank and joined the crowd of needy people clamouring to be bled. "They gave me Rs 15 but the *dalal* took away Rs 2 as commission. The blood bank gave me a date 90 days away for the next donation but whenever the need for blood arose they would send the *dalal* to round me up along with other donors." Like others of his tribe he would do the rounds of the blood banks in town. They always asked him to return 90 days later, but when he came back sooner they would take his blood anyway but put a different name on the bottle.

Because the same donors are bled repeatedly under different names the number entered in the registers of the private blood banks is many times more than the actual number of donors. Dr Arvind Lal, who owns one of the oldest blood banks, says there are about one lakh donors in Delhi and his bank alone has 15,000 to 16,000 on its registers. But Bhardoj insists there are only 5,000 donors in Delhi and about 2,000 floating donors who migrate to the capital

Professional donors outside a blood bank in Delhi

BHAWAN SINGH

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BHAWAN SINGH

in winter from neighbouring states. Bhardoj, who claims he sells his blood 17 times every month, explains that the association was formed to prevent the exploitation of jobless teenagers who are now being introduced to blood selling by the rapacious *dalals* of the commercial blood banks. "We have been rendered diseased, disabled and dependent on blood-letting," says Bhardoj, "and we don't want our children and other teenagers to be corrupted." Nearly 500 of Delhi's professional donors have been stricken with hepatitis or venereal disease because most private blood banks do not use disposable syringes, says Bhardoj.

THERE is a serious shortage of blood in the country and that is why the substandard blood collected by commercial blood banks finds ready customers. According to the estimates of the Indian Society of Blood Transfusion and Immuno-Haematology (ISBTI), the country requires 3.5 million units of blood every year, but only 1.5 million units are collected leaving a deficit of 2 million units. The ISBTI's Founder-President and Professor of Blood Transfusion at Chandigarh's Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Dr J.G. Jolly, says hospitals cope with the deficit by transfusing less blood than the patients should ideally get. This does not harm the patient but may delay his recovery. More worrying than the deficit, says Jolly, is the fact that nearly half the blood collected in the country is from professional blood sellers like Guru Datt and Nand Lal.

The dangers of infected blood are obvious. The viral hepatitis which killed nearly 1,000 persons in Ahmedabad last year spread mainly through transfusion of infected blood and the use of unsterilised syringes in the city's hospitals. Out of the 135 patients who died in hospitals, at least 26 had earlier received blood transfusions. And this happened in Gujarat which is less dependent than other states on the blood of professional donors. Elsewhere "there are many Ahmedabads just waiting to happen," commented a leading Delhi surgeon.

Actual figures of post-transfusion hepatitis caused by the blood of professional donors are hard to come by because there is little or no follow-up of transfusion cases. Internationally, blood from professional donors has been proved to carry a ten times greater risk of hepatitis infection when compared with voluntarily donated blood. This is because an al-

Donor giving blood: crass commercialism

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truistic voluntary donor would not lie about any infectious disease he may have had. The incidence of post-transfusion hepatitis in India is suspected to be much higher than the international average.

Mrs Kanta Saroop Krishen, ISBTI secretary-general, squarely blames the medical profession for this state of affairs. "This is a big racket and it exists because the medical profession is totally indifferent about the quality of blood being transfused. Who is patronising the commercial blood banks?" she asks angrily. "Doctors are still directing patients to these blood banks without making the effort to inform them that it is not safe." If only doctors took a stand on this, commercial blood banks would close down, says Krishen.

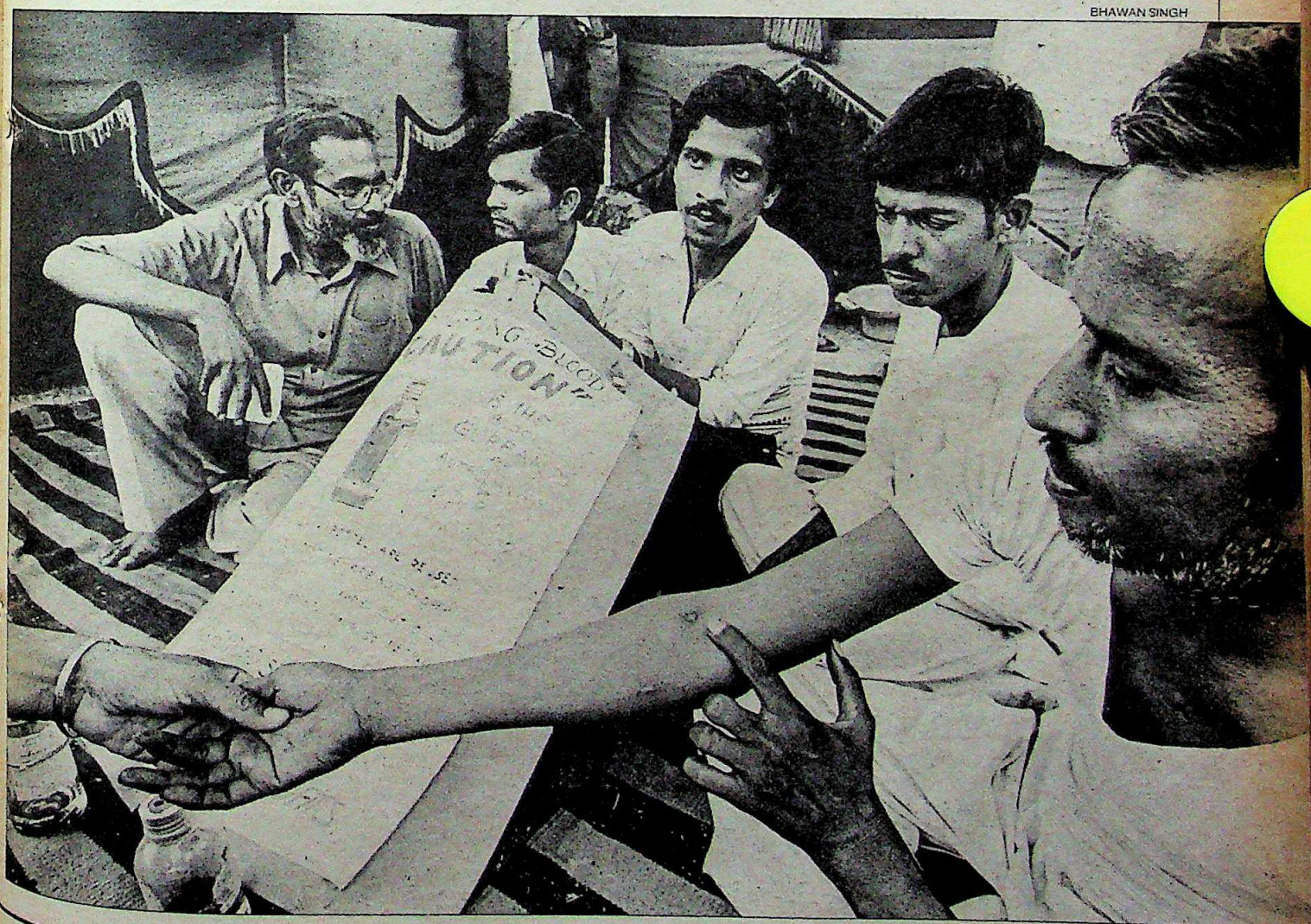
Complains Dr Jolly: "It's very regrettable that most of the blood required by Army and Railway hospitals comes from commercial donors. These are organised services and can work for voluntary donation, but they don't make the effort." Even health ministers have refused to recognise the danger of blood from professional donors. When officials of the ISBTI met Raj Narain in the late 1970s to plead for a ban on professional blood donors, he chided them saying: "*Array in gareebon ka khoon nahin logay to unki dehaari kaise chalegi.*" (if you don't take their blood how will these poor people be able to earn their livelihood).

BUT NOW there seems to be some rethinking in the Health Ministry, at least about reorganising blood transfusion services. The ministry has sought the Planning Commission's approval to start a national blood transfusion service which will train staff in blood transfusion and fractionation, undertake motivational campaigns to propagate voluntary donation, and run a national and several regional blood transfusion centres. "We are totally opposed to commercial purchase of blood," said Health Ministry Joint Secretary P.R. Dasgupta, "but a blanket ban on professional donations may not serve any useful purpose at this stage other than perhaps aggravating the situation."

There are no rules to prevent or promote professional donors, complains Dr (Mrs) S.K. Sandhu, director of health services in the Delhi Administration. Like prostitution, commercialisation of blood has a moral dimension. "It is the degraded morality of the donors and the people running blood banks. We cannot do anything about this moral crisis." Dr M.L. Gupta of the Indian Red Cross Society agrees: "Nobody in a civilised society has the right to purchase anybody's blood. It is a living tissue and should come as a free gift." Gupta feels that those who buy blood from private blood banks are "exploiting someone's poverty or helplessness". The only way out is voluntary blood donation and Gupta insists all VIP's who come to inaugurate his blood donation camps should first donate blood to set an example. Rajiv Gandhi, Jagmohan, Chandra Shekhar and Atal Behari Vajpayee have so-far been enrolled as blood donors. But public involvement in the

Blood donors staging a dharna at the Delhi Boat Club

BHAWAN SINGH



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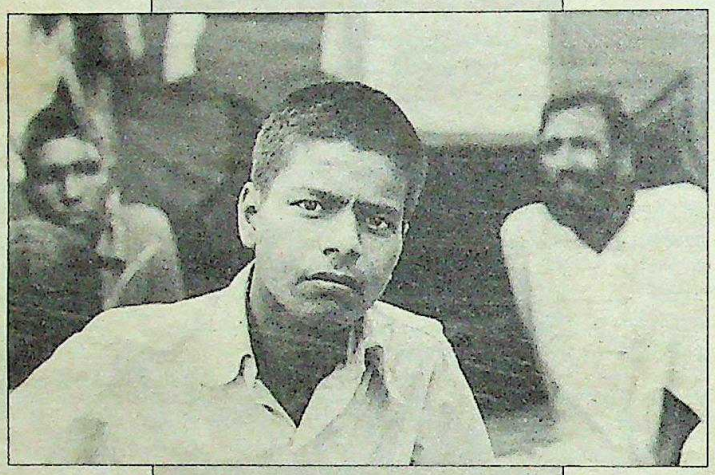
voluntary programme is shamefully low, says Gupta. Delhi manages to collect barely a quarter of its blood needs from voluntary donors. If every citizen donated blood only once in his lifetime, patients and their relatives would not need to patronise the blood shops. One reason for the popular dependence on blood shops is the readiness of the Railways, Central Government Health Service and Employees State Insurance to reimburse its members the entire cost of blood. This encourages the patient's relatives to buy blood rather than donate it themselves. Behind this attitude lies ignorance and selfishness.

The ignorance arises out of prevailing myths about the effect of blood donation. Dr Jolly says men ask him if a blood donation would affect their virility. Others enquire if their life span would be shortened by the blood loss. Most people just do not know that one blood donation every three months is completely harmless: the body replenishes the fluid loss within 48 hours and the red blood cells in a couple of weeks. If only people jettisoned their unreasonable fear of donating blood, the voluntary movement would really catch on as it did in Chandigarh which collects all the blood it needs from voluntary donations. This is the work of some social workers who formed the Chandigarh Blood Bank society several years ago. Enthusiastic college and university students unflinchingly provide the blood. This experience spurred Dr Jolly into starting ISBTI as a forum to campaign for voluntary blood donation. But while the society was pleading for action against professional donors, Delhi's biggest commercial blood bank carried the battle to Chandigarh by securing permission to open a branch there. "This blood bank is going to cut at our roots," fears Jolly. A delegation of the society met Mrs Indira Gandhi in December 1983 to plead for a ban on registration of new commercial blood banks, propagation of the voluntary donation message on the electronic media and special screening and safeguards to prevent the dreaded disease AIDS from spreading in India. Dr Jolly warns that with professional blood donors holding sway, India is just ripe for AIDS.

Why? Because the Government machinery in most cities is just not equal to the task of supervising the operations of blood banks. In Delhi for example, Mrs Sandhu candidly admits that with the existing staff, the Drug Controller's office "cannot carry out satisfactory checks and we don't have an independent laboratory of our own to check the blood samples that we collect". Keeping an eye on the blood banks is only a small part of her department's function. With a staff of only 19 persons it has to keep tabs on 250 licensed drug manufacturing units, 400 cosmetic manufacturing units and nearly 100 Ayurvedic and Unani drug units, besides over an estimated 6,000 chemists shops.

BHAWAN SINGH



Having sold his blood three times in the past four months Naushad, 13, is on his way to becoming a professional blood seller. He may never grow into manhood.

In Bangalore and Hyderabad the authorities don't seem to have any control over commercial blood banks. Bangalore faces a large demand for blood from over 150 private nursing homes. This blood invariably comes from the commercial blood banks: the city's wealthy elite therefore get the worst possible quality of blood while poor patients in government hospitals get healthy blood as most government blood banks are allowed to bleed only voluntary donors. Says Dr J.N. Vajifdar, director of Bombay's Red Cross: "The poor get very good blood and the rich often get very poor blood" because hospitals like Jaslok and Breach Candy depend mostly on blood supplied by commercial blood banks. Even Red Cross donor cards which entitle the voluntary donor to free blood for him and his family are sold by panwallahs outside Jaslok Hospital. In Delhi, police constables are known to sneak into a commercial blood bank to sell their blood rather than donater it.

Are commercial blood banks really indispensable? Dr Lal, the owner of one in Delhi, contends: "If the Government were in a position to supply blood we would not be here." Adds Dasgupta of the Health Ministry: "Present day requirements of blood are not being met by voluntary donation." Counters an angry Krishen: "Would any doctor recommend an adulterated drug if the real thing is not available?" The blood of profes--sional donors, she insists, is definitely hazardous and often fatal for the receiver. In support, Dr Jolly says that even if commercial blood banks carry out all the tests—and they don't because some tests are very expensive—it is still not possible to detect all types of hepatitis. Even with the most sophisticated tests, blood banks in the United States can detect only about 80 per cent of the Hepatitis–B virus in blood. The rest escapes detection and afflicts the blood recipient. In any case, the test carried out here cannot detect Non–A and Non–B types of hepatitis. "So screening for Hepatitis–B alone is not a foolproof way to detect infectivity in blood," warns Jolly. All the more reason to play safe and administer healthy blood obtained from voluntary donors. Otherwise the chances are that the blood bought from a commercial blood bank may have come from an aplasia–afflicted Guru Datt or a tubercular Nand Lal. Aplasia is common in regular blood sellers: their bone marrow loses its power to create new red blood cells, the body's immune mechanisms are shattered and they can fall prey to any infection. Walking germ banks like Guru Datt, Chelladurai and Nand Lal pass on the infection to anyone who receives a transfusion of their blood. In the words of Dr Jolly: "Can this be allowed?"

—RAMINDAR SINGH with bureau reports

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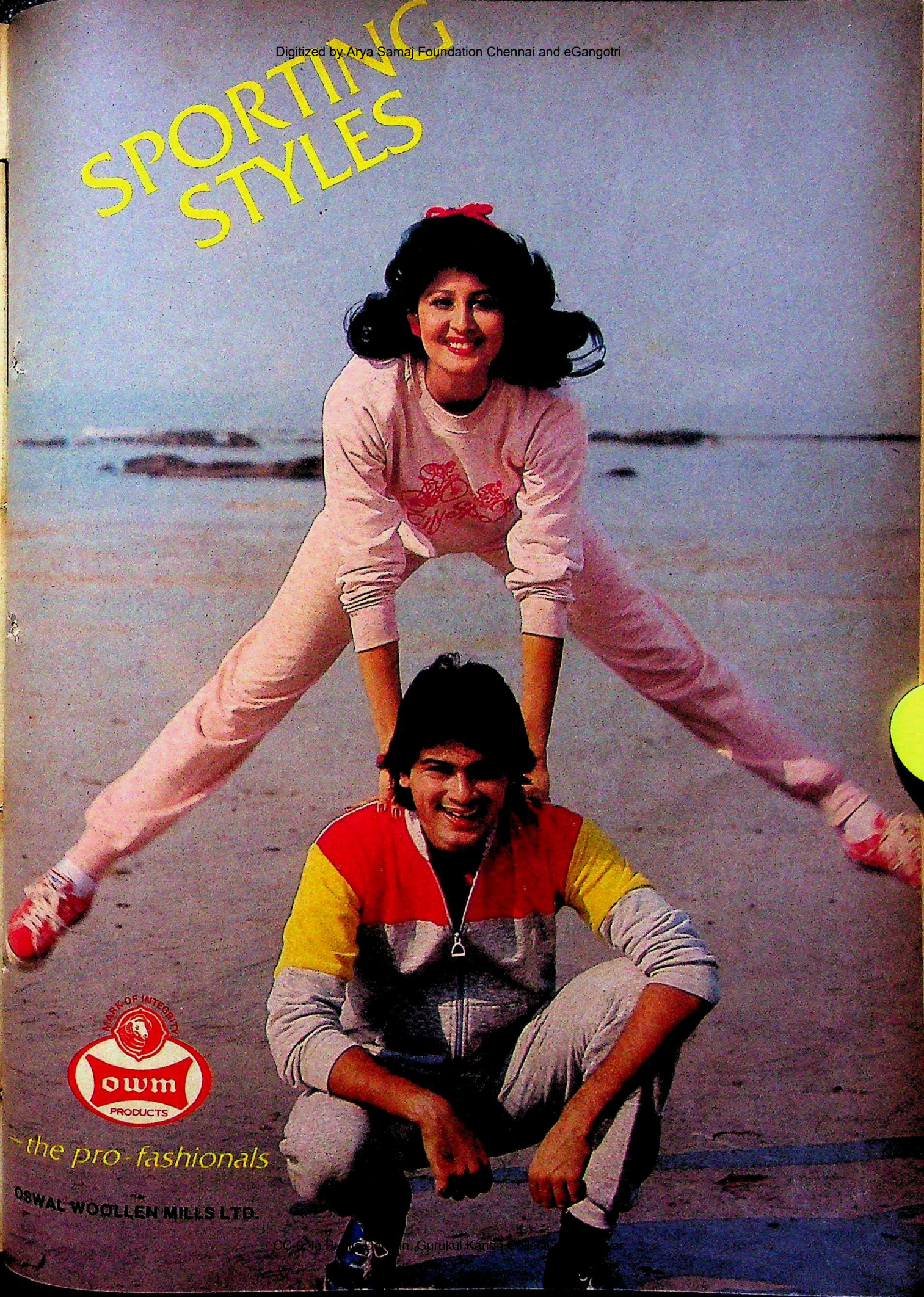

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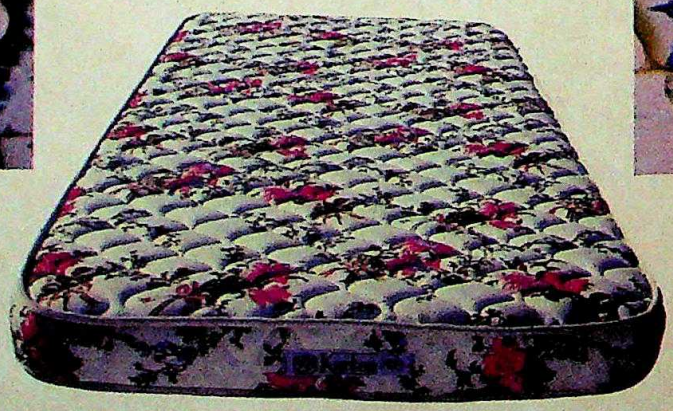

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UNITED STATES

Discovery of India

GENERAL Motors is quietly exploring the Indian market for a local collaborator to build diesel engines. Honeywell is scanning the Indian horizon for computer manufacturing. ITT is expecting to make a breakthrough in telecommunications manufacturing with an Indian partner. PepsiCola and IBM—notwithstanding past debacles in their fields of business in India—are getting ready to set full sail for the attractively beckoning commercial shores of India.

There is no doubt about it. The Fortune 500 have begun to discover India. Their interest in doing business in India—on Indian terms—is deep, genuine, serious. It is also very recent. And it has been stimulated dramatically by Prime MinisterRajiv Gandhi's popular image here as a dynamic and practical leader as well as his new budget initiatives which have been trumpeted enthusiastically in the American press and the US House of Representatives.

"A couple of years ago," says Susan B. Magee, vice-president of India International Inc, "I had a lot of interest from Indian firms looking for American partners to do business with in India. But we'd get very little response from American firms. I remember in one case—even though it was a perfect opportunity for an American firm in that field to make money in India—we went through 18 American firms to hook up with an Indian collaborator before we got a single positive response. Now it's just the opposite. We have US firms coming to us to find business partners for them in India."

India International Inc, a Washington-based organisation, specialises in doing market research, finding suitable Indian and US partners to collaborate in a field of endeavour, and then sees the partnership through to fruition. The kind of drawing power that India seems suddenly to have developed was illustrated recently by a conference on "US-Indian Business Opportunities" organised by India International Inc. It proved to be a sell-out.

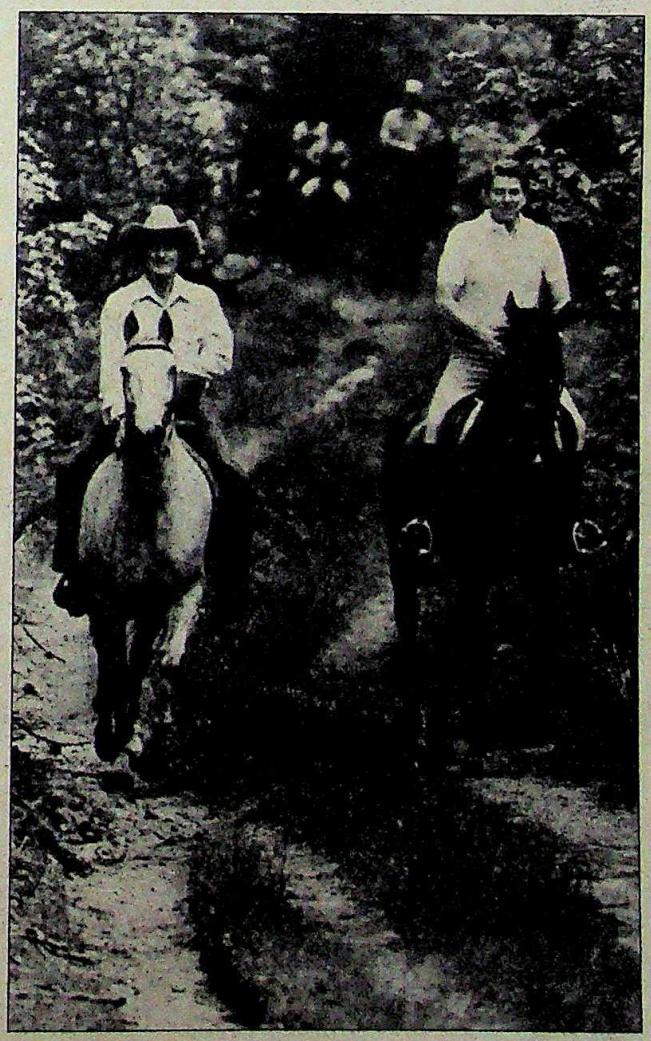
Hundreds of businessmen from America's top firms—including several prominent Fortune 500 executives—attended the two-day seminar. And the speakers included heavy hitters like Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldridge, Under-Secretary of State Michael Armacost, World Bank South Asian Vice-President David Hopper, Overseas Private Investment Corporation President Craig Nalen, and Control Data Corporation Vice-President Hugh P. Donaghue.

The cost per participant was $145. "Two years ago you probably would not have been able to fill half the room even if you gave out the tickets for free," observed Magee. She said she organised the conference in response to persistent questions from US businessmen who, since the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, had approached her organisation with questions like: "Will India hang together? What will be the new investment climate like?"

Magee said that the need for a high-level conference received a further impetus from the way Rajiv took quick and decisive control of the Indian Government. "People all over the country were surprised and impressed," she said. "Also President Reagan had been taking positive steps to improve relations between the two countries. There had been a recent agreement to sign a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) to facilitate the flow of previously forbidden high technology from the United States to India. All this needed to be put in perspective."

Interviews with sources who attended the conference—which was closed to the press—as well as with key government officials reveal some of the following trends and developments in Indo-US commercial relations on the eve of Rajiv's visit.

Baldridge (left) with Reagan: high level initiative



Both India and the US, while recognising that there will be political differences between the two regarding their often conflicting interests in the South Asian region, agree that commerce, trade and scientific cooperation are the best areas for expanding their overall relationship for mutual benefit.

The interest in India is really a two-way street. There has been a surge of general American interest in India during the last year which has coincided with India's own interest—starting under Mrs Gandhi in the 1970s—in importing American technology to meet its economic development needs. This process has accelerated under Rajiv Gandhi whose positive image abroad and economic liberalism have filtered into the American business community. India has an obvious preference for US technology because the US is still the world leader in technology, it has a large market for

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buying back products made in India under joint collaborations, and Indians and Americans share common things such as their democratic traditions and higher learning acquired by hundreds of thousands of Indians in American universities.

THE INABILITY of the US to clear high technology exports to India was a serious impediment to more trade and investment. The MOU—while it will not automatically grant every Indian request for high technology—is a clear signal to everybody in the American bureaucracy that they take a positive look at all requests for trade with India involving high-tech exports. "The bias is now in India's favour and not against it as was previously the case," one official explained. As of now more than half of all the computer applications—worldwide—from US companies awaiting export clearance from the US Government because of their potential defence-related use are for the Indian market. The clearance process is now being speeded up.

The US will continue to be India's largest single trading partner in the foreseeable future. Total US direct investment in the Indian market is about $600 million and is expected to move up. The two countries do more than $4 billion annual trade with each other with the balance—largely because of recent oil exports, being in India's favour. And India has approved more projects for collaboration from the US than for any other single country. Experts predict that future collaborative ventures between the US and India will be in the areas of food processing, petrochemicals, telecommunications, computers, ethylene propylene, printing machinery, power plants, non-stick Teflon products, industrial valves, medical instruments, machine tools, rechargeable batteries and fertilisers. In fact the US is sending a high-powered government-sponsored trade mission to India in 1986 to explore joint ventures in the telecommunications field.

The new Indian budget won universal accolades. World Bank experts predicted that India will see such rapid industrial progress during the next decade that even the miracle of the green revolution will pale in comparison. But India will need more resources to finance this great leap forward, and will have to increase its exports to 8.5 per cent of its gross national product. Otherwise India will have to borrow and its debt service ratio is expected to rise from 12 per cent to about 22 per cent. India's private sector will be under the gun to deliver.

This last aspect was also addressed in a lengthy report in the latest issue of the prestigious *Foreign Policy* magazine. In a major article entitled "The Indian Miracle", the authors said: "The perception of India as a hopelessly poor society no longer reflects reality. Major economic progress, especially in the last 10 years, has brought not only economic growth but also increased diversification and reduced vulnerability to bad

MALCOLM BALDRIDGE

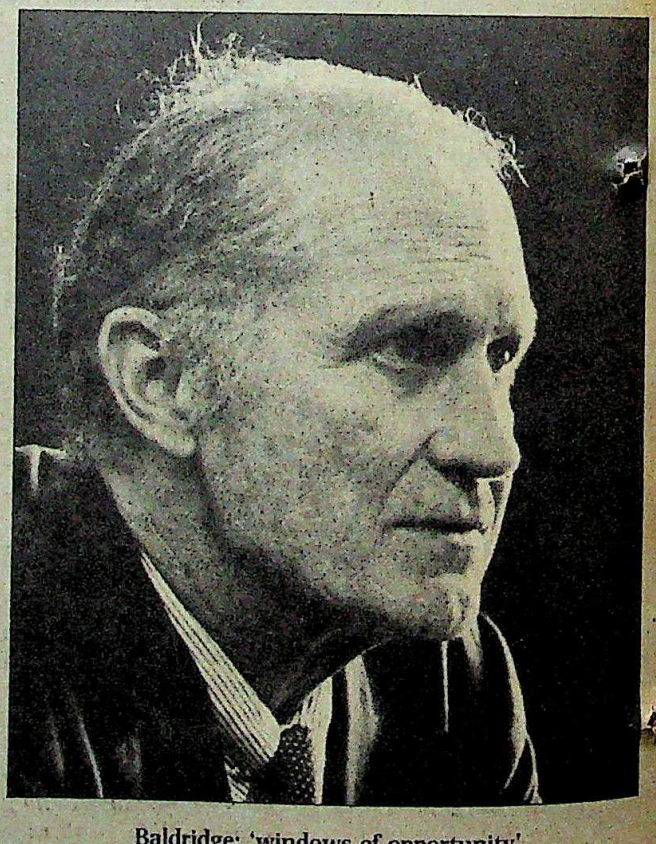
Signalling a New Era

THE 26TH Secretary of Commerce of the United States, Malcolm 'Mac' Baldridge, arrives in New Delhi this fortnight for extensive discussions with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his aides covering trade and commerce between India and the United States. Baldridge, 61, is considered a member of President Reagan's innermost circle of cabinet advisers and his visit is being interpreted in Washington as one more step to open wider what the Reagan Administration considers to be a "window of opportunity" for vastly improved relations between the two countries. During his talks Baldridge is expected to lay the groundwork for some of the discussions that will take place between Rajiv and Reagan when the Indian prime minister visits the US in June.

Baldridge discussed his visit, the prospects of more trade between the two countries as well as the Reagan Administration's reaction and response to the budget and economic reforms now under way in India during an interview with Washington Correspondent INDERJIT BADHWAR. Excerpts:

Q. *You stated recently that it was your impression that Rajiv Gandhi's Government was opening up a new era in US relations. What did you mean?*

A. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi represents a new generation of leaders whose view of the world, as well as of domestic economic matters, is not tied to the thinking which prevailed in India immediately after independence in 1947 and continued into this decade. The prime minister and many of his closest advisers are more geared toward modern technology and private sector initiatives to provide the products and services required for a nation of 750 million people. With these developments taking place in the Indian economy, there is a basis for a new era of expanding commercial ties between our countries.



Baldridge: 'windows of opportunity'

Q. *Is this view shared by the President and other colleagues in the Cabinet, and do you get the same sense from Congress? In particular, from the more conservative members of that body, who have not been previously very*

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weather and other shocks. Prospects are good now for India to achieve significant sustained growth through the 1980s and beyond...."

BUT THE article warns that any drastic shortfalls in concessional aid "beyond those already anticipated by India and factored into the Sixth Five-Year Plan and financing strategy would threaten India's movement toward a more open economy. A premature shift from public concessional to private non-concessional borrowing could force India to either incur a dangerously high debt service burden, or more likely, given India's fiscal conservatism, to put the brakes on the country's development. Neither option is in the interests of India or the West. At a minimum, the reduction in IDA funding for India should be gradual and access to IBRD (the World Bank's hard loan window) should be increased."

According to reliable sources several high-level State Department memos have been sent to the White House suggesting that President Reagan look favourably on the Indian Government's requests for continued concessional borrowing. The matter is expected to figure prominently during Rajiv's visit to the United States as it did during Mrs Gandhi's visit in 1982. India's share of IDA borrowing is expected to plummet from an all-time high of 40 per cent to less than 20 per cent because of the competition for the increasingly scarce concessional dollar.

According to government officials here, the Reagan Administration will not precipitously pull the rug out from under India on the concessional aid issue. The Reagan Administration is impressed with Rajiv's new economic policies and recognises that it does not want to derail the interest of American businessmen in that new and exciting market. But the Americans will impress upon India the need to supplement and create more of its needed resources by increasing exports and encouraging foreign investment. Foreign investment, they argue, not only brings with it technology and market expertise but also saves as well as generates foreign exchange if it is export-oriented.

The US also argues that it has absorbed more than 50 per cent of the growth of exports from developing countries, and that giving American markets to developing countries is better than giving aid. But the Reagan Administration is now in a more practical mood in its dealings with India. This mood was succinctly summed up in the *Foreign Policy* magazine article: "India's economic growth and development and governability...are essential conditions for regional stability, regional self-management, and inter-regional strategic collaboration. And it is especially in these areas that the United States has an interest in cooperating with India....In the coming years there can be no sensible US policy toward India until American officials grasp the geopolitical and commercial significance of India's new economic success at home and abroad."

enthused about India....?

A. President Reagan and other members of his cabinet recognise the gradual but positive changes that have occurred in the Indian environment since prime minister Indira Gandhi visited the United States in 1982. It is impossible to speak for all Members of Congress, but there is no question that India's growing number of friends in Congress recognise the mutual advantages of a closer relationship.

Q. ***What strikes you as the most significant aspect of the economic reforms now under way in India? Why do they make India a more attractive market for American companies than it has been previously?***

A. Recent economic reforms, particularly liberalisation of imports, reduction of customs duties on capital equipment imports, encouragement of the introduction of new technology, and elimination of licensing requirements for 25 industries are major steps that will support private sector initiatives and unshackle the capabilities of the private sector.

American firms have been doing business in India for years. Generally speaking, there is a great deal of mutual respect between Indian and American businessmen. One of their major problems has been the slow decision-making process in the Indian bureaucracy. If government controls are limited, I am certain that the US businessman's perception of the Indian market will be considerably improved.

Q. ***What do you view as the most exciting prospect/development in the Indian market? Is it now considered more sophisticated than earlier? Outside the Rajiv Gandhi initiatives, what has contributed to this late awakening among US businessmen to the prospects of the Indian market?***

A. The most encouraging development in the Indian market is the realisation by government officials as well as private sector businessmen that excessive controls and regulations are a drag on economic growth. Western officials and businessmen are impressed with the growth that has occurred in the industrial and agricultural sectors since Indian independence. India has reached a level of development that can profitably absorb the sophisticated technology available from abroad. In the past, US businessmen were discouraged by government controls and policies. With a more positive environment, US businessmen are prepared to allocate the time and money required to explore and analyse the huge potential for business collaborations. The increasing number of US trade promotion activities in India on the one hand and on the other the regular visits of Indian trade groups to the US have made the US business community more aware of opportunities in India.

Q. ***What do you expect to achieve in India?***

A. I plan to convey to Prime Minister Gandhi the President's interest in improved relations and explore with him ways and means to strengthen bilateral trade and investment. In addition, I hope to return to Washington with first-hand knowledge of the economic and administrative reforms which Prime Minister Gandhi is advocating and how we can support these reforms.

Q. ***You have stated that a more open Indian economy is in the interests of both countries. What is the Administration prepared to do to help India realise its prospects for continued growth in the 1980s?***

A. One of the major aims of my visit is to determine areas for cooperation and other measures that will support the prime minister in his efforts to achieve faster economic growth by eliminating unnecessary controls and encouraging modernisation of the economy.

With regard to concessional multilateral aid, I believe India's access to such aid should be considered in relation to the needs of all countries, including those that cannot sustain borrowing except on highly concessional terms. The Administration continues to support a substantial input of World Bank resources to India, which is the bank's largest single borrower.

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H.M. ERSHAD

"My record is not bad"

*BANGLADESH President H.M. Ershad has had more than one brush with democracy. This fortnight's local government elections will be his fifth "attempt" to reintroduce civilian rule to Bangladesh. Politicians inside the country or observers outside don't see these efforts as having any great seriousness of intent. Last month, as the count-down began to the latest round —the elections are due on May 16 to 20—*KARAN THAPAR *of London Weekend Television's Eastern Eye Programme met Ershad for more than an hour in Dhaka's Bangabhawan. Dressed in a cream safari suit and looking very much the general in mufti, Ershad answered a wide range of questions on his professed aim of restoring civilian rule to his country and the army's future role. Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *President Ershad, to many observers your particular plans to restore democracy in Bangladesh have often seemed just like a thinly disguised attempt at keeping yourself in power. How would you answer this charge?*

A. It's not true, and I think I have proved it in the past, when I permitted political activity without the political parties asking for it, and gave them concessions so that they could participate in the election and we could establish a democratic system in the country. Therefore, what you've just said is not true.

Q. *The referendum that you held last month to secure your own position as President was widely reported as a sham. People said that very few voters had actually turned out at the polls on that day. How do you explain that?*

A. You must know that before that I tried my best to bring them to elections, and whatever demand they put up to me, I met all of them, one after the other.

Q. *These are the political parties you are talking about.*

A. Yes. When they did not come for election I had no other alternative or option open to me but to go to the people and ask for their mandate, and....

Q. *So the referendum was, in your eyes, a last desperate move.*

A. Yes, to get the people's support on whatever I've done, the programmes I've set up, whether the people accepted them or not.

Q. *Why, then, did you arrest political leaders while holding the referendum, particularly the two women heading your two main opposition parties?*

A. We've not arrested anybody.

Q. *But aren't they under house arrest?*

A. They are—only their movement is restricted, that's all. Because we wanted the people to be able to vote freely without interference from anybody.

Q. *And their freedom would have restricted the people from giving their free mandate.*

A. You see it's not very difficult to create some problem here or there, to create some scare. They tried their best of course. They exploded one or two bombs here and there but that didn't keep the people away, and whatever they may say—that the turnout was poor—the people did come and they did vote for me and for my policies.

> **"If the people decide that they need my leadership in the next few years, I will naturally consider it."**

Q. *You said earlier that opposition leaders were not arrested, their movement was restricted. What is the distinction between the two?*

A. Only the two ladies' movement was restricted, because of security reasons. The way they behaved, destroyed government property, incited people.... after all this, people expected they would come for election. And when they did not come, naturally I thought that the people's sentiment was against them and they may have been harmed.

Q. *And do you have plans now to release them, at some point?*

A. *Insha Allah* (God willing) we will release them after the Upazilla elections.

Q. *When do you plan to hold national elections, and particularly the parliamentary ones?*

A. It will depend largely on the course of events in the future. After the Upazilla elections, naturally we'll have to go for national elections.

Q. *Will they be this year?*

A. You must know one thing that in our country, normally, elections are not held in the summer season because of the rains, and it is very difficult from the point of view of the system. Therefore no elections can be held before November.

Q. *But will they be held in November?*

A. It will depend again on the course of events, the political parties.

Q. *You're not going to commit yourself on that.*

A. No. I have already called for elections four times, which had to be postponed because the political parties, the opposing political parties, did not take part in the elections, because of their attitude.

Q. *Well, one of the reasons they say they didn't participate in the earlier four elections is because they believe that elections held under martial law would not be free and fair. Will the elections which you are going to hold later this year be under martial law?*

A. Let us go back to the history. In 1970 when we were under Pakistan, elections were held under martial law and....

Q. *Would you accept that as a precedent, what happened under Pakistan?*

A. I'm just explaining to you, and this very Awami League which took part in the elections as the opposition political party accepted the mandate of the people. After that even when we became an independent nation elections were held under martial law, and why this time the elections will not be fair under martial law I couldn't understand.

Q. *The next elections, then, will also be under martial law.*

A. It has to be, because the constitution is suspended and there has to be some law to run this country. Therefore, the martial law cover has to be there.

Q. *What if the Opposition boycott the elections?*

A. I'm sure some sense has come into them by now, and they will come forward for the election.

Q. *You're quite confident.*

A. I'm quite confident, because they thought I'm weak and if they pushed me a little more I would no doubt just abdicate and hand over power to somebody.

Q. *There's a lot of speculation in Dhaka that you will be one of the candidates in the presidential election....*

A. I did not commit so far.

Q. *Are you about to?*

A. I have got the mandate to run this country until the elections are held, and again I would like to say that the future course of events will decide whether I'll be

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candidate or not.

Q. What are the factors you would like to see fulfilled before you decide whether you will be a candidate or not?

A. That I said will depend on the course of events. After the Upazilla elections naturally there will be political activity going on in the country, and if the people decide that they need my leadership in the next few years, I will naturally consider it.

Q. And chances are that you probably will stand.

A. It again depends on the people.

Q. Why do you believe the army should be associated with the running of the country?

A. Again, you go back to the creation of this nation, the history. The Bangladesh army fought for a political cause, they fought to create a new independent state and that is a political cause. And after that is over, the country has been created, independent Bangladesh, you can't just keep the army away because it naturally would like to be associated with the progress of the nation for which it fought and lost lives.

Q. You are saying, that the army now has a right to be associated because....

A. If everyone has a right, why not the army?

Q. Your critics point out that most senior officers who were involved in the 1971 liberation war are now no longer present in the Bangladesh army high command. They've either been purged, killed or posted abroad. On whose behalf do you make this claim?

A. I'm a member of the armed forces.

Q: It's on behalf of the armed forces.

A. Naturally.

Q. In the last 10 years of army rule, the military share in the national budget has increased from 13 per cent to almost 38 per cent. It's often said that over that period some of the most prized jobs came under control of army officers or sometimes former army officers. For instance, it is said that 90 per cent of the state sector jobs are with army officers, as also 60 per cent of ambassadorial jobs. Does that record justify military rule?

A. How many of our officers are in prized jobs, I don't know. There is a shortage of talent in the country and most of the officers are retired army officers who are now on contract in certain sectors of the Government, and I'm sure they are helping the Government in many ways. I'm telling you that we are not unjustly grabbing something from the civilian rule. Most of the army officers who have been appointed to some particular job are qualified for that. Ambassadorial jobs you said—we have a fixed quota for it, I think 20 per cent is reserved for army persons.

Q. Who are the other forces in Bangladesh society that should be involved in determining the future of the polity?

A. Everyone of us, everybody from every profession should have some say in the administration in this country.

Q. Including civilian politicians.

A. Of course, surely.

Q. And the parties you have banned.

A. Everybody should have some say to run the country.

Q. What you are talking about is some system of power sharing between civilian politicians and the army.

A. I told you already it is not power sharing—we want to be discussed, we want to contribute in the policy making, all the future plans of the country and also in the development work because we are a united disciplined force.

Q. Would the army want to be associated with the running of the country by having a role in the cabinet or would it be in terms of an army officer being President?

A. No, not at all, not at all.

Q. Do you have any specific plans of how the army should be associated?

A. That I said parliament should sit down and decide. I've left it to them.

Q. You have no ideas of your own that you want....

A. No, I have my ideas about that, but let the parliament decide.

Q. Would you share them with us?

A. I strongly feel that I will be able to convince them that if they want progress for the country, if they want to utilise the disciplined force for the development, they should consider this.

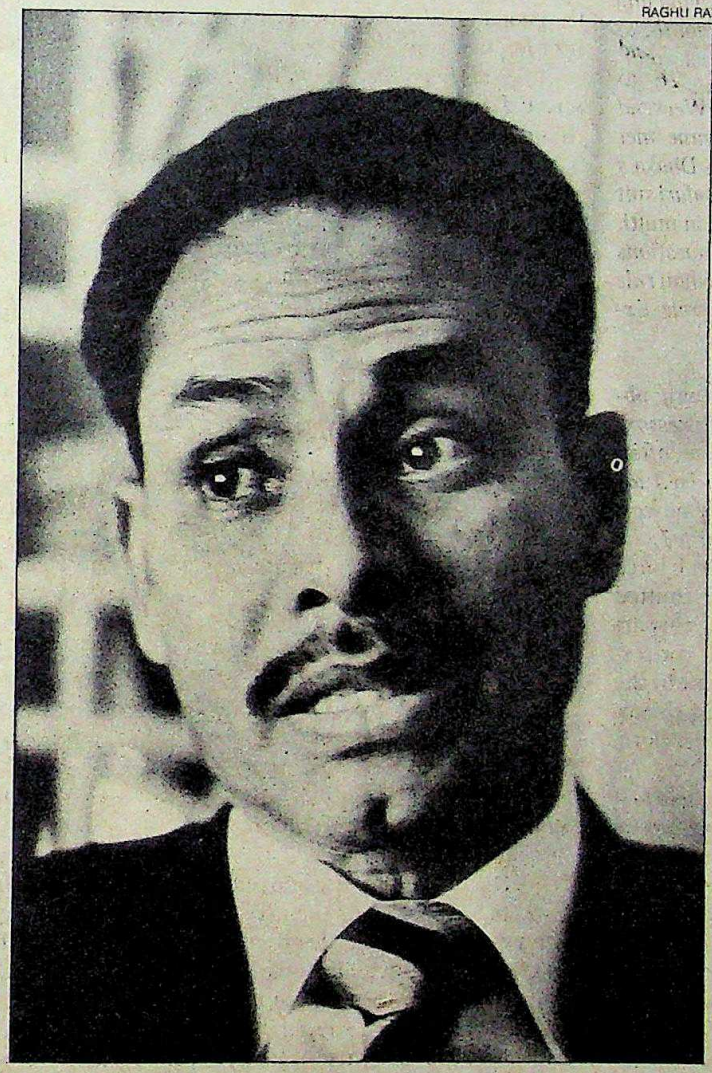
Q. If the system you are talking about were to come into being and if you were also to become president, your critics say that what you would be doing is perhaps shifting from your present position as a military dictator to the position of a civilian dictator.

A. I am not a military dictator.

Q. But it is a martial law regime.

A. It is a martial law regime. People asked me to come and take over this country. You must know history also...and for this we are not responsible—it is the politicians who are responsible. They failed to administer this country and deliver the goods and therefore the whole country, as a matter of fact, asked the military to take over and we just obliged them. And I think I did not do a bad thing by obliging the people of this country and my record over the past three years has proved that.

RAGHU RAI



Ershad: "You can't keep the army away"

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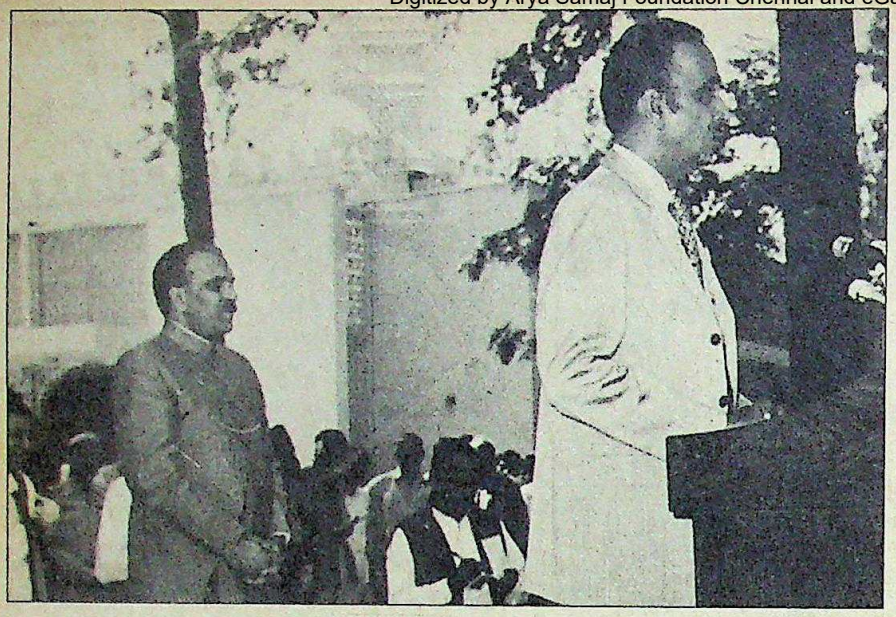

Zia (left) and Prime Minister Junejo: signs of change

PAKISTAN

A Crucial Crossroads

A NEW democratic order is replacing martial law. We have made a very long haul before reaching this phase of the restoration of democracy. This transition period is crucial."

For one caught so irretrievably in the eye of the impending political storm Mohammed Khan Junejo could hardly have put it more audaciously. The six-footer from Sind stands at the most crucial crossroads in Pakistan's chequered history of governance. One road, steeply inclined, can take the country to some degree of democracy and another to a tumble downhill, stuffing it in the unrelenting clutches of the military.

For many in Pakistan today Junejo is a symbol of the grudging yet welcome change which President Zia-ul-Haq has been forced to make. But the hardboiled political observer, incurably cynical after three decades of near-misses, sees it as no more than a shrewd gambit on Zia's part to shed the albatross of martial law without losing any of his dictatorial clout. Either way Junejo, appointed prime minister on probation by Zia and now awaiting his endorsement by the new, partyless national assembly represents this change. As a western diplomat in Islamabad summed it up, "Junejo may be a stooge and this assembly a miserable pack of jokers. But the mere fact of their being there means a definite change. At least Pakistani officials can now talk in terms of such things as having to get a budget passed by a parliament."

That bare fact, of change, is not contested even by the worst critics of Zia's new democratic doctrine which dissidents contemptuously dismiss as "Ziocracy". They may question the degree of change and Zia's ultimate intentions but agree that he is now faced with some people in the national assembly who are keen to prove themselves as being more than the military's camp-followers. The March election may not have sent many great politicians to the assembly but even the feudal lords who have got in made self-righteous promises on restoration of democracy. They have no choice now but to at least demonstrate that they are pushing in that direction. One consequence is the more than 20 privilege motions that the new MNA's (Members of National Assembly) have put up are to be debated during the budget session in the coming month of Ramadan.

Late last fortnight, both Zia and Junejo were acknowledging this change. Zia in his own shrewd manner when he promised to lift the martial law in case his cabinet recommended it and Junejo by invoking divine intervention. Speaking to a large gathering in the faraway Baluchistan town of Quetta he said: "People want democracy and let us hope God will help us in this holy task." The new mood was aptly summed up by well-known *Nawa-i Waqt* columnist Ata-ul Haq Qasmi: "I would not say democracy has finally been ushered in. But what we have today, after the elections, is a lesser evil. When you promote a lawyer to judgeship he on his own becomes a different person. The same could happen to our rulers now."

There were indeed some pointers to change. Civilian officials replaced at least two army officers, Lt-General Abdul Hamid Khan, the federal information secretary and Brigadier Fuad Zaman, provincial secretary of planning in Punjab. The provincial governors, all officers of the rank of lieutenant-general, were told by the General Headquarters (GHQ) to prepare for retirement as soon as they relinquished their posts and there was a general mood of insecurity among the brass. "The fear," said a senior Islamabad official, "is that Zia may now find it difficult to contain the forces he has unleashed. People are enthused by the new promise and want democracy. And the assembly has plenty of young people who will keep pushing for change." Echoing the same sentiment an American diplomat commented: "We are not suggesting that Zia is a great democrat. But now he will not be

"This is a bonsai democracy, kept in the show-window for the Americans to admire. This is a neonatal situation. Nothing has been delivered so far."

AITZAZ AHSAN
MRD leader

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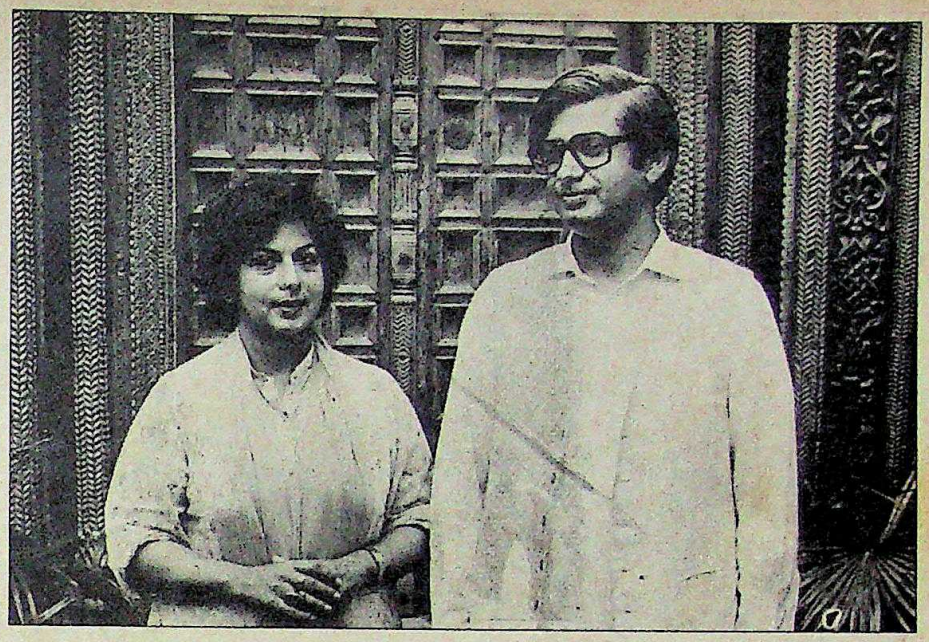
Assembly Speaker Fakhr Imam and wife Abida Hussain: act of independence



able to put the genie back in the bottle."

The first indication—indeed the only one so far—of the new assembly defying Zia came in the form of the election last month of Syed Fakhr Imam Shah, a 42-year-old agricultural economics graduate from California University, as speaker of the assembly. In bold opposition to Zia's candidate he won the only office where Zia had chosen to hold an election rather than appoint his own man. And even if the margin of victory was just eight votes it was of great symbolic value, "an act of independence" as Imam puts it, if not of defiance. "I am a believer," says he and adds, "there is going to be a slow fade-out for martial law. This assembly is full of middle-of-the-road people and that should be good."

The crucial question, however, is who will win the loyalties of these middle-of-the-road people, many of whom are politically uninitiated and thus open to manipulation if not coercion. The fear in liberal circles is that, in case the democracy-seekers set a fast pace at this stage it will only scorch them as Zia could pull out all stops and supersede the assembly. As Sajeda Abida Hussain Imam's wife who happens to be the only woman MNA elected from an unreserved seat, said: "To me the name of a person (read Zia) and where he stands is not as important as a steady transition to democracy. We should not rush things."

"In Pakistan the forum for democratic revival has always been the streets...But if democratic means fail, there is a real danger of Pakistan breaking apart."

GHAUS BUX BIZENJO
MRD convenor

BESIDES apprehension of interference from Zia, the moderates in the assembly have another reason for worry. The various political parties constituting the powerful Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) boycotted the election. They reject the new assembly. Sooner or later they will resume their war with Zia and, for democracy's sake, it will be unfortunate if the new assembly is also to range itself on Zia's side of the fence. But the MRD also realises that despite its boycott call, over half of the voters participated in the election and its strategy is not to take on the MNA's right away. It will wait for what it sees as inevitable: a confrontation between Zia and at least some of the MNA's or, if that does not happen, for the people to get totally disillusioned with them.

From Lahore to Karachi, practically every MRD leader talks of the MNA's in sympathetic terms, as pawns in Zia's end-game. "These poor, destitute orphans, *Yeh garib bebas to bebas hee rahengey* (these helpless people will remain helpless)," says Ghaus Bux Bizenjo, veteran Baluch leader and MRD convenor. On the MRD strategy vis-a-vis the assembly, he is slightly defensive, saying, "People voted alright. We do not want to harass these poor MNA's who will themselves be forced to fight Zia ultimaltely. Our enemy is the army." This was also the essence of a consensus evolved at a national MRD convention held in Karachi late last month.

The MRD leaders, who happen to be Zia's most bitter opponents, argue that his offer of democracy is like a leopard promising to change its spots. They are banking on the prospect of quick popular disillusionment unleashing a groundswell of support, enabling them to revive the movement in the course of time. "People will see through this game very fast," says MRD leader and former Punjab minister Aitzaz Ahsan in Lahore, asserting, "what you see today is bonsai democracy, created by Zia to be put in the show-window for the Americans to admire. This is a neonatal situation—nothing has been delivered so far." Ahsan reels out the long list of presidential orders and constitutional amendments through which, he says, Zia has made the assembly redundant. Says he: "Zia has the national security council which can dissolve the assembly, he appoints the prime minister and the governors, and governors appoint provincial chief ministers. He is empowered to constitute military tribunals even when there is no martial law. Who has he fooled in the bargain?" The MRD leaders' basic argument is that the election was at best a tactical feint planned by the United States administration to please the anti-dictatorship lobby in Washington.

They point out that during Sri Lanka President Jayewardene's visit to Islamabad, Junejo was put sixth in order of precedence, after the President, chairman of the chiefs of staff committee and the three service chiefs. "What kind of a prime minister is he, whom the generals do not even salute?" asks dissident poet Habib Jalib. But the dissidents' main problem now is, they have been left without a forum. Says

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Bizenjo: "This is an alarming situation where the army does not budge from power and people won't budge from their right to democracy. If this continues the other nationalities (Baluch, Sindhi and Pakhtoon) will get further disillusioned, take recourse to undemocratic means and Pakistan will disintegrate. In any case the forum for democratic revival in Pakistan has always been the streets."

Besides Zia, the dissident ire is directed at the US which, they say, is using Pakistan as an expendable pawn in its South Asia strategy. Again, Bizenjo is their most eloquent spokesman: "The Americans want to undo the Iranian and Afghan revolutions and destroy Pakistan by using up its people and resources to

SIKH EXTREMISTS

The Outside Force

BELIEVE me," said the young artillery captain in Peshawar, referring to the series of cantonments along the 160-km route to Rawalpindi, "this is one of the largest concentrations of military installations in the world."

There couldn't be much exaggeration in that. A signboard at the foot of the Attock bridge proudly announces the approach of the "home of armour", the headquarters of the Pakistani armoured corps. The massive Pakistan Aeronautics complex almost gets lost in the maze of the myriad infantry units designated by mere figures on the signboards that also warn, grimly: "Entry prohibited without valid permits." It is in some of these bunched up units, Indian authorities believe, that the Pakistani forces are training over a thousand young Sikhs to serve as a fifth column in Punjab.

So emphatic is the assertion on the Indian side, and the denial in Pakistan, that it is virtually impossible to sift fact from fiction on the question. In India, for example, it is popularly believed that retired Lt-General A.A.K. Niazi, who led the Pakistani surrender following the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, has been put in charge of the clandestine operation. This has often been stated in the newspapers and, on the face of it sounds plausible enough. If the Pakistanis were to choose the right kind of person to train rebellious Sikhs, who could have better motivation than Niazi, the man who suffered such humiliation at the hands of the Mukti Bahini trained by India?

But INDIA TODAY's inquiries in Lahore do not exactly mark Niazi as the villain. He is old, a wee bit overweight and very frustrated with the fact that he has been unfairly labelled the loser of 1971, whereas he claims, "my last order was to fight to the last man and last bullet but the General Headquarters ordered surrender."

Niazi is a man with a visible feeling of victimisation. He spends most of his time at his farm near Mianwali with an occasional, low-profile presence in his modest house at Shami Road in the Lahore cantonment. With a mixture of skepticism and plenty of conviction he laughs away the charge, saying, "Yes people tell me newspapers in your country have been saying that. What can one do? I am keeping busy farming and lying low with my mouth shut."

But Indian officials, while accepting the innocence of Niazi, now point to certain events last month that serve as vital pointers. First of all Raghunandan Lal Bhatia, the AICC(I) general secretary, who had been making loud noises about the presence of Pakistani commandos in Punjab was shot in his house. A week later the Amritsar police captured two Sikhs, Joginder Singh and Kahn Singh who confessed to having been trained in Pakistan. They say they were smuggled across the border along with at least 50 others to spread out over Punjab and possibly even Delhi.

Similarly, the Border Security Force occasionally catches the odd Pak-trained terrorist infiltrating across the line of control in Kashmir. Interrogation reports establish a trend—that a number of small groups of Sikhs who fled from the Punjab countryside are getting sabotage lessons at some Pakistani cantonments. There are no large, demarcated camps. These groups stay inside regular cantonments close to the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir areas. Indian sources mention the name of Brigadier Imdad Hussain Khan as the man "looking after" them.

JANG

Gurcharan Kaur, Kulwant Kaur and Sham Singh: ominous presence

Pakistani officials do not deny the presence of some Sikh "refugees". In fact they have told some visiting American academics that the number of such "refugees" exceeds 2,000. But they indignantly deny the charge of running training camps. Suggesting that these doubts had already been removed, Abdus Sattar, additional secretary in the Pakistan Foreign Ministry says: "We now feel that our relations have come out of the trough in which they had fallen last year following the events in Amritsar."

But Indian complaints are not confined to the camps. The Pakistanis continue to patronise a number of "Khalistan" campaigners abroad and that bothers India a great deal.

Last month the Pakistan Government made a show of goodwill by sending away Pritam Singh, Queen's Counsel, from the Karachi airport. But they did

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make Israel the most dominant power in the whole region." In fact, in post-election Pakistan, this is the dissidents' main line of attack and the clamour for direct talks with the Karmal regime in Afghanistan is becoming louder with even a number of MNA's joining it and proposing to table resolutions to this effect in the budget session.

"Any sensible leader in Pakistan today," says Iqbal Haider, the Karachi-based chief of Quami Mahaze Azadi, an MRD constituent, "would talk to Karmal directly and stop harassing the Soviets." Even people in the higher echelons of the Government have now begun to worry about this new campaign on Afghanistan which is catching the popular fancy

not stop a number of others who attended the trial of Sikh hijackers in relays (INDIA TODAY, May 15). Also, despite the Pakistan Government's protestations to the contrary, Ganga Singh Dhillon had visited Pakistan in the last week of March and stayed with Shujat Hussain, a member of the National Assembly and a son of the late Chaudhri Zahoor Elahi, Dhillon's old friend whom Ayub had assigned the task of cultivating Sikh separatists in the '60s.

Time and again Indian authorities have protested against Dhillon's frequent visits to Pakistan and Rajiv Gandhi has even personally taken up the issue with Zia. Even Shujat Hussain confirms his continuing visits.

Niazi in 1971

In the course of a long conversation on the lawns of his imposing house in Lahore's exclusive Gulberg locality, he said: "Yes Dhillon came to Pakistan last month. But now he has stopped staying with the President whom he knows through his wife (both Zia's and Dhillon's wives are from East Africa). He was also a friend of Chaudhri Sahib's and stays with us in Lahore."

A direct consequence of this access to foreign-based separatists is the anti-India campaign directed at every jatha of Sikh pilgrims visiting Pakistan. Because of the uproar following the anti-India demonstrations led by Bhindranwale's nephew Jasbir Singh in January, these campaigners have remained relatively restrained. But they still distribute anti-India pamphlets and incite the pilgrims against Indian officials accompanying them.

Among these foreign Sikhs were Gurcharan Kaur Khalsa and Kulwant Kaur, from British Columbia in Canada who also attended the Sikh hijackers' trial. Brazenly displaying her interest in the Indian pilgrims Kulwant Kaur said: "This bunch consisted entirely of the Congress(I) Sikhs. We have just one message for them. Go and tell your masters that they have pricked the tail of a sleeping lion. They cannot escape unscathed now." Added Sham Singh, a Pakistani Sikh escorting the women: "Our Sikhs left such marvellous shrines to go and live with you in India and all you gave them is death and destruction."

A relatively recent entrant on the scene, Sham Singh adds a new dimension to the problem. He hails from Thatta, 80 km from Karachi, and is one of the 4,000-odd Sikh families that remained in Pakistan after Partition. Most of these families live in NWFP, concentrated mainly in the valley of Swat and mix with the local population.

A few families in Sind, on the other hand, are closer to their religious roots. It is among these that the Pakistanis are looking for recruits. Sham Singh now spends most of his time shuttling between Panja Sahib and Nankana Sahib, and is also often seen at the Thada Sahib gurudwara in Lahore. He has been indoctrinated well and reacts angrily to the suggestion that a Pakistani Sikh like him should keep away from Indian politics, saying: "We also have Hindus in Pakistan. Won't they be upset if Varanasi and Haridwar were destroyed? There are Muslims living all over the world. Don't they think and feel the same way about Jerusalem?"

Indian officials are resigned to the prospect of people of his kind mixing around with the jathas in the future to embrass the Government. Worse, they think, these Sikhs are being used to indoctrinate the odd Sikh who crosses the border into Pakistan. A number of Sikh traders who happen to visit the shrines in the course of routine business visits are surprised to find granthis or other traditionally-dressed Sikhs ask them questions such as: "From where did you manage to cross the border? Are they looking after you adequately."

The Pakistanis, on the other hand, argue that if their intentions were dishonest they would not propose an anti-terrorism treaty with India under which forces of two countries could even act jointly to prevent trans-border movement of terrorists. "The fact is that 12 Pakistani terrorists, convicted and given long sentences by a Vienna court, began their journey from India. They even acquired their fake passports there," says Sattar, making a counter charge. He goes on to add that the men who hijacked a PIA aircraft to Kabul in 1982 too had started from India.

Indian officials deny the allegations. According to South Block spokesmen Austria has formally told S.K. Singh, Indian envoy there and ambassador-designate to Pakistan, that investigators found no link between the terrorists and anyone in India. The hijackers, on the other hand, had merely transited in India—they never left the transit lounge of the airport.

In the same vein Indian spokesmen point to the Pakistani dilly-dallying in extraditing two suspects in the Mhatre murder case who, Scotland Yard says, are in Pakistan. On this even the Pakistanis are on the defensive. Said Sattar: "In principle we have decided to extradite them. But it is a long legal process and this is also a case of double extradition. There are separate rules between Pakistan and Azad Kashmir."

More than this, however, what is causing embarrassment to Pakistan is the pressure from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). The organisation is seeking an explanation as to why the Government handed over a pistol to the hijackers of the Indian Airlines aircraft at Lahore last year. Interpol says that the pistol was part of a consignment imported by the Pakistani Government from West Germany in 1978. Pakistan claims that the pistol had later been disposed of as scrap and may have fallen into wrong hands but this convinces neither Interpol nor ICAO and least of all India.

On the issue of terrorism, thus, the air between Delhi and Islamabad is far from clear. And unless this is first cleared all efforts at quiet diplomacy and joint commissions may ultimately come to nought.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Islamabad

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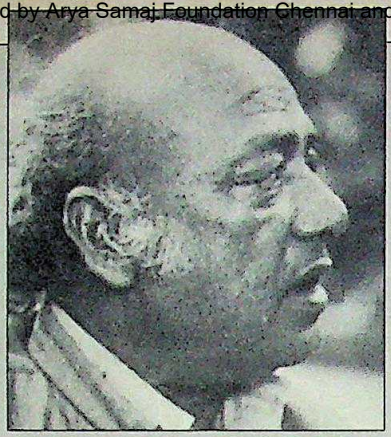
because, as a western diplomat in Islamabad explains, no one in Pakistan dares to covet war with the Soviet Union and they all want the Afghan refugees, who are dominating the entire carpet, truck and (most vitally) heroin trade, to go back.

In fact, it was out of concern on this score that Deane R. Hinton, the US ambassador in Islamabad, jumped the gun last month by publicly stating that any suggestion of "direct talks with Karmal would amount to a betrayal of the Mujahedeen". He went so far as to ridicule the MRD, which has been making this demand, as a bunch of people "who always sought democracy but boycotted the election." While the Pakistan Government maintained an embarrassed silence, the dissidents immediately seized the opportunity, demanding Deane's recall and quoting this as evidence of the US interference. Said Wali Khan, pleading for a departure from the American-inspired Afghan policy: "God forbid, if there is a superpower conflict in the region there is every chance of Pakistan becoming the battlefield much to the detriment of NWFP and Baluchistan." But on Afghanistan both the dissidents and MNA's are bound to run into a wall. The support to the Mujahedeen is central to Zia's foreign policy and means a lot to the military regime in terms of dollars and weapons.

It is even possible that a growing demand for peace on the Afghan front may just give the military the excuse to pull down the shutters and stop the wild football match, as Zia once described democracy. The troubles in Afghanistan are now as vital to the military rulers' sustenance as the bogey of an Indian attack, that overused ploy employed so effectively over the decades. Now, with pressures from the people, the new assembly and even the democratic lobby in the US building up, the army brass would indeed be looking across the Khyber for an escape route.

Also, now that the political battlelines are in the process of being drawn, the brass-hats are unlikely to call quits before trying their luck. They have ruled Pakistan for a long time and are much too deeply involved in political stakes to return to the barracks now. They have all along been the super-elite of Pakistan, a fact evident in the size of defence officers' houses in the major cities, their life-style and wages, something their envious Indian counterparts perpetually complain about.

Control in Islamabad makes things easier for the Pakistani soldier. While the best jobs at home are reserved for them—one general heads both the multi-crore Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and the Board of Cricket Control—the forces have also been able to cash in on the Gulf boom. Says Jamal Rashid, an analyst based in Lahore: "With military training missions in 23 countries and over 26,000 troops in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan has the largest mercenary army in the entire third world."



"What kind of a prime minister is he, whom the generals do not even salute? This is democracy of the graveyard, a shameful farce."

HABIB JALIB
Dissident poet

Mercenary services obviously mean big money. A Pakistani major in Saudi Arabia gets the equivalent of 70,000 Indian rupees a month and keeps the bulk of it, barring a 30 per cent contribution to the government pensionary fund. An ordinary sepoy too makes Rs 7,000. So vital are the stakes that the Pakistanis have even been quietly swallowing the humiliation of being told by the Saudis to recall the Shia soldiers from their units. Of late there has been a clamour for the termination of this arrangement. "This is what the Americans want," says Ahsan adding, "The Americans know we have the only army in the whole Muslim world that is capable of absorbing modern technology. So they want to use us as mercenaries for ever." A return to civilian rule threatens this arrangement and that adds to the generals' insecurities.

To counter this, they can draw upon resources and support extending far beyond the limited world of khaki-clad ranks. An academic in Lahore points out that the army draws sustenance from not merely its own armed strength but also from the vast army of ex-servicemen which still remains involved with serving soldiers through the Fauji Foundation, Pakistan's legendary soldiers' cooperative that does everything—from collecting donations on flag days to running sugar mills and is responsible for providing the Pakistani soldier the bulk of his post-retirement benefits and resettlement. The generals expect the foundation to command the loyalty of rural ex-servicemen. There are many in Pakistan who believe that the generals have already gone as far as they had wanted to. "We do not even laugh at the *fauji* jokes any more, for the joke is finally on us," grunted a Lahore lawyer.

Yet the coming months will see the generals under increasing pressure with even the non-MRD politicians wanting the revival of at least the party system. As Pir Pagaro, president of the Muslim League said, "It is in Zia's own interest to return to the party system. Ultimately the soldiers will tire out and surrender to us. The GHQ is hardly capable of coping with the process of democratisation." But GHQ may have an entirely different view of the situation. It was not without purpose that Zia, in his election-eve rush of constitutional amendments gave himself sweeping powers under the emergency clauses where he can, besides other things, dismiss the national assembly with no questions asked. That threat will prevent the more ambitious MNA's from going too far too fast.

Either way, the situation is ripe for political conflict. Broadly, Pakistani politics will proceed along three coordinates in the weeks to come. There is the insatiable ambition of the military brass, the newfound enthusiasm and compulsions of the members of the new national assembly and the tenacity of the belligerent MRD men. For Zia, ironically, there is challenge from each one of the three. From the dissidents who want his blood, from the assembly that wants his khaki-shirts back in the barracks and from the soldiery that is wary of his dabbling with democracy. If he emerges victorious from this round he would have won the biggest gamble of his life.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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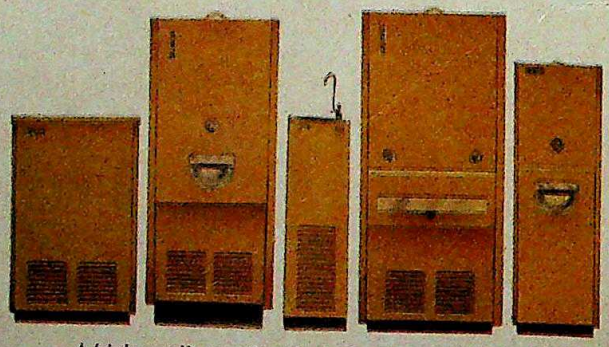

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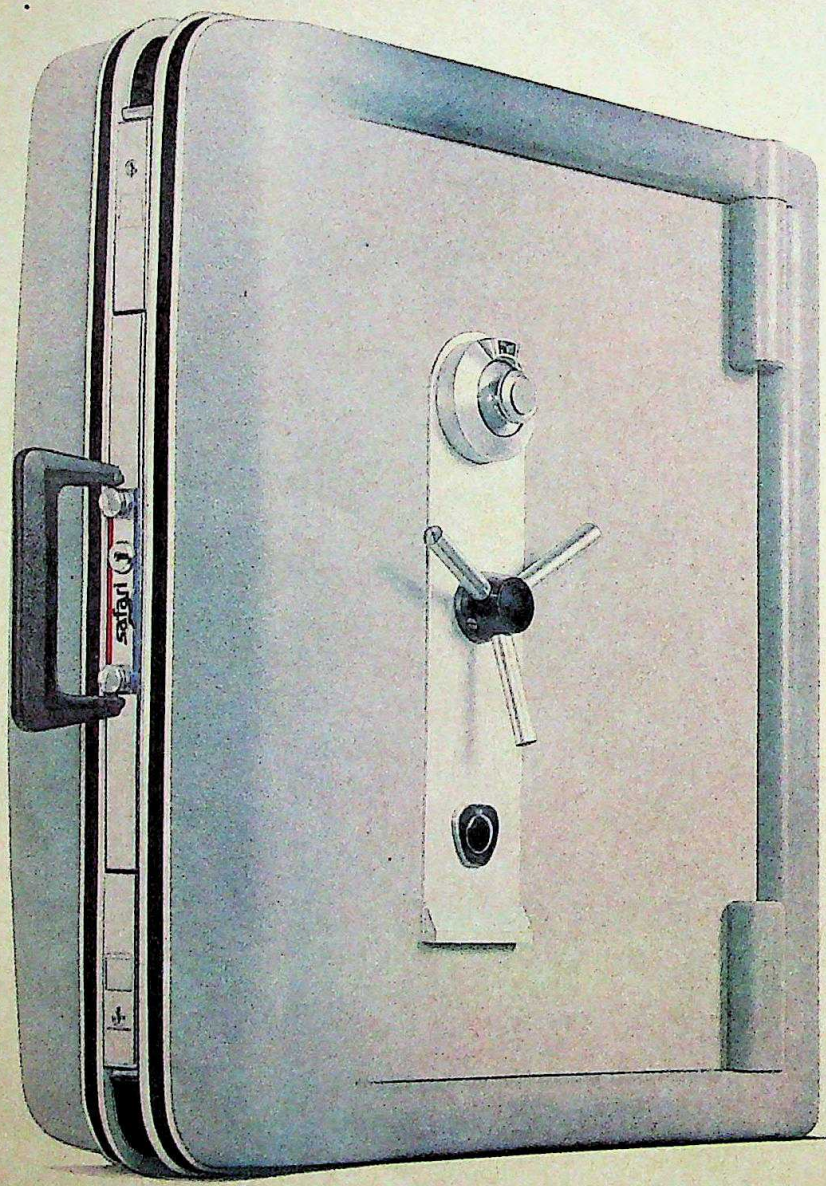

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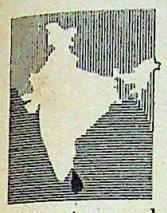
SRI LANKA

A New Dimension



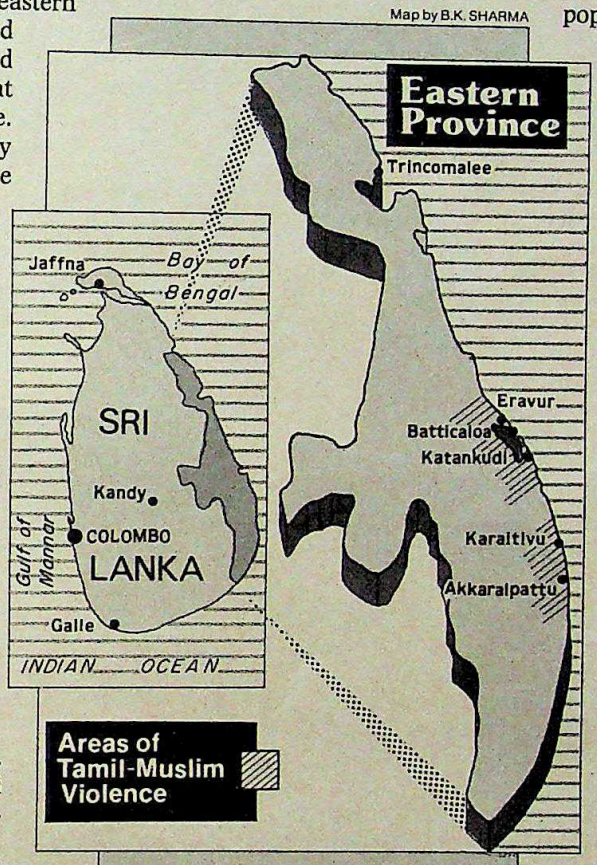
SRI LANKA'S ethnic upheaval has now acquired another dimension that threatens to impose further strains on the island's social fabric. The three weeks of tension and violence in the eastern province between Tamils and Muslims which left 50 people dead is likely to have consequences that are both grave and unpredictable. Last fortnight, the area slowly limped back to normalcy with the reopening of 130 of the region's 200 schools. But the physical and psychological scars still remain.

In physical terms, the toll is enormous. Though senior officials from Colombo are currently touring the province to assess the damage, over 2,000 homes and buildings, mainly shops, have been destroyed, with the loss in housing alone estimated at Rs 70 million. Some 25,000 refugees, rendered homeless by the violence, have been given shelter in the unopened schools.The majority are Tamils who fled their homes when violence broke out in towns like Karaitivu, Eravur, Akkaraipattu, Katankudi and even the outskirts of Batticaloa, the provincial capital.

The psychological damage is perhaps far greater. Tamil-Muslim violence on this scale is unprecedented. The last serious riots involving the Muslim community occurred as far back as 1915 and were religious rather than political in nature. This is the first time that the island's main minorities, the Tamils who comprise 13 per cent of the population and the Muslims (6 per cent) have been locked in violent conflict.

The upheaval has also brought into question the role of the Special Task Force (STF), the elite commando unit trained by former British SAS personnel which is in charge of security in the region. The failure of the STF to contain the violence led to the dispatching of police reinforcements to the area more than a week after the outbreak of violence. Asked why the STF could not control the violence, National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali, however, told INDIA TODAY that well-armed terrorists had been operating in the area for several years and the STF faced many "logistics problems", specially that of mobility.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



The tension and violence between Tamils and Muslims in the eastern province threatens to impose further strains on Sri Lanka's social fabric.

Both Tamil and Muslim leaders, currently engaged in taking out peace marches in the area, are, however, convinced that the embittered STF preferred to stay aloof when the trouble erupted. There have also been hints that "external elements" were responsible for fanning the flames, a phrase used by Home Minister K.W. Devanayagam, a respected Tamil leader representing the local electorate, and by a Mulsim deputy minister.Meanwhile, S. Thondaman, minister for rural industries and president of the powerful Indian Tamil labour union, the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), told President Jayewardene that seven buses and two jeeps carrying armed men he described as "undesirable elements" had gone to the eastern province from Colombo.

Senior officials in the province admitted that members of the Muslim population had been given guns but explained it away by saying that they were merely returning weapons confiscated under the emergency regulations. Evidently, Muslims had been feeling threatened by the growing presence of armed Tamil youths supporting the cause of Eelam and claiming the racially-mixed eastern province as their "traditional Tamil homeland". Says Athaluthmudali: "The real cause of the trouble is the resistance by the Muslims, specially the youth, to the northern terrorists and their separatist demand. When they failed to win over the Muslims, they resorted to the tactics they used in the north —robbery, assault, murder".

There is some truth in that statement. Muslim traders of the area hail from the affluent strata. Like the majority Sinhalese, Tamil militants regard the educationally-backward Muslims as a money-making community uninterested in politics or culture. But the new generation of Muslim youth, fired by ideological currents in the Arab-Islamic world, resent the Tamil attitude.

In that situation, political expediency could play a major role. Some Sinhalese politicians view the current tension as a means to win back Arab support and sympathy, diluted considerably in the wake of the introduction of Israeli "advisers" into Sri Lanka. Already, some newspapers in the island have hinted that the latest ethnic problem has been instigated at the advice of the Israeli personnel attached to Sri Lanka's intelligence organisations with a view to discrediting and undermining the Tamil extremists. However, the official *Daily News* warned against Sri Lanka becoming the cockpit of international conflicts. In the event, the current internal conflict is enough cause for alarm.

—MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

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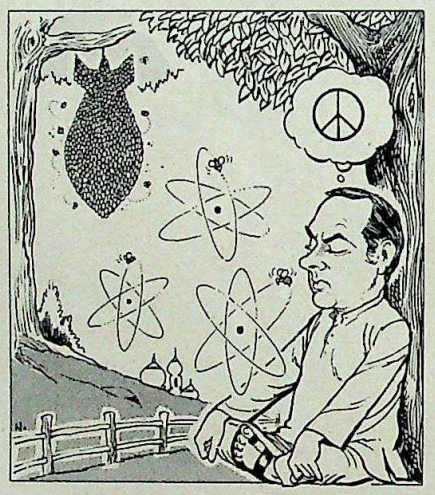
THE NUCLEAR OPTION

Ambivalent Stand

THE PERFORMANCE of ministers is often determined by the ministries they happen to hold. In the Indira Gandhi regime, Narasimha Rao made a good foreign minister. Now, in the Defence Ministry, he is probably bored to death for there's very little an Indian defence minister can do on his own initiative. Rao's only distinctive contribution to defence so far is a reference to Pakistan's efforts to make nuclear weapons which, he told the Lok Sabha, was "deliberately" planted in the traditionally secretive lack-lustre annual report of the Defence Ministry. A single sentence spoke of India's "concern" at Pakistan's "relentless pursuit of nuclear capability with the assistance and connivance of certain countries." This added a "new dimension to India's security environment," said Rao, and asked the MP's for their "enlightened" views on the matter.



Predictably, several voices cried out for the Indian bomb, just as it happened last year and the year before. The only difference was that the most eloquent advocate of the bomb this time was H.M. Patel of the Janata Party, while last year it was Madhavrao Scindia, of the ruling party! The minister, however, beat a hasty retreat in the face of the "enlightened" demand. In his reply to the debate, he just chose to ignore it! Nevertheless, *The Times of India* wrote in an editorial that "Parliament has at last begun to come to grips with the nuclear dimension of national defence", forgetting that it was as early as April 1979, when the Janata regime was still alive though very unwell, that the External Affairs Ministry had for the first time recognised that Pakistan's nuclear programme had "a nonpeaceful dimension", and that since 1964, when China went nuclear, members of Parliament, in their "enlightened" manner, have been relentlessly "gripping" with the nuclear dimension of national defence.

For 20 years India has been chewing over its nuclear option. If there is a peculiar dimension to this longest nuclear debate in history—it is that clear, categorical no-bomb declarations of successive prime ministers have been pitted against persistent demands of the bomb lobby for nuclear weapons.

In her own relentless pursuit of power, Indira Gandhi was almost as clearly categorical as Morarji Desai that India would not make nuclear weapons. Her most authoritative statement was made on the floor of Parliament in August 1984, barely 75 days before she fell to the assassins' bullets. "India will not deviate from its peaceful nuclear policy no matter what Pakistan does," Mrs Gandhi declared, adding, very wisely and correctly, that the nuclear issue could not be "viewed at the micro level." That is, at regional levels, but had to be fought out on a global scale by arousing world opinion against the nuclear arms race. Even the *Patriot*, with all its zeal and fervour for Mrs Gandhi, took her severely to task for "unilaterally renouncing the nuclear option." An echo of how most of the press had reacted to Morarji Desai's declaration at the UN Assembly Special session on nuclear disarmament in 1978.

But Rajiv Gandhi has been doing exactly what his two predecessors had done. He told the *Los Angeles Times* on February 22 that "... at the moment I don't see a situation arising when we would start up again making the bomb. Just the fact that Pakistan made a bomb would not make us change our policy. We don't want to become the same as the others." More recently, on April 24, in an interview given to Mushaheed Hussain, editor of the Islambad newspaper, *The Muslim*, Rajiv Gandhi categorically rejected the theory that nuclear weapons in the hands of India and Pakistan would stabilise peace in South Asia by creating a "balance of terror." He said, "I have never subscribed to the view that 'terror', balanced or otherwise, would stabilise anything. A nuclear arms race in the subcontinent would only subject both our peoples to the worst possible fate on earth."

The categorical views of the Indian prime ministers are not reflected in the statements made by foreign and defence ministers. For instance, in March 1984, the then defence minister S.B. Chavan, made a startling announcement in the Lok Sabha with barely a quorum present. In the face of conflicting reports coming from various sources, he said he had decided to "proceed on the assumption" that Pakistan had reached the capability frontier marked N, and had asked India's defence planners to take "appropriate" measures. No one even pressed him to clarify what he meant by "appropriate". However, Narasimha Rao, then foreign minister, referred to the same reports in a parliamentary statement only to tell the members by implication that he would not share his cabinet colleague's assumption. He would neither "brush aside" those reports, nor accept them "as gospel truth".

The Indian option will not be determined by public debate, nor at cabinet meetings. If ever India goes nuclear, the decision—a major political one—will be taken by the prime minister after consulting the service chiefs and his own close political advisors. One very strong reason against the option is that the United States and its nuclear allies have already made reluctant allowance for a junior society of "small nuclear powers" outside the Club of Five. Eighteen countries have been identified as possessing a stronger nuclear industrial base than had the United States in the early stages of the Manhattan Project. Of these six are "problem" states, probable founder members of the juniors' society. Amongst the six, four are said to be under rising pressure to go nuclear—India (which is under "notable" pressure), Pakistan (under the "greatest" pressure), Israel and South Africa. Not exactly heart-lifting company!

The Americans have taken the gloss of status and power off nuclear weapons when these come in the arsenals of "smaller" nuclear nations by the mid-'90s. None of the proliferators will be allowed to climb up the ladder of strategic power. Their "dirty deterrants" will keep them confined for a very long time to the regions in which they reside, exposing them to mutual annihilation at the worst, to frozen animosities at the best.

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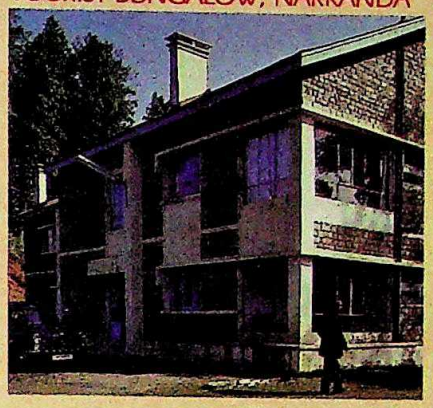

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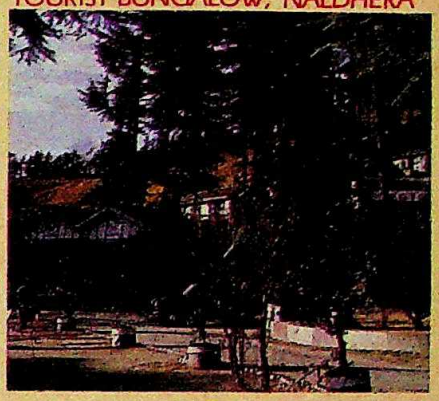

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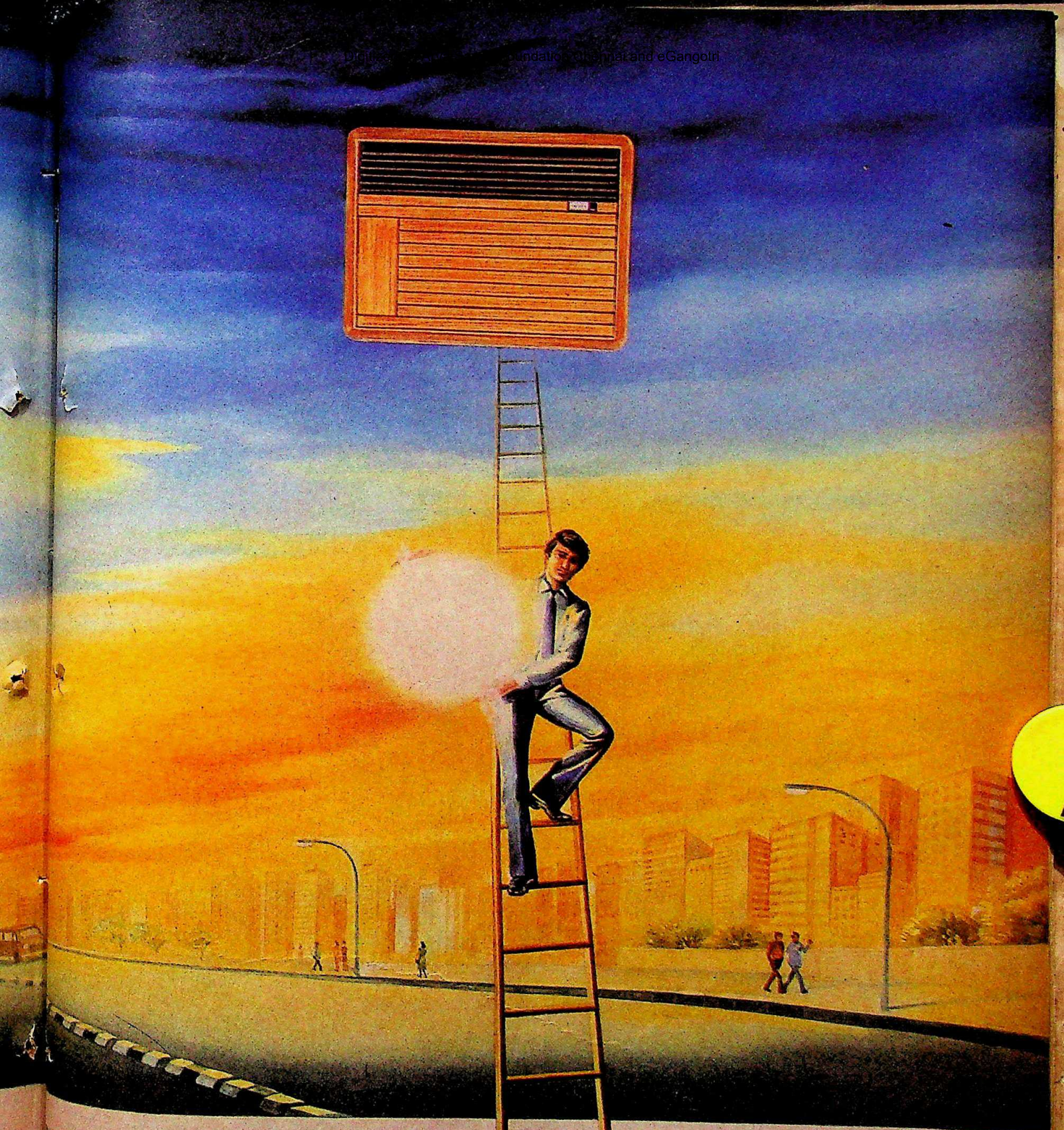

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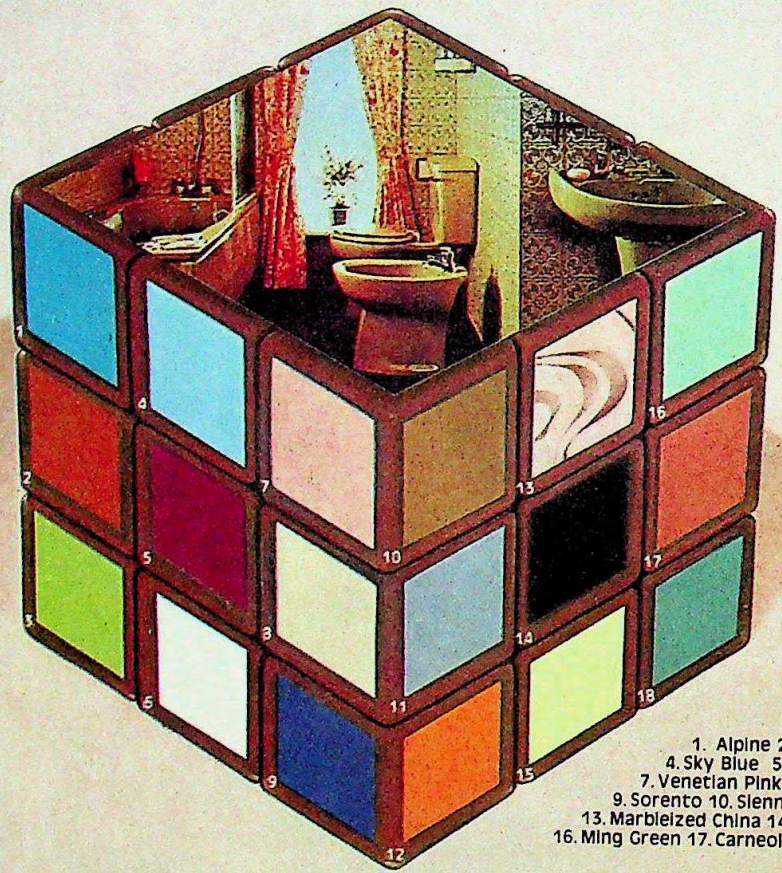

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PARING DOWN

PFIZER is likely to join a long list of foreign drug companies that have voluntarily diluted their overseas shareholding to 40 per cent in order to get out of the clutches of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA). The drug companies that have already done so are Parke Davis, Warner Hindustan, German Remedies, Hindustan Ciba-Geigy, May and Baker, and Organon, among others. Pfizer had believed that it could continue to grow despite FERA by staying in the area of high technology and priority drugs. But the company's New York headquarters feels otherwise. The Indian subsidiary's senior executives have tried to argue that with the national drug policy about to change, a dilution of foreign shareholding from the present 60 per cent may not be necessary, but the parent company remains unconvinced. The advantages of dilution are evident, in that many of the companies that have come down to 40 per cent overseas shareholding have been able to register large capacities in otherwise forbidden areas and expand their formulation activity.

BOOM TIMES

IT IS now boom time for jeeps. Maruti is getting ready to start the production of its jeeps, with a 970 cc engine. Mahindra and Mahindra has just introduced its new MM 540 model with a four-speed gearbox, a Peugeot engine and a new streamlined body. Next in line could be Hindustan Motors, said to be negotiating with Isuzu of Japan for its Trooper model. And Toyota and Nissan are also expected to introduce their versions of the jeep in the Indian market.

Meanwhile, Tatas are said to be negotiating with Mercedes and Audi for making one of these premium cars in India. The market for luxury cars is now believed to be much larger because bookings for Standard Motors' Rover 2000 have been way beyond expectations.

FAST MOVES

A NUMBER of industrial groups with sick units in their stables are planning quick steps to prevent any fall-out of proposed policy that will forbid the financial institutions from lending to such tainted groups. The favoured plan of action at the moment is merging sick units with healthy ones in the same group. The JK group is already implementing its decision to merge its sick battery and steel units with healthy companies, while the Modis may work out a similar arrangement for their textile unit. Such arrangements also lead to tax write-offs. However, this stratagem is not open to all the big groups, especially if the sick unit is too big to be merged into another. This is the case with Rohtas Industries, belonging to the Sahu-Jain group.

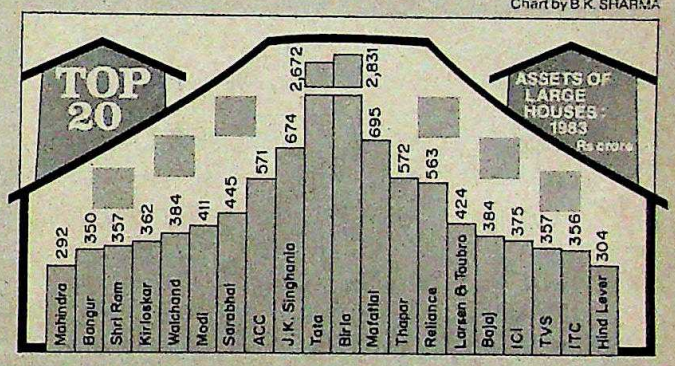
REVERSE POSITIONS

POSITIONS have been reversed regarding the future of the Mysore Iron and Steel Works (MISL), run by the Karnataka Government. For a long time, the Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) was keen on taking control of the unit, with the state Government stoutly opposed to such a move. But with the company having slipped deep into the red, Hegde's Government is anxious that SAIL should take charge of the unit. Now SAIL is insisting that the state Government guarantee sufficient power supply for the unit and that the Centre must provide the funds for rehabilitating MISL. Meanwhile, steel demand has picked up.

STILL TOO BIG

THE REJOICING in corporate circles over the raising of the asset threshold for coming under the purview of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act may be misplaced. None of the original 20 large houses stands to benefit from the raising of the threshold from Rs 20 crore to

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Rs 100 crore. Even among the top 75 large houses, the vast majority will continue to stay within the purview of the MRTP Act. Even companies as relatively insignificant as United Breweries and the Khatau group stay within the MRTP limit, since both have assets of over Rs 200 crore.

TYRE TROUBLE

TRUCK operators plan to go on the warpath once again over rising tyre prices. At a meeting held last fortnight, the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC)—the apex body of the truck trade—decided in principle to haul tyre manufacturers into court on the price issue and to boycott the products of any one tyre company. The AIMTC is seeking legal advice on the strength of its case against manufacturers, and will decide in the next few days on which company's products are to be boycotted. The AIMTC claims that tyre manufacturers have jacked up tyre prices by Rs 1,300 to Rs 1,400 per truck tyre during the last few months over the levels prevailing last October, and charges that this has been done despite the Government having referred the issue of earlier price increases to the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices last May. Tyre manufacturers say that the demand for truck tyres has shown some improvement, but for car tyres is sluggish.

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INDUSTRIAL TARGETS

Thinking Small

I SPENT a whole morning the other day at the booking office of Indian Airlines (IA) trying to get a seat on its Delhi-Bombay flight. Normally it takes no more than ten minutes, a bit longer if there is a rush, but this time we had to contend with a brand new computer which either did not like our names and spat them out or had other things on its mind. Every few minutes, the machine would go on a blink—which meant literally that it went to sleep—while IA officials went on pressing one button after another, mostly in vain. I came away with a ticket only to be told at the airport my name was not on the list.

A year or so ago, I was in Paris on a plane to Strasbourg, a small French town that is no bigger than our Chandigarh or Kolhapur. I was to return to Paris the same evening but was not sure about the reservation. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to find that the girl in Strasbourg not only had my name and address—and of course the reservation—but also my telephone number in Delhi. It was all over in two minutes and I was back in Paris in good time.

Indians seem to be particularly prone to Murphy's Law according to which anything that can go wrong will go wrong, and in fact does. Take the case of the fertiliser plant at Haldia which has been in the news lately as the Government is apparently thinking of selling it to private industry. It is not a small plant; it has cost more than Rs 400 crore so far and is losing money at the rate of Rs 150 crore a year, if not more. It is one of those stories that should make the *Guinness Book of Records* if the book accepted such ghoulish stories. To quote from a report in the *Statesman:*

"Although the deadline for the project was September 1, 1972, the preliminary work of earth-filling and civil engineering began only in October 1976. When the mechanical part was completed in 1978, the state Government failed to keep its commitment regarding supply of power. The plant authorities decided to instal their own generator, but that delayed the commissioning of the plant till January 1982. Beginning with the production of ammonia, the authorities went on to commission the nitro-phosphate plant in January 1983."

Even as the plant was limping along, an incredible act of indiscipline paralysed it altogether in September-October 1983. In September, the operators on duty at the control room of the ammonia plant left their charge over a dispute regarding the food from the canteen. With the control panel unmanned the gasholder of the unit collapsed.

When the oxygen-compressor of the plant was operated with a second gasholder without anybody gauging the damage to the first, the compressor caught fire and exploded in October. A second oxygen compressor met with the same fate in November. Since then, the ammonia plant, the nerve-centre of the entire project has been closed down.

> **We Indians seem to be particularly prone to Murphy's Law according to which anything that can go wrong will go wrong, and in fact does.**

Haldia is near Calcutta and there are other plants there, including a Rs 40-crore chemical plant operated by Hindustan Lever, that function quite satisfactorily. It is not clear what the West Bengal Government did to help the Haldia authorities, since the fact that it is in big trouble must have been known to them. Did Jyoti Basu or Ashok Mitra take up the matter with the Centre? Did they, or other representatives, go down there, to Haldia, that is, and try and put things right?

If they did, they have not said so. After all, a plant like Haldia brings a bad name to the state. If it is Haldia today, it could be Durgapur tomorrow, but that is not apparently how the politicians see these things. The West Bengal Government has been after the Centre for setting up a petrochemical complex at, guess where, Haldia, and the Centre has been turning it down. It cannot see how Haldia can be said to be a suitable location for a petrochemical plant when the government cannot or does not summon enough energy to help run a fertiliser plant half its size.

But that is not the point. The point is that while we are very good at abstract reasoning and macro-scale thinking, we seem to lose interest when it comes to small things that matter, forgetting that it is small things that add up to a big whole. For years the planning commission has been working out on its computer what it calls the input-output tables relating to plan in order to check the internal consistency of the plan framework. For instance, if you are going to produce so many tonnes of steel, you must have so much coal and power, and so on, and there our plans are wonderfully consistent in their targets. But the targets are rarely met, and the growth rates are seldom realised. But if a fraction of the energy that the planning commission puts into such esoteric exercises were actually expended in seeing that the targets were met, half our problems would be over.

And that means not only the big targets but all targets. The girl at Strasbourg seemed genuinely pleased to find my name in her terminal, and she read out my Delhi telephone number as if it was some kind of a secret code number. These are small things, just as the girl herself was a small cog in the giant Air France wheel, but they matter. At IA the officials gave the impression that they could not care less whether the computer worked or not. The West Bengal Government may also have treated the Rs 400-crore Haldia plant as if it was none of their concern. But it *was* their concern, not only because the plant is located in the state and therefore contributes to the state's economy, but also because the resources going waste were national resources, and therefore as much theirs as anybody else's. And resources do not grow on trees; they are created out of such things as Haldia and the computerised reservation system of Indian Airlines. Every little thing that works adds to national resources; and every little or big thing that ought to work but doesn't subtracts from it, no matter whether it is in the private sector or public sector and belongs to the Centre or the states. Unfortunately, that is not how we see it. We see the world in round big numbers: Rs 180,000 crore for the seventh plan, Rs 10,000 crore for West Bengal's plan and so on, forgetting that it is not the round numbers that decide our fate but small things like Haldia, before they turn into scrap.

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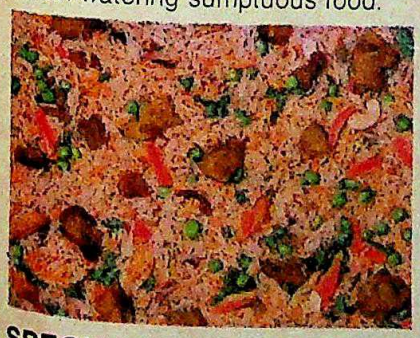

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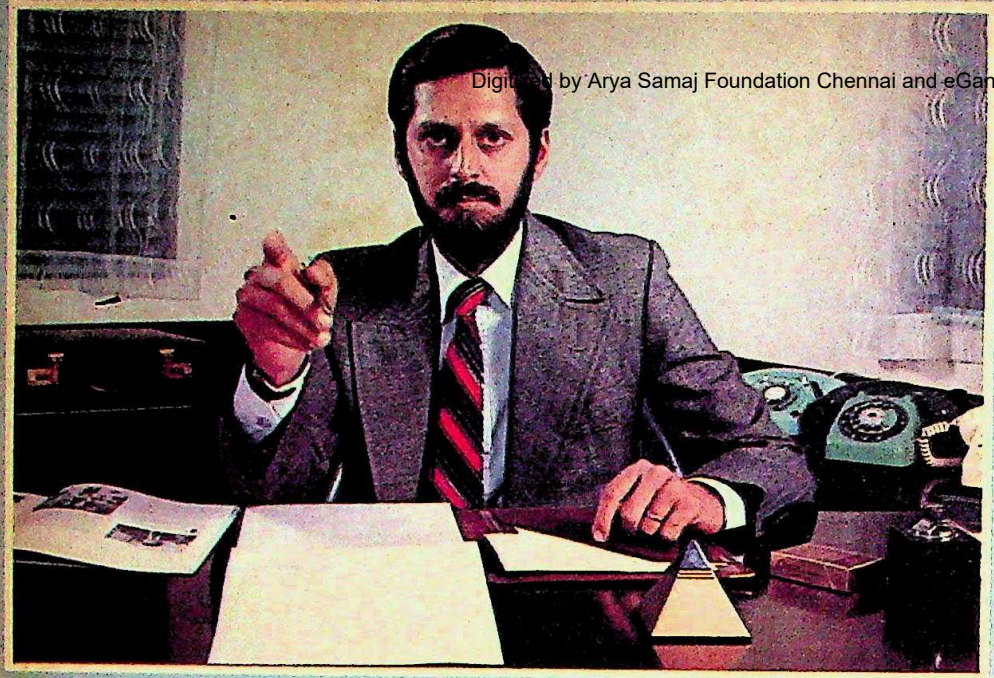

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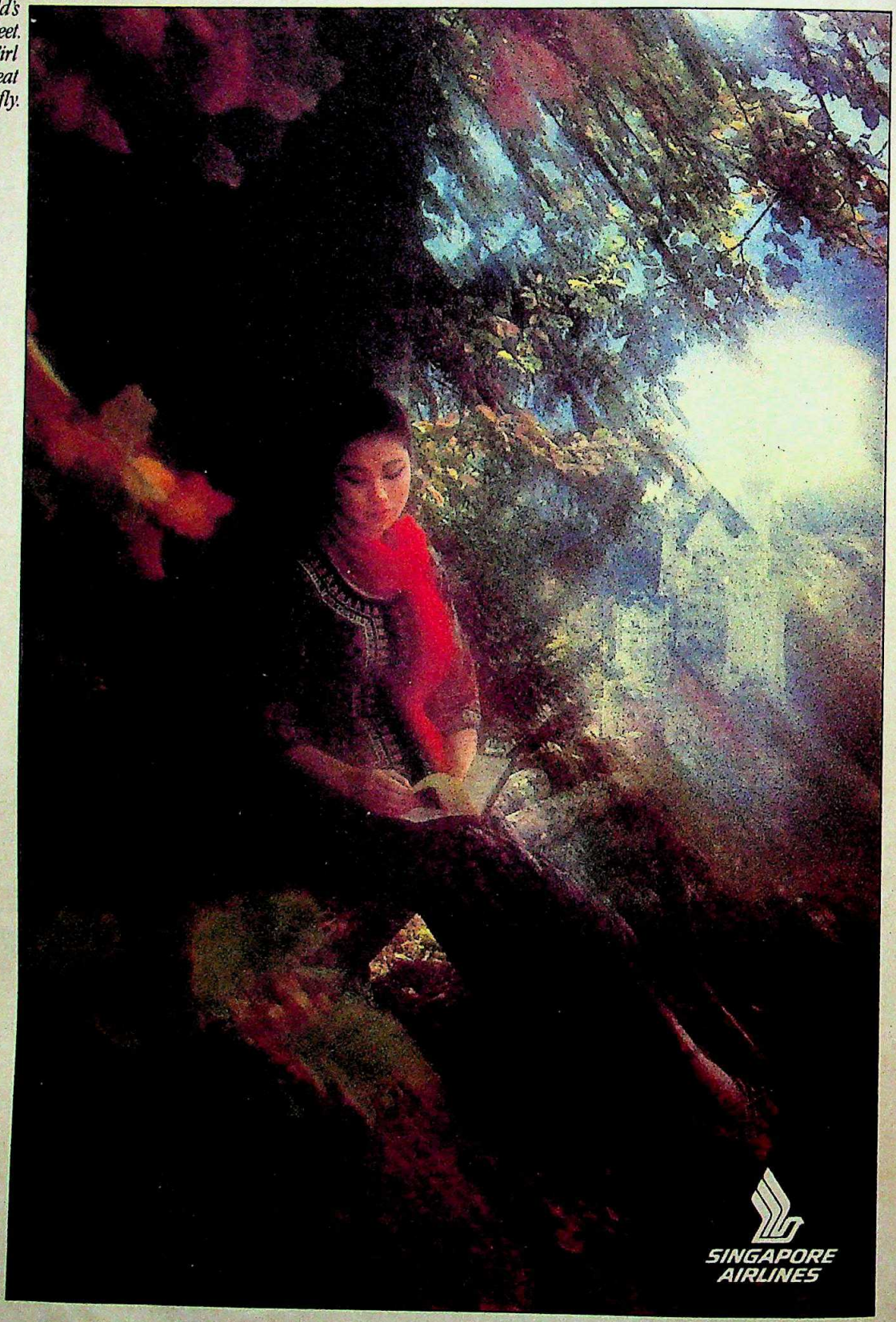

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BANKING

Under a Cloud

A.K. BHATTACHARYA, general manager of the Lakshmi Commercial Bank, sits disconsolately in his office in the bank's New Delhi headquarters. He has a large fixed deposit with the bank for which he works, and does not know if or when he will be able to get back his money. "If I had known that there would be a moratorium placed on the bank, I would have pulled out my money immediately," he says ruefully.

Ved Kapur, a director of Lakshmi Commercial till last year, when he sold his 10 per cent shareholding, is in a similar plight: Rs 50,000 in his current account with the bank is at least temporarily out of reach, and a close relative has been ringing up about a Rs 10 lakh deposit that too is beyond reach. "Who knew that this would happen?" Kapur asks.

Hundreds of thousands of other depositors are in a similar plight following the biggest crisis in Indian banking since the Palai Central Bank folded up in the early 1960s. For apart from Lakshmi Commercial (among the largest private banks in the country), the Government of India has placed a similar temporary moratorium on two other banks: the Bank of Cochin and the Miraj State Bank. Between them, the three banks have deposits totalling over Rs 300 crore.

Small depositors are automatically protected by insurance cover that is provided by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, but people with deposits of over Rs 30,000 may have troubled times ahead. Most of them will get back their money only in stages, and some of the money may never be returned: something like 10 per cent of the Bank of Cochin's deposits have been eaten up (Rs 5.86 crore), and over 7 per cent of Lakshmi Commercial's deposits have similarly been eroded (Rs 16.86 crore). In both banks, the paid-up share capital and reserves have been fully wiped out, so that their shareholders will get no compensation from the public sector banks that are now supposed to take them into their fold.

The crisis had been brewing for some time. More than 40 per cent of Lakshmi Commercial's loans totalling Rs 103 crore have been declared "sticky" (that is, loans which have overdue repayments). In the case of the Bank of Cochin, the sticky loans are more than half the total, and in the Miraj State Bank the figure is around 40 per cent.

Besides, Lakshmi Commercial had for a long time been unable to meet the stipulation that some 45 per cent of its deposits must be kept with the RBI and the Government, and as a consequence had been paying out huge penalties. For two years in a row, profits had been declared only by resorting to the revaluation of old assets. But by 1984, there was no room left for even this, and Minister of State for Finance, Janardhan Poojary said in Parliament that the bank was in the red by more than Rs 5 crore. The bank had in any case not been paying any dividends. The Miraj Bank had been resorting to similar financial legerdemain.

Inevitably, public faith in numerous other private banks was momentarily shaken. There were reports of runs on private banks in Kerala and the Traders Bank, a Delhi-based unit, found that some depositors in Jalandhar were asking for their money back. Worried officials of the Reserve Bank kept ringing up twice a day from Bombay to keep track of events, so that money could be rushed across to the bank in case there was a full-scale panic. But things soon quietened down.

Nevertheless, the action against the three banks pointed to a growing crisis in Indian banking, casting doubts on the viability of a substantial part of the industry. A highly-placed RBI official said that "we have been receiving alarming signals that at least a third of the private sector banks are fiddling figures to inflate profits and have on their hands a large number of sticky loans."

In 1983, as a case in point of private banks being in financial difficulty, the 57-year-old Dhanalakshmi Bank of Trichur reported profits of only Rs 42,000 on deposits of Rs 53.50 crore and advances of Rs 29.15 crore. The bank's annual report admitted that it "went through considerable strain due to steep increases in operational costs, administrative problems and factors beyond control." Said D.P. Chadha, president of the All India Bank Employees' Association: "Many private banks divert public funds to private purposes, and when they collapse cause thousands of jobs to be put in jeopardy."

There was every indication that all three banks now under a moratorium had been heading deep into trouble for some years, and that both the RBI and the Government should have acted earlier to stop the rot. RBI inspection reports had warned of impending trouble, pointing to irregular loaning practices, the window-dressing of accounts, the rising proportion of sticky loans and bad debts, the fact that large loans were being given to a few borrowers who had connections with the owners or directors, the evidence of weak management structures, the failure to observe basic banking commitments regarding maintenance of cash reserves with the RBI, the erosion of depositors' money, and much else. In some of the banks, additional RBI directors had been posted to keep a watch on developments, and Lakshmi Commercial's board had in fact been advised to merge the bank with

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some other healthy bank.

The Miraj State Bank is owned by the princely Patwardhan family, whose members and companies owed the bank Rs 1.01 crore. And in the Bank of Cochin, an RBI inspection report had stated that "during the last quarter century or so, it would appear that there has been no bank in Kerala with such an alarmingly high percentage of sticky advances and such distressingly adverse operational features.... Many of the advances were granted on considerations other than those of prudent banking. With undue and undesirable pressure exerted on the decision-makers, the whole credit process started with a taint. Unviable projects which would not have stood the test of even a cursory scrutiny were liberally financed by the bank."

Lakshmi Commercial Bank: mismanagement

Among the leading lights of the Bank of Cochin is A.C. Jose, Congress(I) strongman and former speaker of the state Assembly. CPI(M) leader E.K. Nayanar has called for action against Jose, who is a director of the bank, for loans given to people and companies associated with him. The bank's former chairman, E.K. Andrew, is already facing charges in the court of Ernakulam's chief judicial magistrate for flouting rules and regulations in the grant of loans of over Rs 1.53 crore, following which the RBI had removed him in 1983. But Andrew claims that he was made a scapegoat by "certain powerful directors" of the bank.

In the case of Lakshmi Commercial, the bank's Opera House branch in Bombay had no fewer than 130 irregular or sticky loan accounts. Fully 50 of them were made at the manager's discretion, 35 have no documents attached, and 47 have no security whatsoever. There have also been numerous accusations concerning corruption. The head of a private finance company in Delhi said that when he once asked the bank for a loan, he was asked to pay a 3 per cent commission, which he refused. He was told subsequently that such demands were habitually made when anyone asked the bank for a loan. And a leading trade union leader in Delhi charged that officials in the bank often used to take Rs 5,000 for jobs handed out (the bank is heavily over-staffed) and varying sums going up to Rs 3,000 for transfers. Asked to explain these charges, S.R. Kapur (perhaps the most influential director of the bank till he left last year) said: "We had heard of these rumours, but there was no evidence to go by." Nevertheless, bank staff and some officers allege that the corruption reached right to the very top levels.

Bank of Cochin: questionable performance

RBI officials charged that inspection of the bank's records frequently showed an absence of basic credit appraisals and routine documentation. In numerous cases, money seemed to have been handed out merely for the asking. Ved Kapur tried last fortnight to explain the bank's decline as being caused by "management weaknesses", but the general impression in New Delhi was that the real reason was rampant corruption. A visit to the bank's main branch in New Delhi's Connaught Circus showed union posters up on the walls demanding that the management stop the lending of money to non-existent firms.

Staff indiscipline was widespread. S.R. Kapur said that people almost never came to work on time, that branches opened late and closed early, and that board meetings had to be held in hotels because otherwise agitated staff used to barge in with their complaints. Another director recalled that truckloads of policemen had to be summoned to the head office at least twice in the past to control agitating workers.

Lakshmi Commercial's directors clearly knew that the ship was sinking, and had been trying for some time to bail themselves out by selling their shares. Three years ago, they offered to hand the bank over to Punjab National Bank, also headquartered in New Delhi, provided PNB was willing to lend the bank Rs 30 crore that it needed to meet its deposit obligations with the RBI and the Government.

At the same time, the bank started negotiations with Canara Bank, and in fact went as far as passing a board resolution to take on Canara Bank's general manager in Delhi. For reasons that are not quite clear, both deals fell through, though a former director of Lakshmi Commercial said that PNB had offered to buy Lakshmi Commercial's Rs 10 shares for Rs 20 each.

Last year saw wholesale changes in the bank, with six directors leaving the board following a new law that no one could be a bank director for a continuous period of eight years. This meant that Ved

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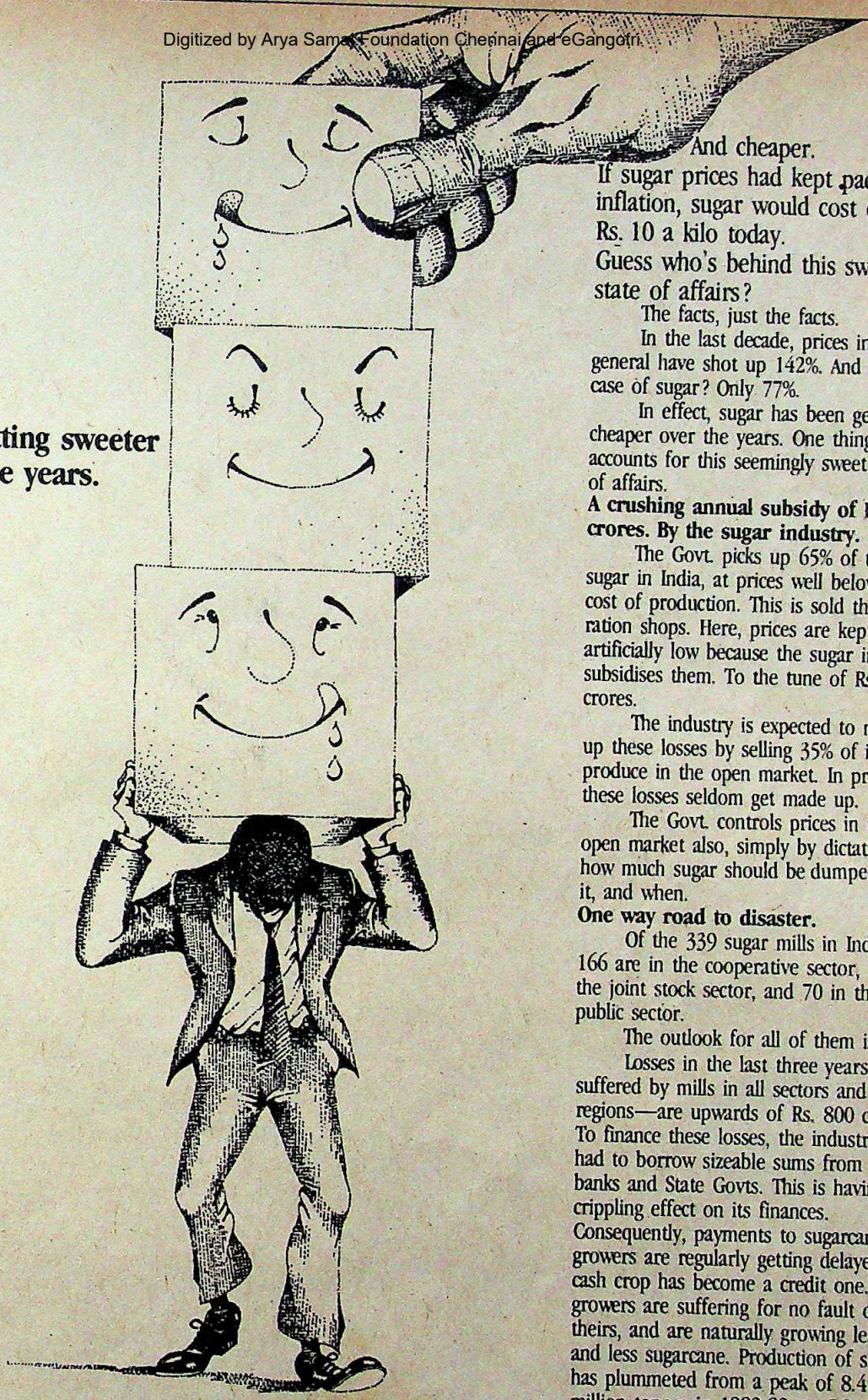

Sugar has been getting sweeter over the years.

And cheaper.

If sugar prices had kept pace with inflation, sugar would cost over Rs. 10 a kilo today.

Guess who's behind this sweet state of affairs?

The facts, just the facts.

In the last decade, prices in general have shot up 142%. And in the case of sugar? Only 77%.

In effect, sugar has been getting cheaper over the years. One thing accounts for this seemingly sweet state of affairs.

A crushing annual subsidy of Rs. 300 crores. By the sugar industry.

The Govt. picks up 65% of the sugar in India, at prices well below the cost of production. This is sold through ration shops. Here, prices are kept artificially low because the sugar industry subsidises them. To the tune of Rs. 300 crores.

The industry is expected to make up these losses by selling 35% of its produce in the open market. In practice, these losses seldom get made up.

The Govt. controls prices in the open market also, simply by dictating how much sugar should be dumped into it, and when.

One way road to disaster.

Of the 339 sugar mills in India, 166 are in the cooperative sector, 103 in the joint stock sector, and 70 in the public sector.

The outlook for all of them is bleak.

Losses in the last three years—suffered by mills in all sectors and all regions—are upwards of Rs. 800 crores. To finance these losses, the industry has had to borrow sizeable sums from the banks and State Govts. This is having a crippling effect on its finances. Consequently, payments to sugarcane growers are regularly getting delayed. A cash crop has become a credit one. Cane growers are suffering for no fault of theirs, and are naturally growing less and less sugarcane. Production of sugar has plummeted from a peak of 8.4 million tonnes in 1982-83, to 5.9 million tonnes today. India, which once exported Rs. 800 crores of sugar (1975,76), has now spent Rs. 200 crores (1984,85) of precious foreign exchange on imports.

This is the state of an industry which, by any international parameters, is productive and efficient! An industry which is the second largest in the country.

Is this in the interest of India?

INTERFACE-1001

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"If I had known the real condition of the bank, I would not have bought its shares."

H.S. HANSPAL, *Congress(I) MP*

Kapur (son of the bank's founder), two promoter-directors of the bank and three others vacated their chairs. Having lost control, they decided to sell their shareholding en bloc to anyone willing to buy. There followed a long procession of interested parties, many of them attracted by the fact that the bank's total share capital was only Rs 25 lakh while it controlled deposits of more than Rs 200 crore. The first was a small sum to pay if it meant getting control of the second.

The prospective buyers included a non-resident Indian in London, a prominent cement dealer in Delhi, and even well-known industrialist Raunaq Singh. Singh was keen on getting control of the bank. So after checking out that his purchase of the bank would not be vetoed by the Government, he asked his son to go ahead and make the down payment and went on a tour abroad. The son had the good sense to double-check with a former chairman of Lakshmi Commercial, who advised strongly against having anything to do with the bank.

Raunaq Singh recalls that he was quite annoyed on his return to find that the deal had not been clinched. Then he too checked with a senior official in Punjab National Bank, who told him his son had been wise in keeping off. Says Singh: "I am very lucky that I did not buy the bank, otherwise I would have been in a mess today."

Through some months of such aborted sales, the market's assessment of the bank's worth seems to have been revised downward sharply. Some of the initial offers were for as high as Rs 100 per share. Eventually, the shares of the ousted directors were sold for just Rs 30 each to a group of Sikhs belonging to the Namdhari sect, whose spokesman appears to be H.S. Hanspal, Congress(I) member of the Rajya Sabha and a businessman in his own right.

THERE is persistent talk in New Delhi that one of the important new shareholders is Ratan Chadha, a non-resident who first went abroad as a hitch-hiker and eventually set up a multi-million dollar garment business in Europe. But Hanspal denied that Chadha owned any shares, and when asked whether he had heard of Chadha, replied enigmatically: "Not much." Chadha himself could not be reached on the telephone as he was shuttling between Germany, Holland and England.

Lakshmi Commercial officers said that Hanspal has emerged as the real power in the bank although he is not a director. But Hanspal, despite confessing that he had flown to Bombay to meet the RBI governor regarding the moratorium placed on the bank, insisted that he owned less than 1 per cent of the bank's shares. But, he added, "If I had known the real condition of the bank I would not have bought shares in it."

If the new ownership of Lakshmi Commercial Bank remains something of a mystery, there is no secret about the identity and character of the Bank of Cochin. Identified for a long time with the Catholic community in Kerala, the moratorium instantly provoked an uproar. The bishop of Kottayam filed a writ petition in the Kerala High Court against the moratorium, and pressure was mounted on both the Central and state governments to not merge the bank with the public sector Syndicate Bank, as had been announced.

Similar efforts were on in Delhi, with Hanspal undertaking some intensive lobbying to prevent Lakshmi Commercial's proposed merger with PNB. Hanspal argued that the Government's step was unwarranted ("The bank's situation had been improving").

But confidential figures concerning Lakshmi Commercial's functioning suggested that its condition was getting rapidly worse. The bank lost Rs 6.75 crore last year (no figures have been officially released) and a further Rs 2.29 crore in the first three months of 1985.

"I am lucky I did not buy the bank, otherwise I would have been in a mess today."

RAUNAQ SINGH, *Industrialist*

RBI officials pointed out that two chairmen in the recent past had tried to straighten affairs, but that both fell out with the bank's board. K.C. Mehra offered to resign three or four times before he finally left in less than two years of joining, and Premjit Singh had some temporary success in imposing discipline and making bank staff come on time before he left to become chairman of the Bank of Baroda. Singh too had clearly fallen out with the board, for over 50 cases of promotions and transfers that he cleared just before he left the bank were all reversed subsequently by the board. Hanspal said last fortnight that he would complain to the Government about Singh's decisions.

Meanwhile, there was considerable concern in PNB about the prospect of having to take charge of what a union office-bearer referred to as "a polluted bank like Lakshmi Commercial". For though one of PNB's general managers argued that the merger would extend PNB's network of branches by another 222 and therefore help future growth, others in the bank felt that Lakshmi Commercial was too far gone, its staff not used to functioning properly and its operational culture much too corrupted.

In Lakshmi Commercial itself, clerks idly sitting around looked forward to the prospect of getting the security that flows from being a part of PNB. But their immediate complaint was straightforward: no salaries had been paid for

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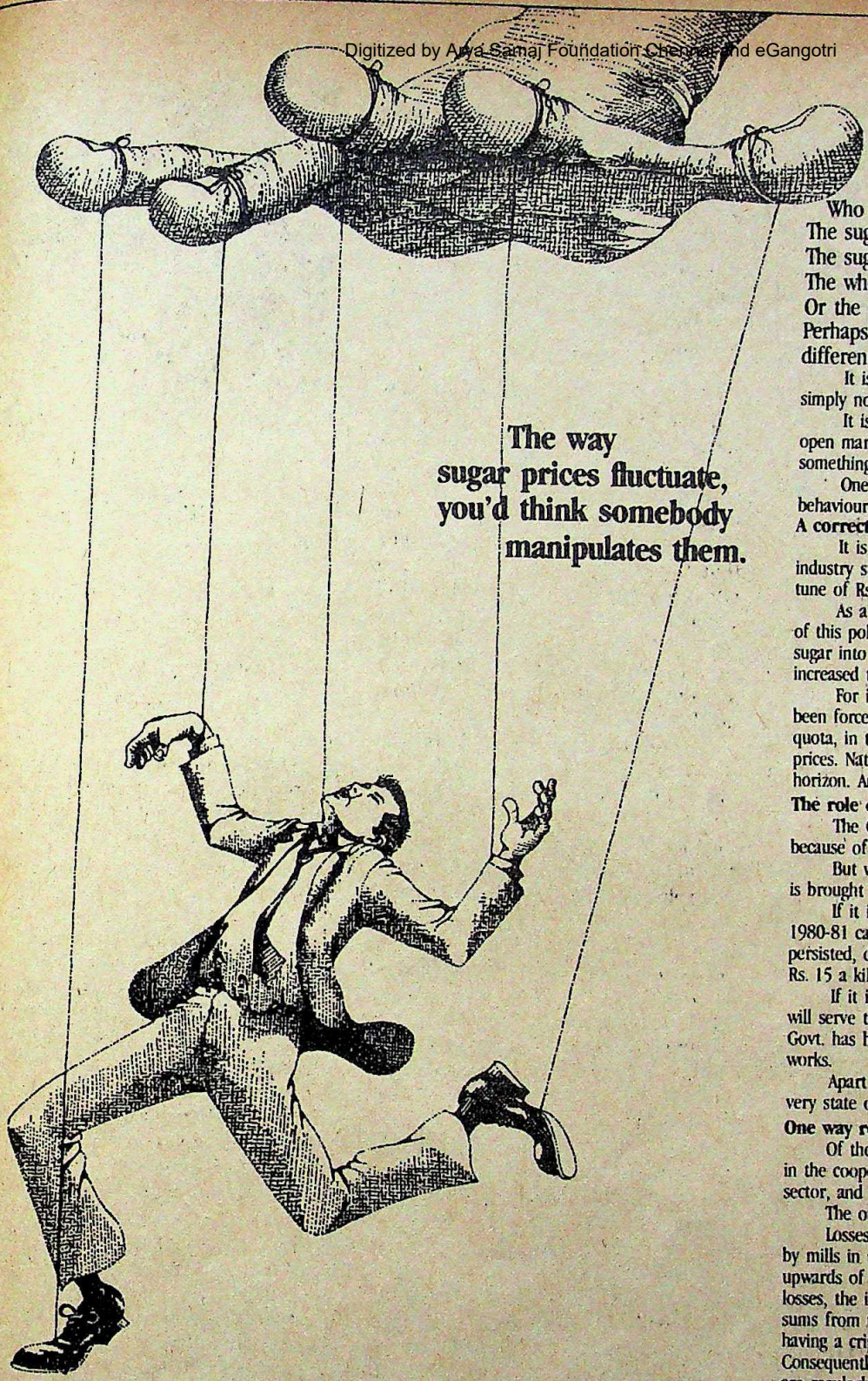

The way sugar prices fluctuate, you'd think somebody manipulates them.

Who could it be?
The sugar barons?
The sugarcane growers?
The wholesalers?
Or the retailers?
Perhaps it is something altogether different.

It is a fact that sugar prices in India have simply not kept pace with inflation.

It is also a fact that sugar prices in the open market fluctuate like nobody's business, something the sugar industry is totally against.

One thing accounts for this oscillating behaviour.

A correct policy, but ...

It is this policy that makes the sugar industry subsidise controlled prices — to the tune of Rs. 300 crores.

As a result of the wrong implementation of this policy, the Govt. has dumped excessive sugar into the open market. This has further increased the losses incurred by the sugar industry.

For instance, this year, the industry has been forced to release 75% of its open market quota, in the first six months, at artificially low prices. Naturally, shortages loom on the horizon. And prices are bound to shoot up.

The role of imports.

The Govt. is planning to import sugar because of expected shortages. Fair enough.

But what's more crucial is how this sugar is brought to the end consumer.

If it is through State agencies, a repeat of 1980-81 can be expected. Then shortages persisted, despite imports. Prices shot up to Rs. 15 a kilo. Black marketeers flourished.

If it is channeled through ration shops, it will serve the purpose. That, in fact, is what the Govt. has been doing for the past two years. It works.

Apart from correctly utilising imports, the very state of the industry needs to be looked into.

One way road to disaster.

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The outlook for all of them is bleak.

Losses in the last three years—suffered by mills in all sectors and all regions—are upwards of Rs. 800 crores. To finance these losses, the industry has had to borrow sizeable sums from the banks and State Govts. This is having a crippling effect on its finances. Consequently, payments to sugarcane growers are regularly getting delayed. A cash crop has become a credit one. Cane growers are suffering for no fault of theirs, and are naturally growing less and less sugarcane. Production of sugar has plummeted from a peak of 8.4 million tonnes in 1982-83, to 5.9 million tonnes today. India, which once exported Rs. 800 crores of sugar (1975,76), has now spent Rs. 200 crores (1984,85) of precious foreign exchange on imports.

This is the state of an industry which, by any international parameters, is productive and efficient! An industry which is the the second largest in the country.

Clearly, a lot needs to be done.
And time is running out.

INTERFACE-1002

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April, how were people going to live?

The broader questions raised by the moratorium are, however, more worrying. How many other banks are in a similarly precarious condition? RBI officials maintained that at least one public sector bank in north India was in a bad way, with a large percentage of sticky accounts. A senior RBI official also confided that the rot set in when political appointees started crowding bank boards, and when RBI warnings about impending danger went unheeded by the Finance Ministry in the last few years. Most bank boards have been changed wholesale this year, but some appointments continue to worry the RBI: in a recent case, the Government appointed a banker as chairman of a nationalised bank despite the RBI strongly advising against such a step. Clearly, while most public sector banks are run far better than most private banks, the rot in the system is widespread. And unless corrective action is quickly taken, other banks could follow in the wake of Lakshmi Commercial, Bank of Cochin and Miraj State Bank.

—T.N. NINAN with SREEDHAR PILLAI and JAGANNATH DUBASHI

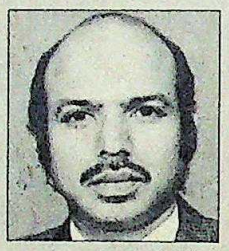
ANDHRA BANK

Jaunt Study

BANK directors are now becoming "beneficiaries of the 20-point programme (TPP) loaning schemes" for the poor. The most conspicuous ones are three directors of the Hyderabad-headquartered Andhra Bank—Dudheshwar Kumar Mishra, 46, a Congress social worker from the obscure village of Dhawa in the Aurangabad district of Bihar, Khushi Ram, 64, a Delhi-based retired Central government official, and B.K. Mohanty, 53, a leader of the INTUC from Rourekela in Orissa. They have been touring the country on the ostensible mission of reviewing the implementation of the TPP by the bank in several states. But a senior executive of the bank objected to their travels, describing it as a "Bharat Darshan" and in an attempt to ground them, found himself in trouble.

The official, B. Srinivasa Rao, the deputy general manager looking after the agricultural finance and TPP schemes, is to face disciplinary action for his candid comments on the directors' tours and his refusal to sign their extravagant expense accounts. The row began with Rao's objections to the directors', all political appointees, excesses, while on monitoring missions. The official pointed out that the Union Finance Ministry had suggested a panel of directors be organised to review the TPP schemes in case the banks have difficulties in achieving the targets set by the Reserve Bank of India and the ministry. He emphasised that "very little purpose is served by the select visits to states where the bank had one or a few branches". Although the bank has an overwhelming 507 of its 642 branches in the state they chose to visit only six of these, in spite of the fact that most TPP schemes of the bank are implemented in the state itself.

During their staggered 38-day tour spread over 12 months they went to 33 branches of which only six are rural branches while the rest are located in state capitals and other urban and semi-urban centres where the loaning under the scheme to help the poor is nominal. Said Rao: "The bank has given Rs 108.46 crore to weaker sections under various programmes and of this, Rs 101.65 crore is accounted for by branches in Andhra Pradesh. Therefore, it is beyond my comprehension what the directors could have possibly gauged about the bank's performance by their travel in other states."



Srinivasa Rao

The "Bharat Darshan" jaunt of the directors began with a visit to the Tatanagar and Patna branches—the only ones in Mishra's home state of Bihar—and the latest was Jaipur—the only branch of the Andhra Bank in Rajasthan which has just 12 accounts under the TPP. The team then went to Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan besides a side-trip into Nepal after a visit to the Gorakhpur branch in Uttar Pradesh. The central region of the Andhra Bank comprising Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh seemed to be popular for they visited nine of the 15 branches including Bhopal, Lucknow, Agra and Varanasi.

Said one bank official: "They were by all accounts itinerant tourists and incidentally directors of the bank." A week-long tour of the south during which they visited seven branches cost the bank Rs 20,896.55 for their travel and hotel expenses.

Surprisingly, their reports about the visits are casual and impressionistic. About the Sheragada branch in the Ganjam district of Orissa they noted: "At the time of the visit to the branch there were about 12 customers, about half of whom belonged to the weaker sections. The committee was very happy to note that there were four women customers—two for loans and two for making deposits—even though the area is said to be very backward. Evidently, banking has reached the masses in this area through our bank." And the only suggestion they have come up with is to start a system of field inspection books in the branches giving details of each borrower, specific purpose for which the loan is taken, amount given and the progress of recovery. At a meeting of the board, in April, they moved a resolution commending the bank staff for their good work and recommended that cash awards be given as incentives for those bank staff who were actively helping to cross the targets.

At the same time they asked the bank's general manager and officiating chairman K. Arvind Reddy to pull up Rao for "his unwarranted comments showing a lack of maturity" Reddy has asked Rao for an explanation as to why he made "intemperate remarks" but he refused point-blank to budge from his earlier stand. Rao told INDIA TODAY: "The board resolution is further confirmation of the fact that the bank has been doing well with the loaning schemes and there was no need for a tour of the country by the directors. Their business is to lay down the policy and we will carry on with the work and they can raise questions if it is not done properly." But that is not the way things are working out just now.

—AMARNATH MENON

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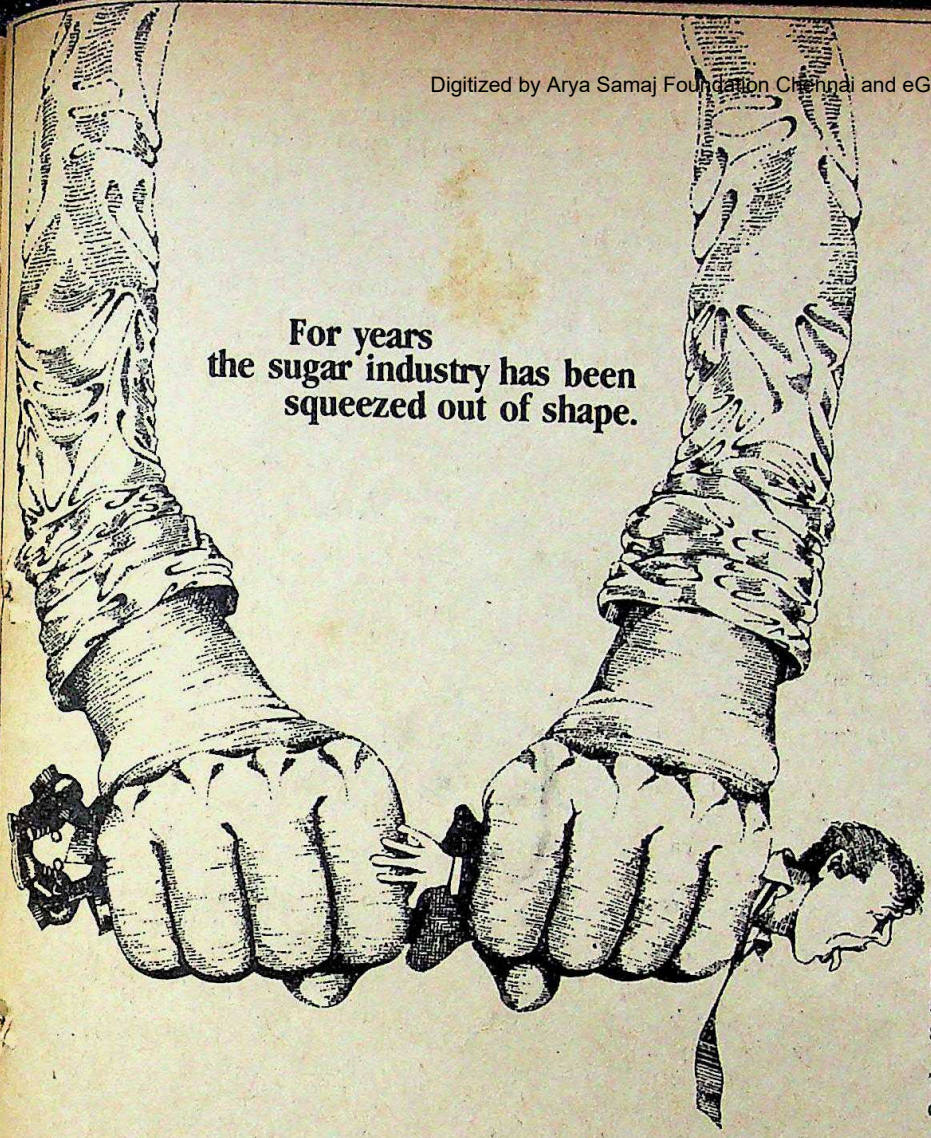

For years the sugar industry has been squeezed out of shape.

Now the crunch is coming. Soon sugar could become very scarce in the open market. And even if it is available, it'll be at prices nobody will find sweet.

How could this happen?
Can anything be done?

The problem lies in the open market. That's where severe shortages loom. And that's where prices are threatening to sky-rocket.

Who's responsible?

The sugar industry is allowed to sell only 35% of its produce in the open market. This is to make up for the losses it incurs in subsidising sugar in ration shops — to the tune of over Rs. 300 crores.

Unfortunately, the Govt. has forced the industry to release 75% of its open market quota in the first six months.

The result? Not enough sugar for the future. Hence the impending shortages, and hence sky-high prices.

Something needs to be done. Immediately.

What can be done?

First, increase the open market quota to 50%. This will help in stabilising prices, and in reducing the expected shortages. Enough sugar in the open market will also keep the speculators at bay.

The Govt. is already importing sugar. This can make up for whatever shortages occur in ration shops.

But much more needs to be done if the sugar industry is to survive.

One way road to disaster.

Of the 339 sugar mills in India, 166 are in the cooperative sector, 103 in the joint stock sector, and 70 in the public sector.

The outlook for all of them is bleak.

Losses in the last three years—suffered by mills in all sectors and all regions—are upwards of Rs. 800 crores. To finance these losses, the industry has had to borrow sizeable sums from the banks and State Govts. This is having a crippling effect on its finances. Consequently, payments to sugarcane growers are regularly getting delayed. A cash crop has become a credit one. Cane growers are suffering for no fault of theirs, and are naturally growing less and less sugarcane. Production of sugar has plummeted from a peak of 8.4 million tonnes in 1982-83, to 5.9 million tonnes today. India, which once exported Rs. 800 crores of sugar (1975,76) has now spent Rs. 200 crores (1984,85) of precious foreign exchange on imports.

This is the state of an industry which, by any international parameters, is productive and efficient! An industry which is the second largest in India.

So has the time come to do something about this?

INTERFACE-1003

Issued in the national interest by the Indian Sugar Mills Association.

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FICCI

The Bogus Battle

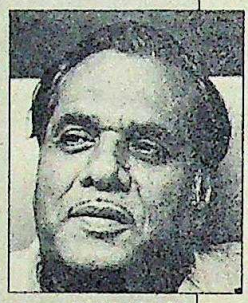
IN THE chequered and increasingly fractious history of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), there had probably not been a meeting quite like this one. Ramakrishna Bajaj, the outgoing president, was not invited because he was not considered heavyweight enough. Similarly excluded was the incoming president, D.N. Patodia. Only the maharajahs of Indian industry's princely club were present: Bharat Ram, K.K. Birla, Shriyans Prasad Jain, Hari Shanker Singhania, Ashok Jain, K.N. Modi, M.V. Arunachalam, P.V. Gandhi and S.K. Birla.

The agenda consisted of just one point: how to end the embarrassingly public bickering between FICCI's two groups of warring industrialists over the federation's "bogus" members, whose voting power was being used to determine the outcome of FICCI elections and thus to establish control over the federation.

On the one side was ranged a whole phalanx of industrialists accusing the Birlas and Modis of having amassed a vote-bank of bogus members. On the other, the Modis and Birlas were intent on arguing that all FICCI's members were genuine since they qualified under the membership criteria, that each member had one vote, and that there was nothing to bicker about.

The meeting, held in Bharat Ram's house in New Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave, began stormily. Temperatures rose quickly as charges and countercharges were traded. At one point, P.V. Gandhi and Singhania threatened to walk out of the federation, at which stage Modi said he would leave if that helped the organisation. But the high point was a heated tirade by the normally low-key K.K. Birla, who accused Ashok Jain of using the Bennet Coleman stable of newspapers (*The Times of India* and *The Economic Times*) to malign Birla and Modi. "If it happens once, that is all right," Birla said. "If it happens twice, it has to be with the proprietor's consent, and if it happens thrice it is with the proprietor's connivance. If this happened in my paper, I would fire the editor tomorrow." Jain responded by saying that that might be the way in which Birla ran his papers (including *The Hindustan Times*), but that his style was different. Birla then retorted by saying that editorial policies were laid down by the board of directors, and that an editor had to observe these policies.

K.K. Birla



K.N. Modi

"The Birlas and Modis reacted heatedly to the charge of bogus members while the others threatened to walk out of FICCI."

Ashok Jain, P.V. Gandhi, Bharat Ram

Bharat Ram and Arunachalam struggled to bring about an orderly discussion, and after a couple of hours some kind of a compromise package began to emerge. Briefly, the arrangement is that major decisions concerning FICCI will in future be first discussed/decided by an informal group of eight senior members, two drawn from each of the four geographical zones.

But it is far from clear whether this experiment in guided democracy will work. The zones themselves see tussles for control between the two groups (the eastern zone in particular is split down the middle), and the formation of such a group of eight only skirts, without confronting, the issue of bogus members. Whoever maintains control over these members therefore retains the ultimate voting clout that can be used in case a compromise fails.

The entire issue and the bickering between the two groups began four years ago, when a common relative of the Birlas and the Modis was defeated in the election for membership of the all-powerful FICCI committee. Incensed, the Birlas and Modis got together, shored up their position by enrolling new members (comprising previously unheard of associations of petty merchants in the small towns) and in the following year handed out a drubbing to the recalcitrant Bombay group. Thus began a fresh round of bogus enrolments by both sides, so that FICCI's total membership swelled from 478 in 1980 to 1,448 in 1982.

In an effort to end the bogus membership, FICCI then set up a committee to sort things out. But a new set of membership criteria took two years to hammer out, and then got stalled over the question of whether existing members should also be asked to qualify under the new criteria. As one leading light of the federation argued, "What is the point of keeping out additional bogus members if nothing is going to be done about people who have already enrolled bogus members?"

When this issue was sorted out, yet another hitch occurred: the registrar of companies refused to ratify the proposed change in FICCI's constitution, apparently at the instance of a leading industrialist who handed in a lawyer's advice questioning the legality of taking such a step.

Meanwhile, the time was coming around for choosing the vice-president for 1985-86 (who by FICCI convention becomes the president the following year). According to one of the warring groups, the Birlas and Modis decided unilaterally to pass up the south (whose turn it was to throw up the candidate) and instead to propose the name of R.P.

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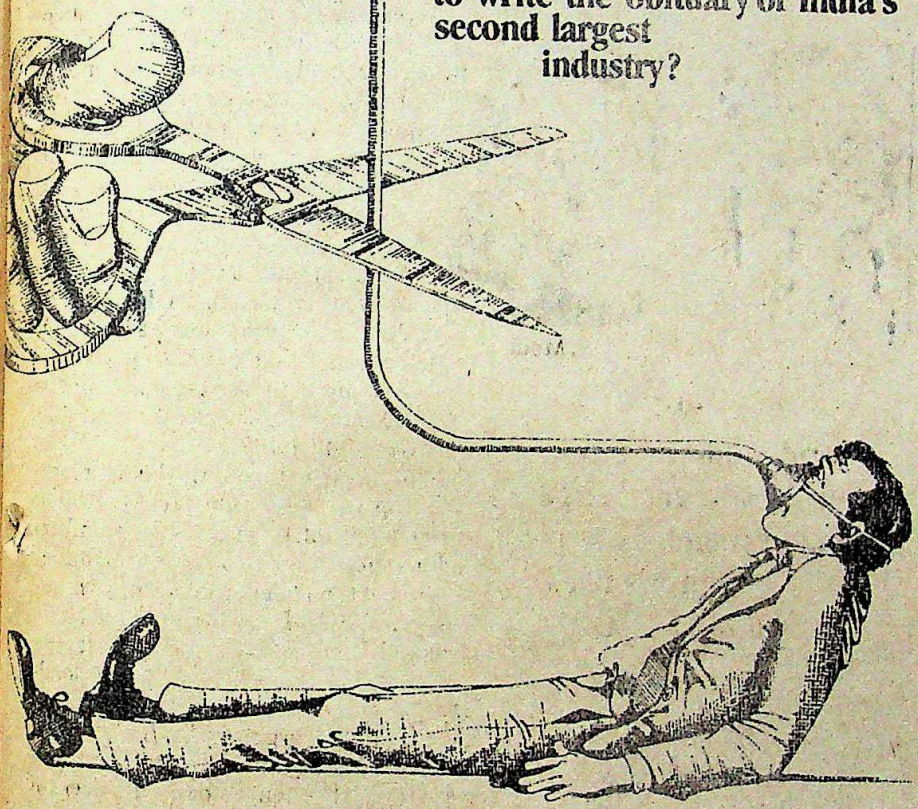

Has the time come to write the obituary of India's second largest industry?

The facts suggest so.

Sugar industry losses in the last three years are upwards of Rs. 800 crores. Production has plummeted from 8.4 million tonnes in 1982-83 to 5.9 million today. India, which once exported Rs. 800 crores of sugar (1975,76), has now spent Rs. 200 crores (1984,85) on imports.

Worse still, to finance these losses, the industry has had to borrow sizeable sums from the banks and State Govts. This is having a crippling effect on its finances. Consequently, payments to sugarcane growers are regularly getting delayed. A cash crop has become a credit one. They are suffering for no fault of theirs, and are naturally growing less and less sugarcane. And that's what is really scary. No sugarcane ... no sugar.

This is the state of an industry which, by any international parameters, is productive and efficient!

So has the time come to write its obituary?

The new economic order.

There is a mood of optimism in India.

The new Govt. has shown every intention of liberalising controls, removing irrational and counterproductive policies.

That is precisely what needs to be done in the case of the sugar industry.

The solutions.

First, and immediately, the industry should be allowed to sell 50% of its produce in the open market.

This will take care of the impending shortages in the open market, and the consequent sky-high prices. This will also keep the speculators at bay. The Govt. is already importing sugar. This can easily make up for whatever shortages occur in ration shops.

But for the industry to survive, much more needs to be done.

Make sure sugarcane growers find it profitable to cultivate sugarcane. APC (Agricultural Prices Commission) recommendations in respect of cane prices should be implemented without delay. A national policy needs to be formulated.

No industry can survive in the face of regular and staggering losses. Make sure it becomes profitable to produce sugar. Rationalise prices.

This will help the sugar industry in getting out of its present nosedive. Over a period of time, this will also help in building up buffer stocks.

Then, and only then, will the Indian sugar industry become stable. And only then can India go back to earning precious foreign exchange by exporting sugar.

To know more about what can be done to save the cane growers and the sugar industry, mail this coupon to:
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INTERFACE-1004

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Goenka, who belongs to the eastern zone. This promptly had the southern associations up in arms, while the Bombay group said enough was enough and came close to a decision to quit FICCI. Numerous industrialists threatened to boycott the federation's annual jamboree, scheduled for this fortnight, and word was passed around that the infighting had prompted the prime minister, the President, as well as the finance minister to pass up invitations to inaugurate the annual session.

Both the Modis and Birlas reacted heatedly to these charges. Modi told a journalist that anyone who wanted to get out of FICCI was welcome to get out, and S.K. Birla, the rising Birla star in chamber affairs, said: "A supposedly responsible newspaper group from Bombay seems to have taken a liking for yellow journalism since they are publishing reports on FICCI that have no relevance to the facts." A spokesman of this faction added that "Bombay has always dominated FICCI elections. Now that the Bombay syndicate can no longer control the elections, they are talking of bogus members. The changes in FICCI's constitution are illegal."

The first move for a compromise came from R.P. Goenka, who suggested that Bharat Ram take the lead in the matter. Earlier attempts to stop fighting and start talking had been cold-shouldered by the Birla-Modi combine. Said a Bombay industrialist who has been in the forefront of the battle: "Whenever we have tried to talk with them they have put things off by pleading other engagements." But this time round, there was a better response, though the various industrialists' replies to Goenka gave vent to their feelings. Bharat Ram warned in writing that "if we are not able to come to an effective solution in this matter, people would be free to act according to their conscience." Shriyans Prasad Jain regretted that the consensus of the past had given way to a situation where FICCI was "being run on the basis of bogus members", and a former president of the Bombay-based Indian Merchants Chamber said: "Only a third of the 1,600 member-associations are genuine." P.V. Gandhi was equally forthright in his comments: "We do not like to work with bogus members and purchased votes."

In fact, there had been a proxy fight between the two camps only a couple of months earlier, for the control of the Indian Merchants Chamber. Ashok Birla and his supporters, including Shantilal Somaiya, tried to oust P.V. Gandhi and company, apparently in order to reduce or dilute the Gandhi group's strength in FICCI. But the effort failed (INDIA TODAY, March 15), and that is when the war began hotting up before leading to the latest compromise move. The question of who will become vice-president next year has also been settled, with the south backing out and the way being almost cleared for Goenka.

Hari Shanker Singhania is hopeful about things now taking a turn for the better. "For the last two or three years, I have been unhappy about the way in which FICCI has been functioning, but now I hope there is a change of heart." Whether that hope is justified will be evident soon enough, at this fortnight's annual session. But so long as bogus members stay on the rolls, or new bogus members continue to be enrolled despite the slightly stiffer new membership criteria, FICCI's future can hardly be bright.

—T.N. NINAN and JAGANNATH DUBASHI with bureau reports

INDIA CEMENTS

Share Play

T.M. THOMAS, managing director of India Cements, is a puzzled man. His company's shares have shot up from Rs 29 to Rs 36 in next to no time, and Thomas cannot understand why. "We don't know who is buying," he admits. "The shares that are being bought now will be presented to us for registration only after two months."

While no one is any wiser than Thomas on the reason for the excitement on the stock market, the finger points to K.S. Narayanan and K.S. Raman, brothers who, along with N. Srinivasan, are all descendants of the company's original promoters. They had been ousted from the company between 1979 and 1981, when the financial institutions (which own more than half the company's shares) decided to bring in Thomas as a professional manager. In their various ways, Narayanan, Raman and Srinivasan have been trying since 1981 to get back into the company, with little luck so far despite some steady buying up of the company's shares. And matters now seem to be coming to the crunch, partly because Thomas' five-year term ends early next year.

Narayanan, it now turns out, had managed a minor coup in late 1983, when ITC gave up its bid to buy the company and returned the shares it had bought from the financial institutions. But what was unknown till now was that the cigarette giant had at the same time unloaded 25 lakh shares that it had bought on the open market, the buyer being Narayanan.

In recent months, Narayanan has bolstered his position in another significant way. Raman had for a while been aligned with Srinivasan in a bid to get control of the company, with the tacit support of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), while Narayanan had been backed by the ruling AIADMK. In recent months, Raman appears to have switched sides, joining hands with Narayanan while Srinivasan has faded out of the picture. Since both brothers now have the support of the AIADMK, and with the Tamil Nadu Government itself having shown an interest last year in taking control of the company, the line-up now is more convincing than ever before.

The two brothers now talk of owning 12 per cent of the company's total shareholding, and that figure may have risen still further if they are behind the recent buying of India Cements shares. They have added strength in the fact that Narayanan has some affinity with the Congress(I) as well: he was one of the leading lights present at a meeting that Vice-President R. Venkataraman had recently with industrialists in Madras.

The crucial question now is whether the financial institutions will play ball. They own roughly 50 per cent of the company's shares, and no takeover of the India Cements management is possible without their consent. But with Thomas due to hand over charge next February, they will have to decide whether to appoint a fresh professional manager, or hand the company back to Raman and Narayanan. It is impossible to predict the institutions' move in this context, but the spurt in India Cements share prices probably means that the two brothers are to stake a serious claim for the institutions' favours.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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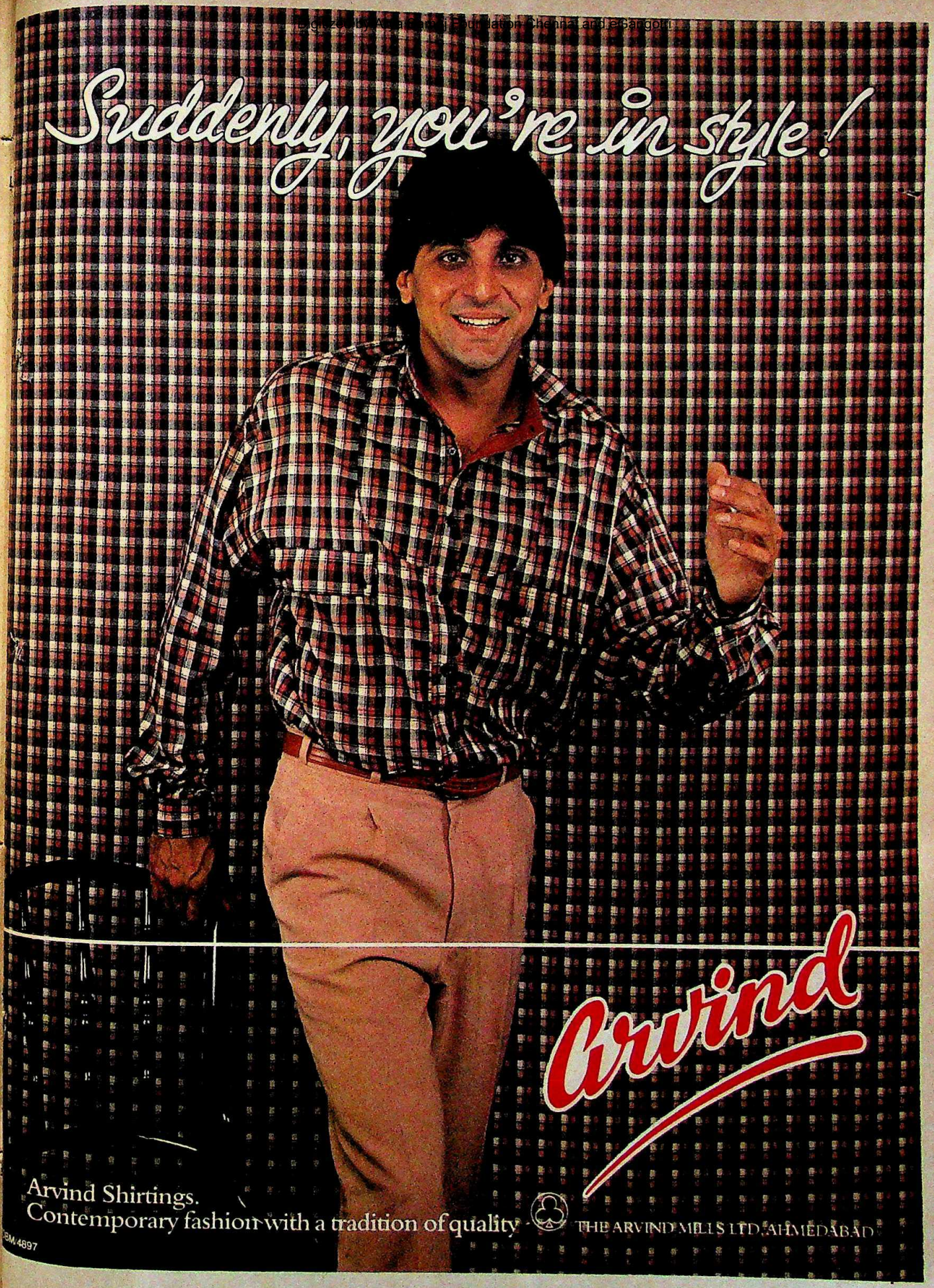

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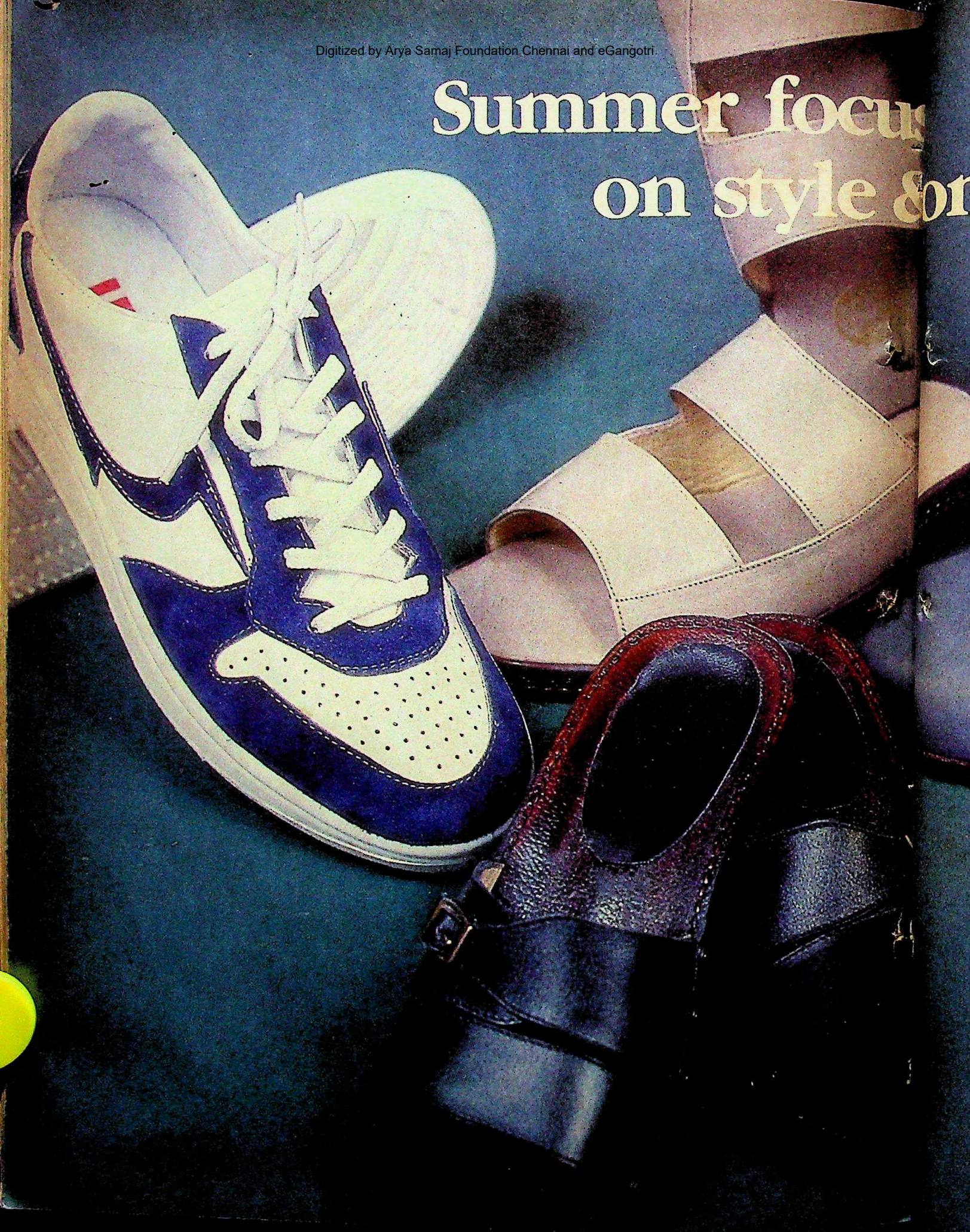
Summer focus on style &or



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omfort...

Shoes, sports shoes, slippers, sandals each in a class by itself ... created by Liberty with a fashion flair combined with super comfort to suit your life style this summer.

The anatomy of each of the above collection reveals the main features of different range of Liberty footwears:

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The uppers: Only the best quality of soft and fine leather treated and tanned carefully are used to make the uppers to keep the feet free from corns and callous.
The designs of Liberty can compare with the best available in international market in terms of style, shape, construction and colour.

Interior: In order to provide maximum overall comfort, each footwear is designed keeping in view the end use of the same. Cushion-collars; padded tongues; tread patterns for excellent traction, body balance and shock absorption; straps; buckles; nylon stitches; toe-holds; proportioned wedges with heel heights; perfect fit and style are the main features of these summer wears.

LIBERTY

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Another Great Idea.

SYSTEM—5500W

In 1937, a man named Avery Fisher had a great idea. He would introduce the world's very first high fidelity audio system. That idea and others that followed began a tradition of great ideas that still continues today at Fisher, the company he founded.

One great example: the totally balanced Fisher audio component system featured above. Inside its awesome 180 + 180-watt* power amplifier, Fisher installed an extra large capacity transformer that provides an exceptionally stable power supply even at extremely high output levels. Also incorporated is an innovative double woofer speaker system that, together with the amplifier, reproduces an unbelievably rich sound over a wide dynamic range virtually without distortion. Designed especially for use in combination audio-video systems, the speakers also eliminate speaker-generated magnetic distortion in nearby TVs.

It's great ideas like this that help Fisher dominate 40 percent of the U.S. audio component market. Don't you settle for less. Get yourself a great idea. Get yourself a Fisher.

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COIN SHORTAGE

Crisis of Change

SORRY no change." This curt and often irritating reply is being heard with increasing frequency all over the country. And substitutes for small change have started finding favour: coupons in lieu of coins are gratefully accepted by bus commuters, stamp vendors urge customers to buy postage worth a round figure, restaurants issue their own brand of coupons and bunk boys pump in convenient-to-be-calculated amounts of fuel. Not to be outdone, clandestine dealers are making their own little millions selling pouchfuls of change with anything up to 25 per cent added on as commission. Says R.K. Kaul, deputy governor, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), somewhat perplexed: "It is difficult to accurately estimate the extent of the shortage but the system is gobbling up the coins as fast as our mints can make them." Now a desperately short-changed government is toying with the idea of importing coins minted abroad. Blank coins have been imported for some years now, but importing minted coins will certainly coin a new phrase in the country's currency history.

Not that coins are not turned out at home. In 1984-85 the three mints at Calcutta, Hyderabad and Bombay produced 1,097 million pieces of small coins—the figure excludes the one rupee coin—and production in the current year is expected to be 1,600 million pieces. But the estimated demand for 1985-86 is expected to be between 2,000 million and 2,600 million if reserves and replacement are taken into account. Says the official of a public sector bank: "Although the situation is not as grim as it was two years ago, the shortage will persist for some time."

Alarmed by the country's voracious appetite for the pieces of alloy, the Government, which runs the three mints, and the RBI which distributes the money through 1,755 coin depots and other centres, have got together to beef up both production and distribution. Policemen are required to guard currency consignments and with more of them available after the election, it is lifting stock faster from mints. Bulk consumers like retail trade associations, fair price shops, hotels, and restaurants are getting direct deliveries of coins and the coin depot network has been expanded with public sector banks pitching in by opening more outlets of their own.

But there is a limit to what the RBI can do on its own. With greater production obviously the key to a resolution of this dilemma, the Government, somewhat belatedly, has decided to take positive measures to meet the demand. These include:

- a Rs 20-crore mint with a capacity equalling that of the three existing mints put together to be set up in the New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA) on the outskirts of Delhi and commissioned in three years (when an RBI committee had predicted a shortage if new mints were not set up soon, the Government had claimed it lacked the funds);
- 22 coin presses with faster strokes to be installed in a phased manner in the existing mints;
- mints adopting a 54-hour week from a 48-hour week, with incentives for added production;
- imports of blank coins to be stepped up and possibilities of indigenous blank coin production explored;
- all denominations to be minted at every centre to facilitate quicker and more even distribution.

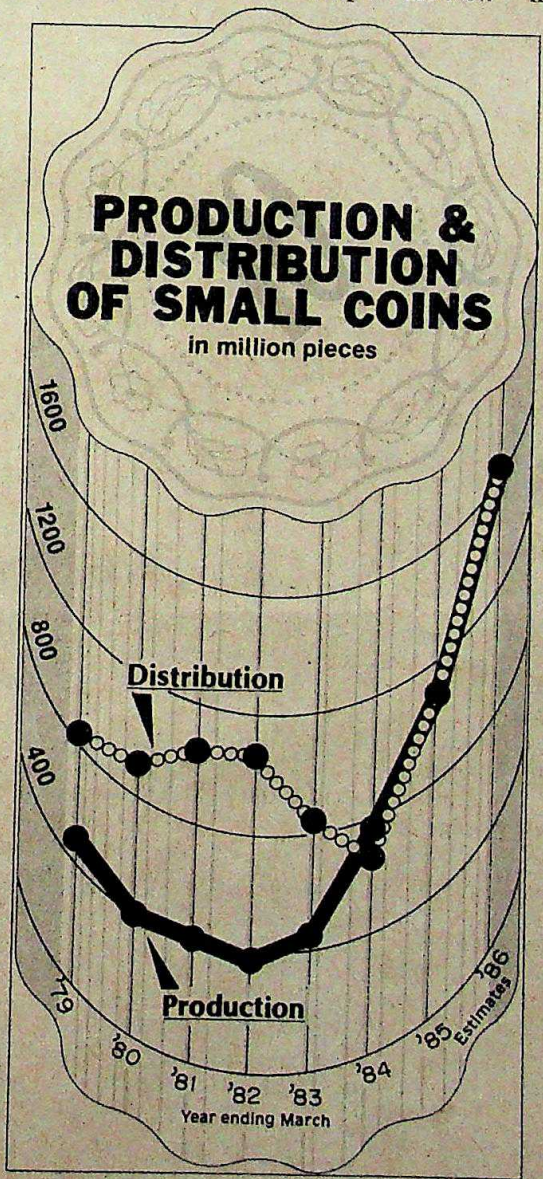

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

However, the import of minted coins was not immediately possible because the Coinage Act stipulates that coins not minted in the country cannot be put into circulation in India. It is likely, therefore, that a bill to amend the act suitably will be placed before Parliament. "If that is done," says an RBI official, "we could tide over the period before the NOIDA plant goes on stream without sweating too much."

But the current crisis is of the Government's own making. Owing to the lack of a formula, the RBI has been assessing the requirement of coins on a yearly, ad hoc basis. With the result that during a coin glut in the second half of the '70s—the RBI distributed 1,544 million pieces in 1973-74 and 717 million in 1977-78—the Government actually toyed with the idea of curtailing production. This was done in 1977-78 and the Government even thought of closing down the Hyderabad mint, the oldest in the country. But demand then rose steeply because, among other things, of a fall in the number of one rupee notes.

Strangely slack in the matter of minting more small money, the Government mints switched to the two-shift system only last year. Besides, the two-rupee coin turned out to be a bitter lemon because it looked exactly like the one rupee variety. Production of this coin was thus halted. Until such time, then, that the Government and the RBI actually get cracking, there will be little change in the present circumstances.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI and PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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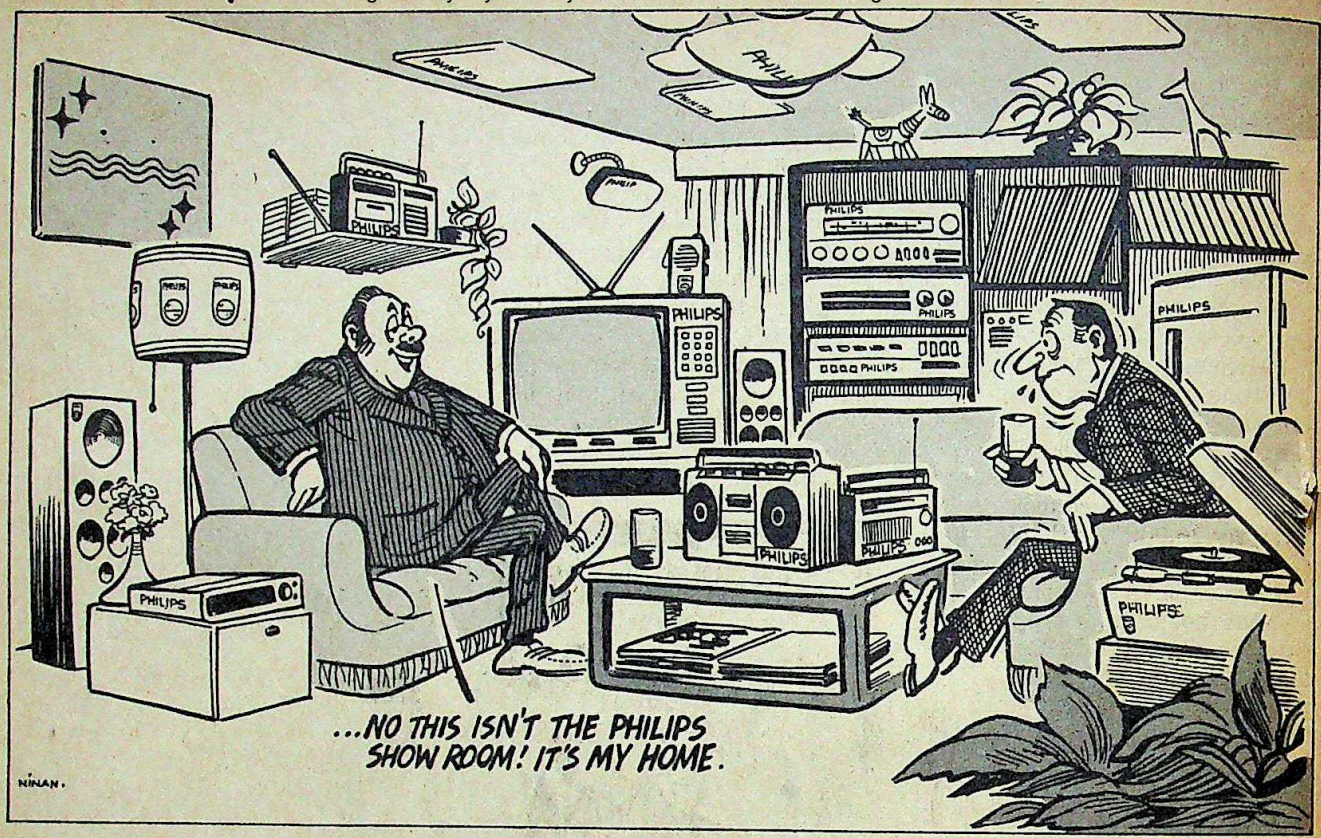

PEICO

Executive Cornucopia

"One owl will suffice to send the garden to seed, what fate awaits it with an owl on every branch?"

A MELANCHOLY couplet in the most unlikely of places: it adorns the cover of a 120-page red book brought out by the Philips Employees Union (PEU). The garden is the electronics leader PEICO Electronics and Electricals Ltd (1984 turnover: Rs 225 crore), better known as Philips India. The owls are senior executives and directors, blessed with fat salaries and perquisites. And perquisites are what the red book is all about. The result of a painstaking ferret job by the PEU, it exposes the jealously-guarded wonderland of managerial and directorial perks and privileges as nothing else has done before. Says Sudhir Vaidya, the chief of PEU's 800-odd members who these days walks around with a black armband and headstrap: "We have documented the manner in which the company's officers milk it for all it is worth."

Everything is here: massive loans at soft interest rates, huge interest-free deposits for executives' flats (quite a few owned by executives themselves), almost-new electronic goodies sold to officers at a tenth of the price, bloated liquor bills, liberal use of company cars, lavish farewell parties and so on. Their story is told, rather like the ache-and-tell letter-novels of pre-Victorian England, in 50-odd letters written over the last nine months to Chairman and Managing Director J. Seelan in language peppered with appealing hyperbole and quotable quotes. When asked if everything set down in cold print was correct, D.N. Ghose, director, personnel and industrial relations, answers: "What they say is perfectly correct. They should know, they have handled the paper themselves." He adds that all the practices and transactions are "auditable and taxable". And that "we have nothing to hide."

The executive cornucopia revealed by the letters is mouth-watering. Loans, for instance: 15 executives owe the company a total of Rs 30 lakh—both principal and interest—in house building loans issued under a scheme for senior executives just below director level. The PEU maintains that several people below the qualifying rank have obtained loans and alleges that after it started exposing them the management hurriedly asked them to pay up and erased them from the list. Many executives acquire flats with the soft loan money and then lease them on exorbitant interest-free deposit terms to the company. In fact, of the 180 flats which Philips has on lease in Bombay with deposits totalling Rs 1.5 crore, no fewer than 25 are leased from company executives, and although Ghose says the company has paid no deposit of over Rs 3 lakh, there are numerous instances of flats, both executive-owned and otherwise, being leased with interest-free deposits of more than that in addition to rent.

The leader is the first-floor flat hired for finance director R.Van Graafeiland, with exclusive swimming-pool and all, which comes with an interest-free deposit of Rs 45 lakh. The book records one senior manager staying in a company flat while his own flat was leased separately to Philips, with Rs 5 lakh paid as deposit. Another appears to have made a business out of this, leasing two flats to the company, and was on the point of negotiating for a third when the union's

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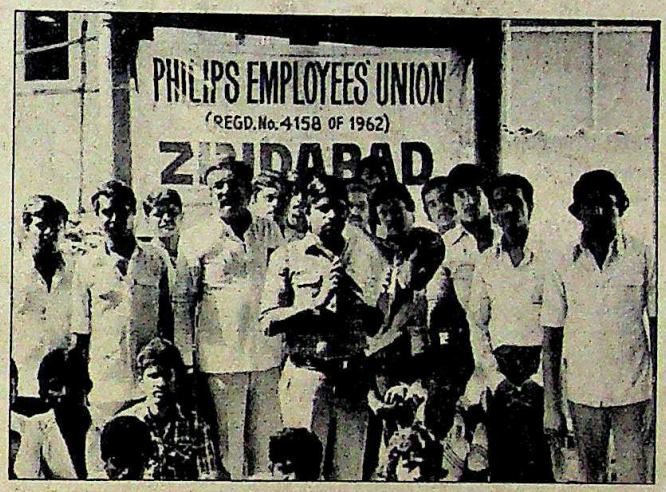
exposés, which began in 1984, apparently caused him to stop short. Ghose himself figures in the list because his son's flat in Calcutta has been leased along with a deposit of Rs 3 lakh. It is used as a transit camp.

The sale of costly equipment at less than give-away prices is another high point of the executive life-style at Philips. Under the "consignment scheme", executives are permitted to keep Philips equipment "belt-fresh" from the factory in their homes, with the option to buy it after three years or on retirement at 10 per cent of the original price—or at 40 per cent if the stuff was obtained less than a year earlier. But one senior executive when he retired took away Rs 26,000 worth of goods, including a 286-litre refrigerator for Rs 2,600 plus sales tax though he had received the consignment less than a year earlier. A director purchased Rs 4,000 worth of furniture which would have brought in at least five times that sum had tender bids been called for—but before he was appointed director—for afterwards the purchase would have required the permission of the company law board. Says Ghose: "We give the equipment for display in their homes so that guests can come into contact with our latest products." Retorts PEU General Secretary Kiron Mehta: "Are executive flats supposed to be showrooms and bargain basements?"

The list of perks runs on and on. About 50 executives in Philips are allowed company cars, and also to buy them at discount rates when they leave. A 1978 Ambassador went four years later for Rs 15,000, a 1981 Premier Padmini in 1983 for Rs 20,000, a 1982 Ambassador in 1984 for Rs 30,000. One such deal is especially revealing: an Ambassador car was bought in January 1982 at Rs 80,000 for the then technical director. Another Rs 16,000 was spent on accessories, including an air-conditioner. Two years later, the technical director resigned from Philips India and was slated for an assignment with the parent company in Holland. He bought the car, at a price which the letter is "ashamed to name" and requested that it be delivered to his brother in Pondicherry. A company driver was given Rs 3,000 and drove the car to Pondicherry in 15 days.

The high travel bills and other incidentals pale in front of such privileges, but one episode is worth mentioning. Senior executives on transfer to Bombay regularly run up tens of thousands of rupees in hotel bills. However, one officer in the advertising department took the cake. He is based in Bombay, and was to shift to another flat. While his flat was being done up he stayed in a local five-star hotel with his family, the company paying Rs 4,610 for four days stay. He then submitted a travel expense statement which stated that he had "visited Bombay".

Executive life is incomplete without entertainment and this is where Philips, or rather its bosses, does itself proud. Ghose admits that they buy foreign liquor from a "bootlegger" because it costs 40 per cent less than the "receipted" price. Currently, Philips has in stock 200-odd bottles which union officers claim have been hastily shifted from their resting place in the building to a discreet cupboard in one of the directors' homes. Most of the liquor appears to have been consumed by the Dutchmen, going by the vouchers. In one instance a director spent an evening with a guest over soft drinks and sent in a voucher for Rs 120.



Protesting employees: baring the perks

Parting is sweet sorrow, but Philips does everything it can to sweeten the separation. One manager, technical services, left Philips in mid-1984. The annual report shows he was grossing Rs 1,77,865 yearly. Besides lavish farewell parties, with the fun and games captured on video, he received Rs 3,000—towards a retirement gift, something nice in silver and his flat that had been leased to the company was renovated with new plumbing for Rs 45,000. He bought the company car, a cooking range and an air-conditioner at a hefty discount, carted away Rs 30,000 worth of electronics goods at a tenth of the price, and to top it all was paid Rs 3,000 for the month that he stayed elsewhere. Then he went and joined Philips' brash new competitor Orson Electronics Ltd the day after he retired.

Perks are an old story in executive circles—every company worth its salt pampers its bosses—but the PEU campaign has set a disturbing precedent. Although Seelan and his deputies shrug off the exposés as "nothing new" and "perfectly above-board" they are clearly disturbed and angered by the turn management-union relations have taken. At the moment the campaign is confined to the 800-member PEU, one of eight Philips unions, but company insiders fear that it could spread elsewhere. Says Ghose: "The letter campaign is designed to cut down our authority and establish a parallel power base." Vaidya denies this: "Our only objective is to save the company."

The rich-poor divide is not conspicuous in Philips. The 1984 annual report lists nearly 3,000 employees who earned over Rs 36,000. Among them is P.B. Saha, a junior assistant, who grossed Rs 39,860 and whose listed qualification is that he "can read and write." Admits Mehta: "I know that what I get here I can't get anywhere else." Adds Ramamrutham: "Even a sweeper collects Rs 2,500 a month."

Meanwhile, things are getting hotter. Last fortnight a union office-bearer was booked on the charge that he had asked an officer why he was looking at him: "*baghtos kai*" in Marathi. Vaidya brandishes a letter from the prime minister's office which says that the matter has been referred to the appropriate authorities. Unions of other companies including an engineering firm and a chemicals manufacturer were taking lessons from PEU on the novel strategy. And the Philips management in an effort to avoid future embarassment, has finally carted all sensitive documents away to a warehouse in the suburb and currently only one officer is in charge of all such transactions. But that is like closing the stable door when the horse has bolted.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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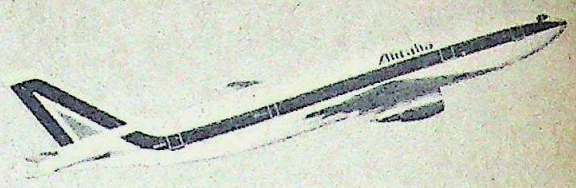

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SUGAR

A Brewing Crisis

FOR THOSE with a sweet tooth, the message was bitter indeed. The attention-grabbing advertisements that hit mainline dailies last fortnight warned that a sugar scarcity was round the corner, prices would hit the roof and the industry itself was in bad shape.

The advertisements, launched by the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), were not far off the mark. Sugar prices are poised to climb in the next few months from the current Rs 6 a kg to Rs 8 or higher. With open market sale stocks whittled down by government profligacy to less than two months' supply levels, the market cannot be fed adequately. Says an independent industry analyst: "We have to live with sugar priced at Rs 8 to Rs 9 a kg for the next one and a half years." And the industry is running scared that it will be blamed for the coming price surge. As an ISMA official puts it: "Sugar prices will go up and the industry will get a bad name for no fault of its own." Prices would shoot up even more were the Government not committed to a rescue act. Five lakh tonnes of sugar is being imported (four shiploads have already arrived) and anything over another five lakh tonnes is planned to be indented abroad.

Sugar prices have so far been pegged at artificially low levels by the Government, and the industry has been squeezed by low returns and high cane costs. The result, the industry claims, is that it has incurred a loss of Rs 800 crore in the last three years. While the figure may or may not be taken at face value, many sugar mills are working at below breakeven point. And with prices low, sugar consumption has outpaced production last year and this year. Worse, the Government has no cushion to fall back on since its buffer stock has been wiped out.

Clearly, a crisis is building up in the open sugar market (there is more than enough sugar to feed the ration shops). And the culprit here is the Government. The total amount of sugar available is supposed to be released by factories for distribution to ration shops and the free market in a 65:35 proportion. This is done on the basis of monthly release orders issued by the Union Food and Civil Supplies Ministry. Extra sugar is released every year in the September to December festival months, but last year even more than the usual amount was dumped in the market (*see chart*) in the months before the elections. And instead of tapering off supplies after January as has been the practice in previous years, the tempo has only slackened.

One explanation could be that the Government initially reckoned that sugar output would be in the region of 70 lakh tonnes, 11 lakh tonnes more than last year's production. But the production estimate was later lowered to around 62 lakh tonnes. Yet the Government blithely went on releasing generous quantities of sugar, though it must have been aware that a crisis was brewing. Last October the buffer stock of 10 lakh tonnes had been wiped out and the sugar year opened that month with a three-year stock low of 23.8 lakh tonnes. The Government imported a million tonnes in two lots, but even this was not enough to match the increased releases into the market. Quite evidently, prudence went out of the window in the desire to keep the consumer happy by pegging sugar prices low.

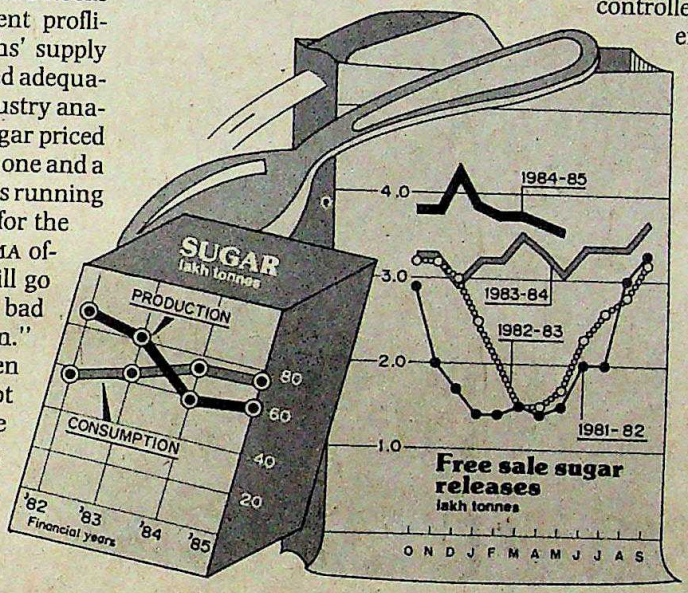

Chart by B.K.SHARMA

Pradeep Narang, managing director of Jagatjit Sugar Mills Co which runs sugar mills in Punjab, questions what he calls "the Government's obsession with keeping free sale sugar prices down." Narang and others in the industry say that over 80 per cent of the sugar sold in the open market is bought by bulk consumers like confectioners and soft drink manufacturers—and they can afford to shell out more.

The official position on the latest crisis is that there is no crisis, and there is enough of the sweetener to go around. Strictly speaking, that is true. The 83.8 lakh tonnes of sugar (this includes the carry-over stock but excludes imports) available at the beginning of the sugar year could easily meet the estimated consumption of around 75 lakh tonnes. Over 30 lakh tonnes of "levy" sugar is now available for distribution through the public distribution system at the controlled price of Rs 4.40 a kg. That is enough and more to maintain supplies at the normal monthly rate of 3.13 lakh tonnes till November. Where the crunch comes is in the free sale quota, and the Government is moving to fill the void by importing sugar.

The sugar industry is plugging the line that the shortage can be overcome if it is allowed to sell the surplus levy sugar in the open market. That would also help mills to recoup some of their losses on levy sugar. And industry men press home the point that imported sugar should be routed to ration shops to avoid the hanky-panky and sky-high prices of five years ago when sugar bought abroad was channelled to the open market. The Government has not so far bought these arguments. While it has the option of permitting mills to sell surplus levy sugar in the open market if prices get out of hand, it is wary of giving the green signal lest that should open the floodgates to profiteering by the industry. So the official strategy for the moment is to import sugar and get tough with traders who hoard sugar.

That may help tide over the shortage for the time being. But the industry's basic problem of low returns (levy sugar prices have risen far less than the issue prices of wheat and common variety rice) remains unresolved, by year-end sugar import bills for last year and this year will cross Rs 200 crore—all reflecting a paisa wise, rupee foolish approach which does not help the consumer in the long run.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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PRICES

Reaching a New High

THE EUPHORIA is over. With prices hitting the roof, worried housewives across the nation are discovering that they have to spend more to run their homes than before the Central budget was presented in mid-March. And though lower income tax rates may have put more money into people's pockets, the additional cash often doesn't cover the fatter bills that have now to be footed. Says vexed Delhi housewife Usha Jain: "The budget liberalisations were an eyewash. We saved Rs 100 on income tax, but have to spend another Rs 300 to run our home—and that excludes clothes, medicines and entertainment." Urmila Vaidya, the wife of a government official in the capital, reckons that she now forks out at least Rs 250 to Rs 300 a month more (*see chart*) to keep her household going.

The budget has certainly nudged up prices. Food and Civil Supplies Minister Birendra Singh conceded in Parliament last month that the price rise could be traced to budget levies and earlier increases in "administered" prices. Official statistics too support the contention. The wholesale price index shot up by almost 2.5 per cent four weeks after the budget, possibly one of the biggest price surges since Charan Singh's budget of 1979. Price increases at the retail level may be higher. Indian Express price lists published a week before the budget and five weeks after show that dal prices have risen by 34 to 70 per cent, basmati rice by 47 per cent, sugar by 7 per cent and dhania powder by 11 per cent, though the prices of a few items like some varieties of rice have fallen too.

Budget levies have certainly contributed to the higher prices, but a host of other factors also are at play, including perhaps traders with an eye on the main chance of jacking up prices disproportionately. Undeniably, manufacturers have passed on the new taxes levied on them along with additional input costs. With petroleum prices up, petroleum byproducts become more expensive. Because naphtha is thus more expensive, plastics have become 14 to 15 per cent more costly, which in turn pushes up packaging costs. Vanaspati, for example, on which the Government has slapped another 5 per cent excise, retails for more than that because companies have to shell out fatter sums for the galvanised iron and steel drums in which it is transported. Explains J.C. Kapur, executive director of Shriram Foods and Fertiliser Industries, which produces vanaspati and chemicals: "All the inputs are more expensive. Railway freight, diesel, petrol and power rates have risen sharply." He estimates that factories in Delhi will be paying an additional Rs 55 crore because power rates were recently raised.

The story is repeated in other industries like chemicals and paper. And though downstream industries may not pass on all the costs, they will pass on some. In steel, prices have been raised twice during 1984-85, by 15 per cent.

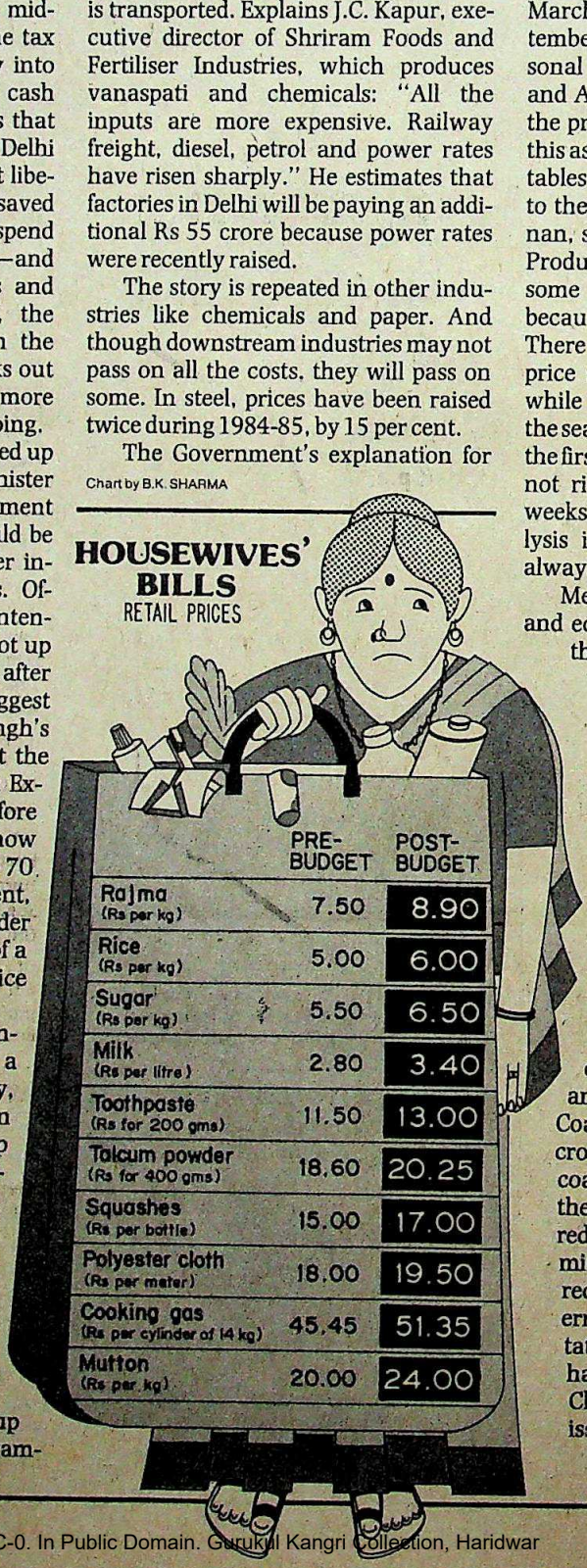
The Government's explanation for the latest bout of inflation is that, while budget levies have contributed to higher prices, much of the price rise is seasonal. The Finance Ministry reckons on the basis of 12-year statistics that prices shoot up every year between March and August before tumbling from September onwards. Says Bimal Jalan, chief economic adviser to the Government: "What happens to the annual rate of inflation depends not on what occurs between March and August, but between September and March." He adds that seasonal price variations between March and August account for 4.2 per cent of the price rise. One cannot quarrel with this assessment, for prices of fruits, vegetables and edible oils fluctuate according to the time of the year. P.S.S. Narayanan, secretary of the Indian Vanaspati Producers' Association, points out that some edible oil prices have climbed because kharif oil supplies are drying up. There is also some evidence that the price spurt may be already over. For while the wholesale price index minus the seasonal factor rose by 1.9 per cent in the first two weeks after the budget, it did not rise at all in the following three weeks. The problem with such an analysis is that wholesale prices do not always reflect the reality of retail prices.

Meanwhile government officials and economists argue that the bulk of the post-budget price spurt is accounted for by petroleum (0.83 per cent) and sugar (0.13 percent).

Some of these arguments are clearly valid, but official calculations could be turned topsy-turvy by the purchasing power that has been or will be pumped into the economy. The personal tax concessions amount to some Rs 200 crore, and dearness allowance (DA) payments have fattened the wallets of Government employees. The rate of DA and the ceiling on bonus have been raised, and one public sector undertaking, Coal India, stands to lose Rs 200 crore on these and other counts. So coal prices may have to be raised if the company is not to wind up in the red this year. The Fourth Pay Commission report is also expected to recommend higher salaries for government employees. Finally, expectations of fresh price increases may have been fixed in the public mind. Clearly, inflation has become a hot issue in a season of discontent.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



	PRE-BUDGET	POST-BUDGET
Rajma (Rs per kg)	7.50	8.90
Rice (Rs per kg)	5.00	6.00
Sugar (Rs per kg)	5.50	6.50
Milk (Rs per litre)	2.80	3.40
Toothpaste (Rs for 200 gms)	11.50	13.00
Talcum powder (Rs for 400 gms)	18.60	20.25
Squashes (Rs per bottle)	15.00	17.00
Polyester cloth (Rs per meter)	18.00	19.50
Cooking gas (Rs per cylinder of 14 kg)	45.45	51.35
Mutton (Rs per kg)	20.00	24.00

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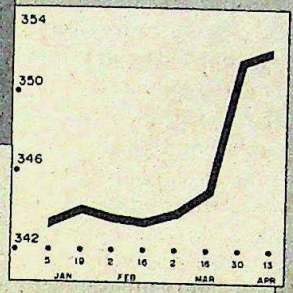
AN UPTURN in industrial production coupled with bullish tendencies in the share market present a rosier picture for industry. The sharp price increase immediately following the budget has now petered out with no inflation recorded last fortnight. *ALL DATA are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.*

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend **6.3% p.a.**

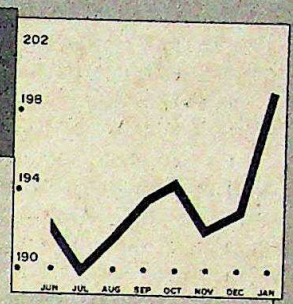


Following the post-budget spurt prices have now begun to level off recording virtually no increase in the last fortnight.

Industrial Production Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend **5.7% p.a.**

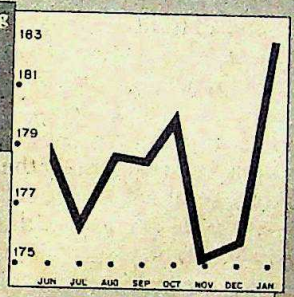


Industrial production showed signs of recovery with a sharp increase in the last month mainly due to manufacturing and mining.

Manufacturing Output Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend **1.3% p.a.**

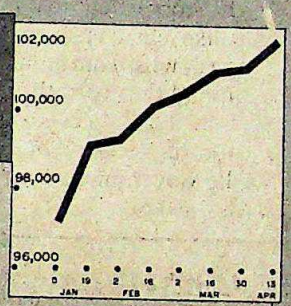


Impressive growth last month reversed a period of deceleration in manufacturing output. Electrical machinery, textiles are languishing.

Money Supply (M3)

Rs. Crores

Current Trend **18.1% p.a.**

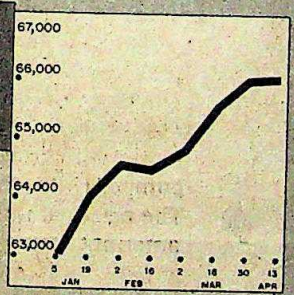


Money supply rose substantially by 0.8 per cent last fortnight due mainly to an increase in government borrowings from commercial banks.

Comercial Bank Credit

Rs. Crores

Current Trend **13.0% p.a.**

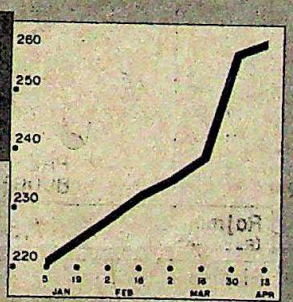


Tightness in the credit market continued. Credit rose by less than 0.5 per cent last fortnight reinforcing the decelerating long term trend.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend **38.3% p.a.**

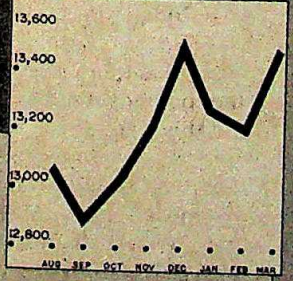


Buoyancy in the share market continued with shipping and aluminium securities rising sharply. Tea, rubber shares indicated a slow down.

Power Generation

Million Kwh.

Current Trend **5.3% p.a.**

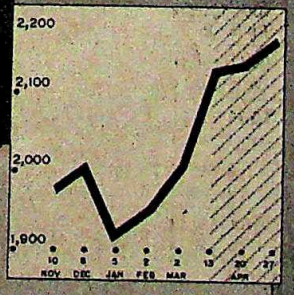


Power generation showed a slight upturn last month after several months of stagnation thanks to nuclear power.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs. Per 10 gms.

Current Trend **15.6% p.a.**



A sharp increase of 1.5 per cent continued the long run bullish trend in gold prices that are now rising faster than the rate of inflation.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Items with maximum growth in December 1984

	%Growth
Beverage Industries	30.85
Pens & Pencils	30.68
Tea	24.04
Construction Machinery	21.78
Motor Cars	20.92
Fine Chemicals	20.36
Dairy Products	19.90
Mining Machinery	18.75
Leather Products	15.55
Buses, Trucks & Jeeps	14.62
(Basic) Iron & Steel	13.27
Coffee Curing Works	12.87
Tobacco Manufacture	11.06
Newsprint	10.45
Glue & Gelatine	10.04
Storage Batteries	9.66
Dye-stuffs	9.34
Watches & Clocks	9.06
Paper & Straw Board	9.04
Vanaspati	8.50
Tyres & Tubes	7.99
Surveying, Instruments	7.86
Salt	7.53
Motorcycles & Bicycles	7.40
Sugar Factories & Refineries	6.87
Fertilizers	6.71
Man-made Fibre,	6.53
Soaps & Glycerine	6.38
Petroleum & Coal Products	6.37
Insecticides	5.79
Electrical Fans	5.72
Structurals Iron & Steel	5.51
Jewelry Manufacture	5.47
Writing, Printing & Wrapping Paper	4.51
Rubber Footwear	4.39
Cement Machinery	3.71
Typewriters & Duplicators	3.45
Razor Blades	3.16
Mining & Quarrying	3.09
Industrial Instruments	2.83
Int Combustion Engines	2.69
Saw Mills	2.21
Synthetic Resins & Plastics	2.14
Electric Light & Power	2.06
Hurricane Lanterns	1.93
Sugar Machinery	1.29
Grain Mill Products	1.28

Of 119 series considered, the growth of 55 with a total weight of 55.3 has accelerated and the growth of 64 with a total weight of 39.2 has decelerated.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1985	1984
Fertilizers Thousand Tonnes, March	484.0	447.3
Rail Movement Million Net tonnes Km, March	16832	15934
Letters of Intent Number, March	263	90
Industrial Licences Numbers, March	67	89
Call Money Rate Per Cent March	10.0	10.0

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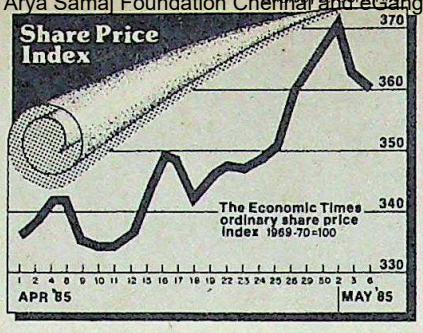
THE STOCK MARKET

Levelling Out



THE STOCK-market has at last reacted as it was bound to do and a technical correction has set in. The bulls are apparently anxious to reduce their commitments lest prices fall further. Some scrips have doubled in less than a month, even the so-called blue chips which often behave in a snooty fashion and are chary of moving with the herd. But some market circles have at last realised that after taking into account all prospects the prices had reached levels justified by the narrowing yields. In some cases, the yield was just 2 to 3 per cent.

There was obviously a lot of money about and not all of it could have come from the home market. The non-residents were evidently busy picking up volatile scrips and making money while the going was good. And so were the institutional investors who must have been astonished to find that the market could absorb anything that came on offer. It is possible that the current reaction may be short-lived while the markets catch up with the political situation.

However, it is unlikely that the market will ever go back to square one. The psychological factor is important. Our simple-minded analysts do not seem to appreciate the tremendous sense of release with which every announcement of decontrol is greeted in the corporate world and which must ultimately influence corporate performance. If it is computers or electronics today, it could be something else tomorrow, for there is nothing like hope to keep the share prices ticking.

Good days are ahead for the pharmaceutical companies if the new drug policy to be announced shortly is any guide. The committee which was formed to take an overall view of the pricing mechanism has apparently suggested an increase in the mark-ups from the current 45-55 per cent to 65-75 per cent, an increase of 35 to 45 per cent. The new policy will also make production of essential drugs compulsory, which may or may not be a good thing, as far as share prices are concerned, but which will certainly help those companies which are already in the essential drug business. Share prices of most pharmaceutical companies have been going up recently, Glaxo, for instance, having gained Rs 10 in the last one month or so. Cyanamid is also doing well, and so is Ranbaxy, though the latter could have done better had it come out with a bonus issue. But the new policy should help companies like Alembic.

A good deal of course depends on the financial institutions which have taken a breather as prices are on the high side. But once the bear hammering is over, they should also take a plunge and let the bulls in, unless the authorities take fright and close the gates, which they do from time to time when things are going a little too fast for them.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1985 HIGH	1985 LOW	1985 CLOSE 2.5.85	Change on Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	38.00	29.00	38.00	0.50 +
Associated Cement	474.00	382.00	460.00	2.00 +
Atlas Copco	52.00	37.50	48.00	7.00 +
Avery India	74.00	56.00	72.00	2.00 –
Bajaj Auto	1,310.00	855.00	1310.00	85.00 +
Ballarpur	49.25	44.00	49.25	2.00 +
Baroda Rayon	375.00	281.00	375.00	15.00 +
Bata India	64.80	48.00	64.30	5.55 +
Bayer	395.00	305.00	340.00	15.00 +
Best & Crompton	81.00	61.00	78.50	2.50 –
Bharat Forge	53.00	35.50	48.00	2.00 +
Blow Plast	55.00	39.00	50.00	1.50 +
Blue Star	46.00	32.50	46.00	3.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	132.50	63.00	132.50	43.50 +
Brooke Bond	65.00	47.50	63.00	5.00 +
Ceat Tyres	210.00	180.00	195.00	5.00 –
Century Spinning	945.00	805.00	945.00	30.00 +
Chloride India	83.50	56.90	82.75	4.75 +
Citurgia	54.00	32.25	51.50	1.00 –
Colgate	272.00	143.50	268.00	2.00 –
Cyanamid	66.00	33.00	64.00	9.00 +
DCM	86.50	45.00	73.50	4.50 –
Dunlop	29.00	22.30	25.00	2.00 –
Elecon	88.00	54.00	86.00	4.00 +
Escorts	67.00	49.87	62.00	3.50 –
Finolex Cables	29.00	23.00	26.25	1.50 +
Food Specialities	154.00	86.00	148.50	20.50 +
Garware Nylon	39.00	24.50	38.50	1.00 +
Glaxo	48.50	24.00	48.50	7.50 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	655.00	533.00	655.00	47.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	64.00	53.75	58.50	2.50 –
Hindustan Lever	90.00	50.75	89.00	1.00 –
Hindustan Motors	48.20	38.24	46.80	0.80 +
Indian Cable	31.25	21.75	31.25	2.50 +
Indian Explosives	54.00	33.00	53.75	2.00 +
Indian Hotels	114.00	76.00	112.00	1.00 –
Indian Organic	79.00	50.25	79.00	2.00 +
Indian Rayon	91.00	63.50	91.00	13.00 +
Indrol	165.00	90.50	155.00	7.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	221.00	159.00	220.00	5.00 +
ITC	36.20	29.00	34.00	2.00 +
J K Synthetics	69.60	52.20	69.25	4.10 +
Kinetic Engineering	208.00	127.00	200.00	22.00 +
Kirloskar Oil	33.00	24.50	24.00	1.75 –
Lakme	94.00	74.00	91.00	16.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	117.00	72.00	112.00	10.00 +
Lipton	40.10	26.50	39.00	3.25 +
Lohia Machines	56.00	42.00	54.75	0.75 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	63.00	47.50	60.00	6.50 +
Motor Industries	435.00	315.00	422.50	32.50 +
Mysore Cement	36.00	30.00	36.00	2.00 +
National Organic	337.50	240.00	337.50	27.50 +
Nirlon	55.00	37.00	55.00	3.00 +
Pelco Electronics	75.00	38.40	74.60	6.60 +
Premier Auto	408.00	310.00	408.00	40.00 +
Ranbaxy	92.00	49.00	92.00	6.00 +
Raymond	92.00	59.00	92.00	11.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	75.00	57.00	75.00	6.00 +
Reliance Textiles	197.00	120.00	195.00	8.00 +
Sandoz	55.00	31.00	50.00	2.00 –
Shriram Fibres	47.00	34.00	45.00	2.00 –
SPIC	80.00	43.50	80.00	2.88 +
Tata Steel	624.00	373.50	616.00	64.00 +
Telco	577.00	406.00	577.00	22.00 +
Vulcan Laval	101.00	64.00	101.00	18.00 +
20th Century Leasing	74.00	31.50	68.00	8.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.4297	8.2227
Austria	Schilling	100	56:3840	54.9930
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.6818	32.9934
Bangladesh	Taka	1	0.4867	0.4522
Canada	Dollar	1	9.2006	9.0174
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1009	1.0789
Egypt	Pound	1	not available	
France	Franc	1	1.2955	1.2707
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6314	1.5987
Indonesia	Rupiah	1	0.0114	0.0107
Iran	Rial	1	0.1321	0.1283
Italy	Lira	1	0.6223	0.6088
Japan	Yen	100	5.0080	4.9065
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7900	0.7447
Kuwait	Dinar	1	41.7813	40.9014
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0995	4.9935
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8107	0.7688
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6886	0.6460
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.4975	3.4265
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7990	0.7648
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6801	5.5632
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0711	0.0695
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4649	0.4497
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3827	1.3547
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.6846	4.5869
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7159	0.6738
Thailand	Baht	1	0.4621	0.4559
UK	Pound	1	15.0681	15.3421
USA	Dollar	1	12.6500	12.9025
UAE	Dirham	1	3.4353	3.2149
USSR	Rouble	1	14.4146	14.1356
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.9490	3.8675

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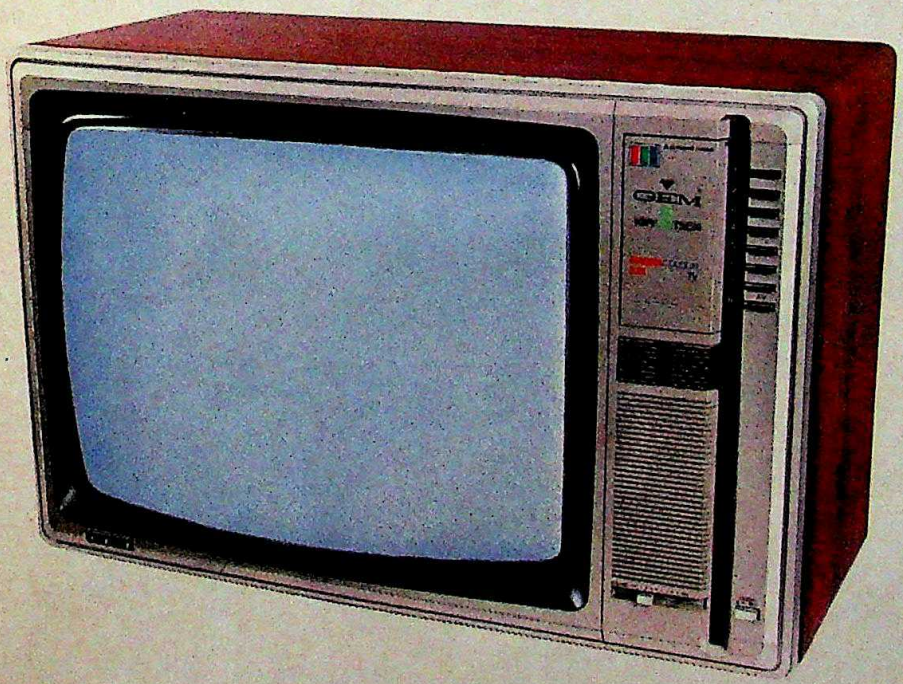

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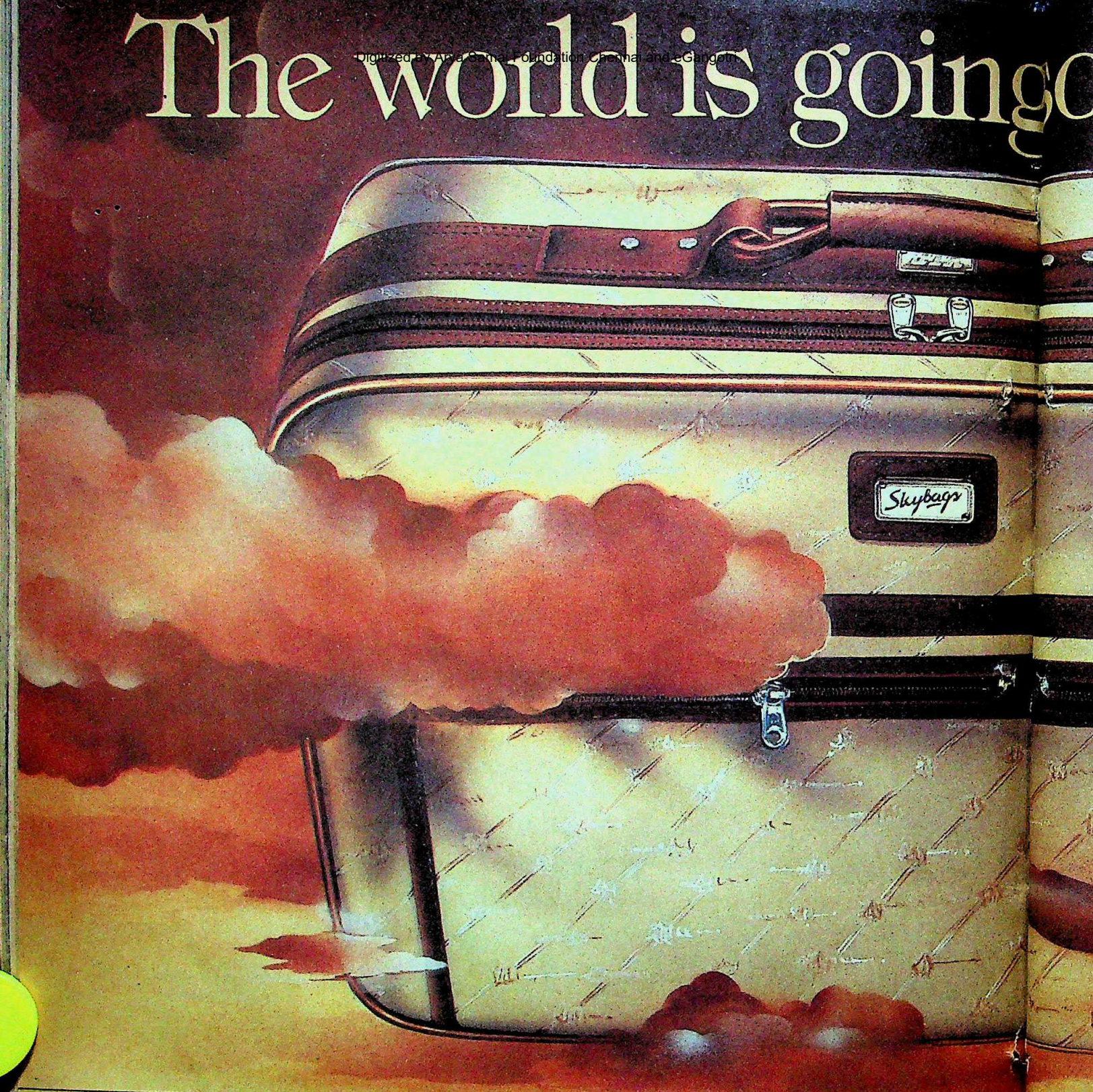
The world is going G



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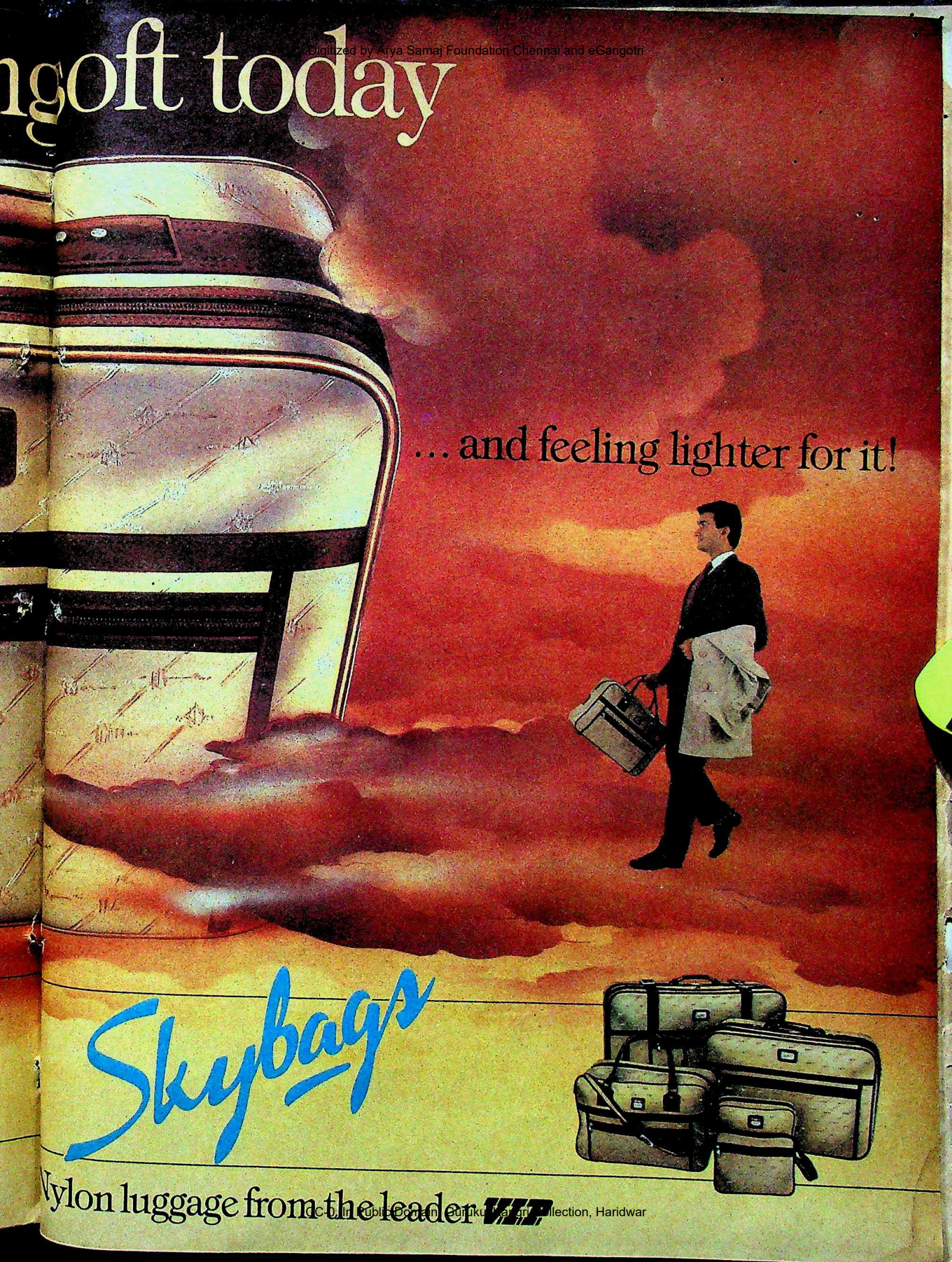

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TELUGU GANGA PROJECT

Pipe Dream?

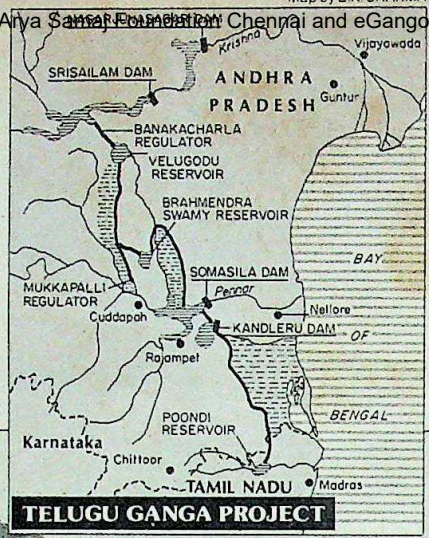
MUCH hoopla attended the signing of the Telugu Ganga accord between Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in April 1983. And when chief ministers M.G. Ramachandran and N.T. Rama Rao exchanged pens as souvenirs of the historic agreement the future certainly looked rosy. The ambitious multi-crore-rupee scheme was expected to irrigate arid areas of Andhra Pradesh and bring much-needed water to thirsty Madras city. However, even amidst the initial euphoria there were some who predicted that the project would be a financial sink-hole.

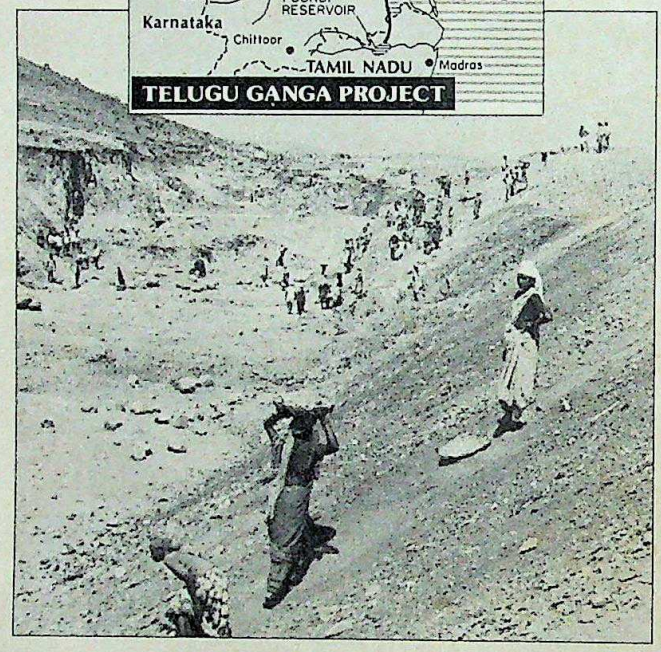
It turned out the naysayers weren't far off the mark. Very little has happened on the project in the ensuing two years and today the expected completion date—before 1990—seems to be extremely unrealistic. Though fulsome in his praise of the accord as an example of regional cooperation, Rama Rao has not put his money where his mouth is. Andhra Pradesh's resources crunch has not helped, so that contractors are reluctant to start work fearing delayed payments, and uncertainty about when agencies like the Planning Commission and the Central Water and Power Commission will give their approval has also hampered progress.

Tamil Nadu, predictably, showed greater enthusiasm at the start, and its cheque of Rs 30 crore towards the Rs 688-crore total cost of the project came a month after the accord was signed. But only Rs 9 crore was spent on the project by Andhra Pradesh that year and the rest was used to adjust its poor ways and means position. Wiser by that experience, Tamil Nadu held back further payments till it was convinced work on the project had picked up momentum. In 1984-85 Andhra Pradesh asked for another Rs 15 crore, which it received. Rupees 45 crore was then spent on buying machinery and excavation.

But at the start of this financial year Tamil Nadu discovered, much to its chagrin, that it had spent five times as much as Andhra Pradesh on the canal project.

Map by B.K. SHARMA





Work underway on the TGP: tardy progress

The matter came up in the Tamil Nadu Assembly last month, and state Agriculture Minister K. Kalimuthu was forced to assure members that Andhra Pradesh had been pressed to make adequate funds of its own available in the seventh plan, so that more water would be available for Madras "in the near future". The minister may have been a bit too optimistic, for Andhra Pradesh must set apart at least Rs 100 crore a year for the project till 1990.

The Telugu Ganga Project (TGP) is based on the concept of tapping excess floodwater during the heavy 45-day monsoon near Srisailam and carrying it through the Srisailam left branch canal passing through Kurnool and Cuddapah districts. It will then be dropped into the Pennar river at Chennumukapalli village, also in Cuddapah district. The flow down the river will be picked up at the Somasila dam and then passed on to the Kandaleru reservoir before it finally reaches Madras.

However, the slow pace of work in some districts and the pronounced activity at Somasila has deepened suspicions among some Rayalaseema residents that they may not get the water. The project plans to carry water to irrigate 5.80 lakh hectares of dry crops, but not paddy, in Kurnool, Cuddapah, Nellore and Chittoor districts of Andhra Pradesh and supply 15 TMC for the Madras city drinking water supply system. Allaying the Rayalaseema residents fears, project officials argue that the delay is caused by the wait for the National Environment Board's sanction for working on forest lands.

Rama Rao's lukewarm attitude to spending money on the project has given a weapon to those politicians interested in accusing his government of neglect. Says Congress (I) leader in the state Assembly M. Baga Reddy: "If Rama Rao does not give up the lopsided priorities on ineffective welfare schemes the state will be drained of its finances and the Telugu Ganga Project will be a late 20th century dream."

And indeed, though the project was initially touted as an example of regional self-help it soon became obvious that regional resources will be strained in putting it into effect. Later Rama Rao wanted the Central Government to pitch in. The Centre refused, pointing out that funds for irrigation are the responsibility of the states. Rama Rao next spoke of approaching the World Bank for aid. The only certainty is that the state is not sure where the funds will come from even if the project is delayed.

Says the TGP Board Chairman A. Krishnaswamy: "If the project is to be hit by the resources crunch it may well be realistic to set a fresh deadline for its completion." And discussions among various departments of the project seem to be a dialogue of the dumb unless the availability of funds is made known by the state Government. Rama Rao seems to be in no hurry and if Tamil Nadu presses hard it may be given water from the Pennar river long before the TGP is completed. With all the hurdles in the way of the project, it seems Rama Rao will have to renege on at least one of his promises.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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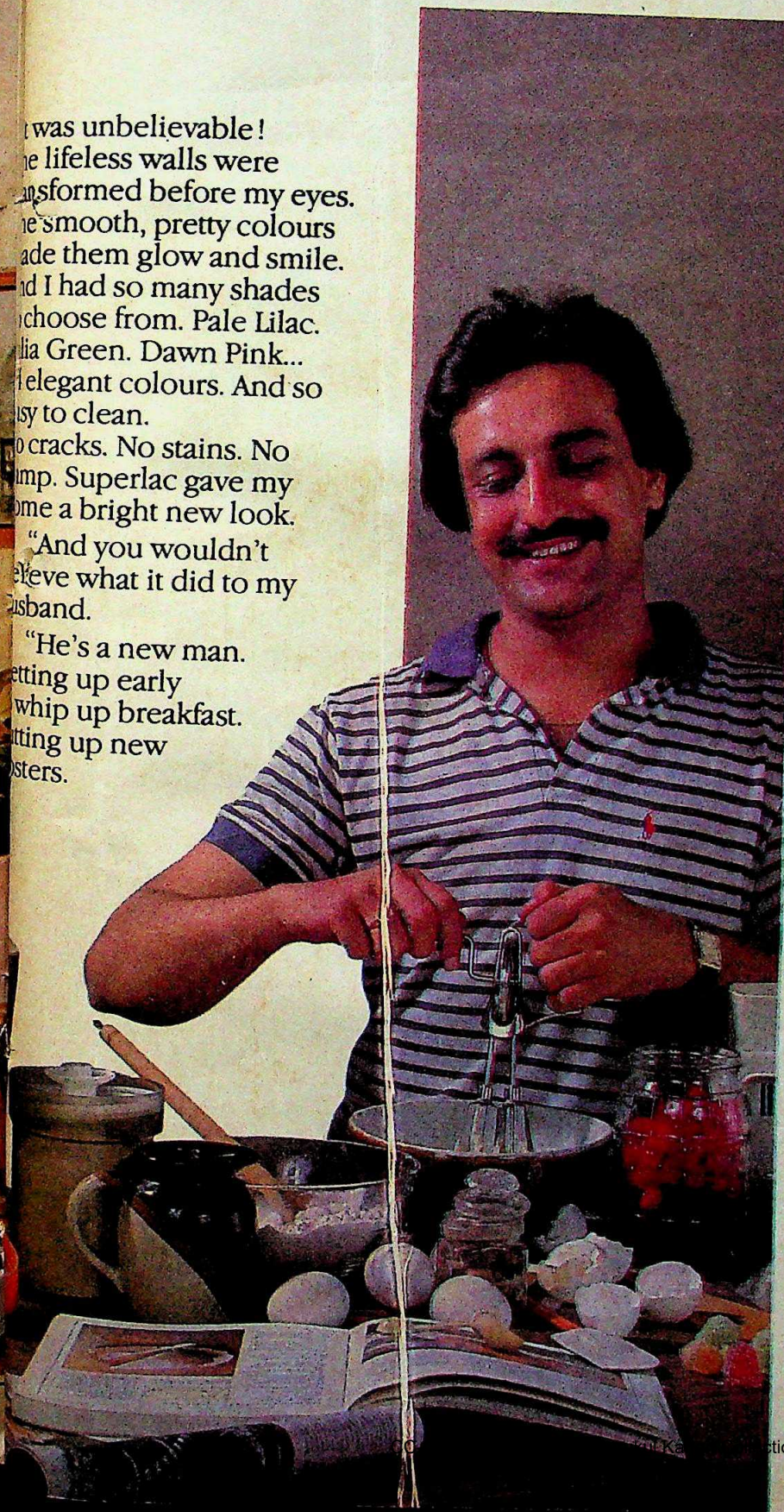
...well, just look at him!"



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Scooters India Limited

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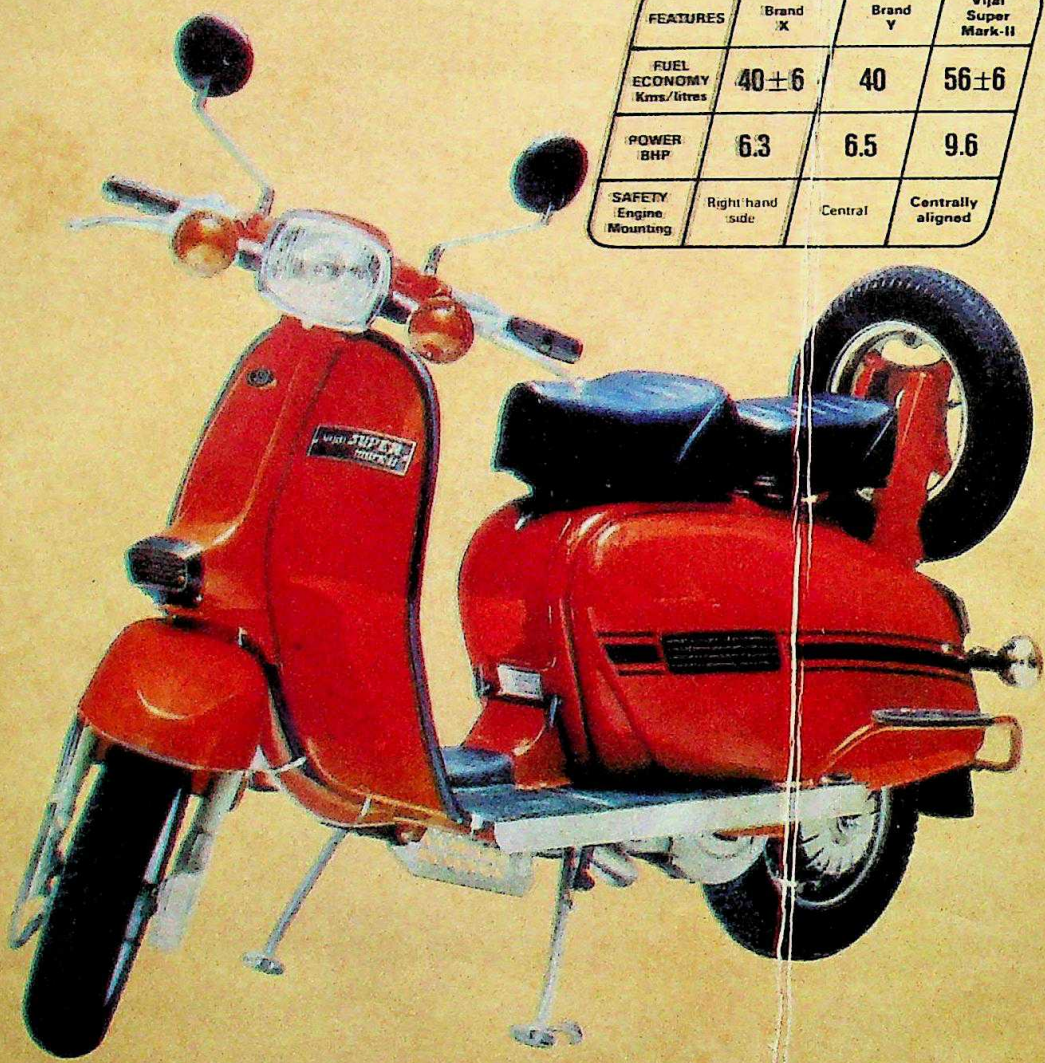
FEATURES	Brand X	Brand Y	Vijai Super Mark-II
FUEL ECONOMY Kms/litres	40±6	40	56±6
POWER BHP	6.3	6.5	9.6
SAFETY Engine Mounting	Right hand side	Central	Centrally aligned



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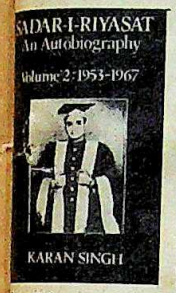
Princely Path

SADAR-I-RIYASAT
An Autobiography Vol 2: 1953-1967
BY KARAN SINGH
Oxford Press
Price: Rs 100; Pages: 168



THE TITLE of the book, the second volume of Karan Singh's absorbing autobiography, is somewhat misleading. The author was indeed *Sadar-i-Riyasat* or head of the state of embattled Kashmir throughout he 14-year period covered in the book ut that is only partly what the book is bout. It is more in the nature of a discovery of India, albeit a discovery with a mall d, just as Nehru's Discovery of ndia was with a capital D. As Singh nakes clear on nearly every page, Vehru is his mentor and the author not nly hews closely to the Nehru line in ndian as well as international politics ut seems to have unconsciously dopted the master's style too.

Nehru dies three years before the ook ends but he dominates the book ght from the very first page—Nehru is nentioned thrice on page 1—until the nd when the author is sworn in as tousm and civil aviation minister in Indira andhi's first cabinet. In between, Singh spends 14 years in Srinagar but it clear that his heart is not in the job, ther because it is not demanding ough or because he is merely a standfigure, while strings, and often heavy pes, are being pulled all the time from e city of Delhi.

Within a week of Sheikh Abdullah's ster and the installation of Bakshi hulam Mohammed as prime minister Jammu and Kashmir, Nehru meets kistan's prime minister Mohammad in Delhi and the two issue a curious tement approving the appointment a Plebiscite Administrator within e months. And all this behind the ck of the *Sadar-i-Riyasat* or even kshi, who, until he spoiled his copyok by making too much money, was lhi's latest blue-eyed boy. Bakshi res s and scores of VIP telephones are ged in Delhi and Srinagar, including or two in Teen Murti, but the crisis is defused, as are many others that follow in quick succession, while the author delivers one convocation address after another and cultivates his narrow circle of influential friends in the capital.

The prince, for that is what the author is, remains *hors de combat* throughout the series of crises that engulf the state from time to time and though familiar names crop up now and again, the reader is provided no more than an occasional peep into the state's curious affairs. This is a pity, for Kashmir is still something of a riddle for the average Indian and the author could have provided more than a running commentary, albeit from a ringside seat, on the goings-on there.

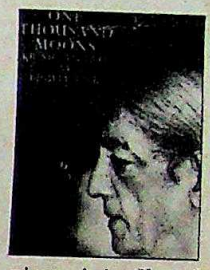
Throughout the period the author is embroiled in a personal crisis of his own, a crisis of the spirit, though that may not be how he would describe it. "With my curious childhood," he says at one point, "and the plunge into public life at the age of eighteen, I had missed an important ingredient, real friendship, and I felt an inner void." He seeks out an Englishman turned sanyasi called Ronald Nixon, who, as Shri Krishnaprem, becomes his guru. The guru has an ashram near Almora where, with the help of two disciples, also Englishmen, he dispenses spiritual wisdom. "I am not prepared to advise you on what to do or what not to do," the guru tells the author, "but do not lose the light that is within you. It is the only thing that will last."

Singh visits Almora every year for six years and seems genuinely happy to meet his guru. He also goes into a trance once or twice and claims to have seen Krishna—once as a baby and the second time as a youth—and also encounters a goddess—he doesn't say which—in various disguises. Karan Singh is evidently a complex character, far more complex than his secular guru, Jawaharlal. Soon after Nehru's death, when the author has to decide whether or not to get out of the state and plunge into national politics, he asks for "clearance" from his guru and only after that does he prepare the ground for moving, as he says, from the crown to the heart of India. The author was barely in his 30s when he went through all this, an age when a young man's fancies turn to more familiar pursuits. Karan is obviously cut from a different cloth, a genuinely Hindu cloth, in the fullest sense of that much maligned word, and that is what raises his autobiography to a level very close to that of Jawaharlal Nehru's classic.

—JAY DUBASHI

Devotee's Dues

ONE THOUSAND MOONS:
Krishnamurti at Eighty-five
BY ASIT CHANDMAL
Harry N. Abrahams Inc, New York:
(Price: not given; Pages 124)



GREAT teachers often inspire unusual offerings from their devotees. Ever since he first came into contact with philosopher and cult figure Jiddu Krishnamurti at the age of nine, Asit Chandmal has been something of a devotee. Chandmal is now 45 and Krishnamurti 90, and this lavishly produced volume is an offering to one who is not only a guru, but as the brief, highly personalised text seems to indicate, also a friend.

It is an unusual book, illuminating because Chandmal gets really close to his subject but disappointing at the same time because he is not an accomplished photographer. For a man whose life and teachings, both often controversial, have spanned so many decades, there is no dearth of written material either by him or about him.

Chandmal has sought to fill the gap that he sees: a visual portrait of the daily life of the philosopher. The text merely sets the context for the pictures which make up the book, pictures which have about them the quality of family snapshots. While it limits the aesthetic value of the book, this also gives it some merit. Chandmal has been able to get close enough to Krishnamurti to give an intimate if contrived look at the philosopher's life.

The book's 120 colour pages, beautifully printed, show Krishnamurti in his various surroundings, in India at the Rishi Valley School where the curriculum derives its inspiration from the philosopher's teachings, in Madras and Bombay, in California where he spends several months a year, in London and in Gstaad in Switzerland. They show him at work, in the privacy of his home, at leisure, with friends and among his followers. It is his followers who will value this book most; but they will also recognise that a truly fine pictorial biography of the man has yet to be produced.

—SUMAN DUBEY

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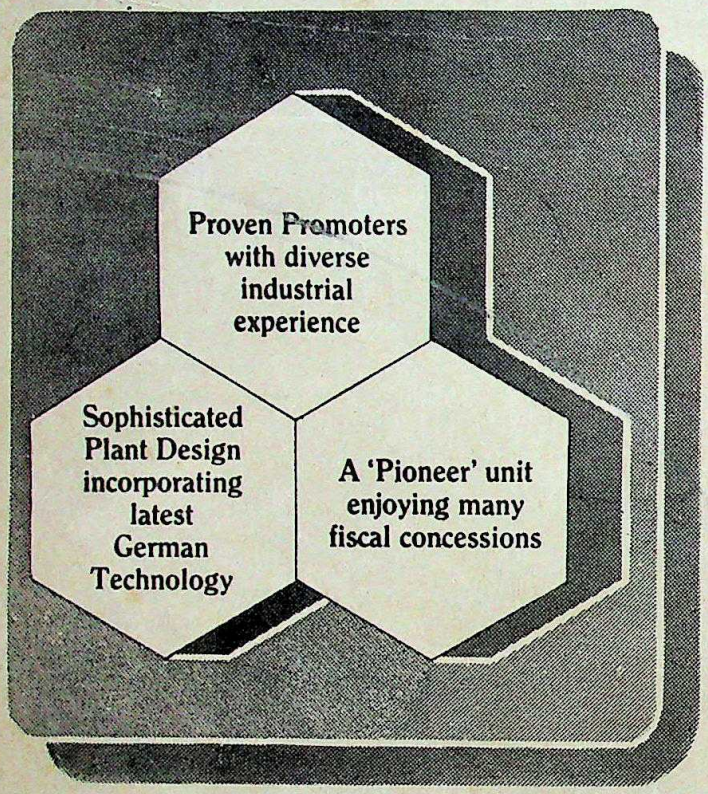
THE CHEMISTRY OF SUCCESS



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GUJARAT PRESS

Working Under Fear

FOR THE *Gujarat Samachar*, the state's largest selling newspaper (Ahmedabad edition circulation: 300,000), it was business as usual last fortnight. The paper's premises were gutted by a police-led mob on April 22 and it was feared that the aggressive 51-year-old newspaper would not be able to come out for several months (INDIA TODAY, May 15). But when it was discovered that two of the paper's four sophisticated Harris N 800 printing machines could be salvaged, the management decided, in the words of the paper's 42-year-old Managing Director Smruti Shah, to "rise from the ashes like a phoenix". Against the earlier 12 pages, the paper that reappeared on May 8 had only eight; compared to the previous print run of 300,000, the two units, patched up with parts cannibalised from the other damaged units, struggled to print three-quarters the amount.

But what had not changed was the paper's tone, which has been sharply critical of the Madhavsinh Solanki Government. In a front-page editorial, Shreyansh Shah, managing editor and publisher, promised that the paper would continue to "walk on the straight road even if it led to bayonets". This facade of bravado, however, hid a mass of private fears. The Shahs, who own the paper, continued to receive phone calls threatening: "Last time we burnt your press; if you don't improve, next time we will kill you." G.H. Master, one of the two photographers who had taken the dramatic pictures of victims of police atrocities which had contributed largely to the police ire against the paper, had gone "underground" and had still not reported for work even though he was at home. "When I ring up his house, his family members tell me he has gone out of station but I know he is arranging pictures for us by calling up other photographers from his house," chuckled a sympathetic Shreyansh Shah. Jhaverilal Mehta, the other photographer, came to work only on May 22, a good 20 days after the attack. Reporter Devender Patel, who had written many of the anti-police reports, had moved his family from his house in the vulnerable Patrakar Colony to a friend's house; the family went home after three weeks. Other employees were similarly fear-stricken: half of the 40-odd employees who were present when the police-led mob burst on the paper were still refusing to do night duty. Smruti Shah voiced their fears when she said: "We don't know what they will do. Even today we feel they might kill us."

The Government, squarely in the dock as far as the Shahs are concerned, was holding out no assurances. Not so long ago the Shahs and Solanki were good friends. Even otherwise, most state governments maintain cordial relations with powerful newspapers. A sympathy call by Solanki on the Shahs would have been in order. But even three weeks after the tragedy, there had been no overtures from him. The bureaucrats had noted the unbending attitude of their master and the paper's reporters found many of them hostile, not because they disliked the paper but because they were worried about how the Government would interpret any courtesy they might extend. Police Commissioner B.K. Jha was still telling all and sundry about the "provocations" his men had been working under but had yet to offer a word of apology to the paper his men burnt down. When the *Gujarat Samachar* sent a representative on April 22 to file a first information report (FIR), he too had been beaten up. The paper wired its FIR the next day and last fortnight policemen came to record statements of eyewitnesses. No arrests had been made but this was hardly surprising. "I have no faith in their inquiry," said Shreyansh Shah, "considering that policemen had led the mob."

For their part, the Shahs were willing to face any inquiry in which the Gujarat Government was not represented into their paper's coverage of the police atrocities in Ahmedabad last month. Said Smruti Shah, who flew to Delhi last month along with her husband Shreyansh: "We told Rajiv Gandhi that we were willing to be hanged from (Delhi's) Vijay Chowk if any independent inquiry could prove anything wrong in our coverage." Even while the paper was reporting the police atrocities, it had printed a challenge to anybody to disprove its reports. Conscious that the paper is accused of exaggerating reporting, and aware that in 1981 the Editors' Guild had passed strictures against its coverage of that year's anti-reservations agitation, Shreyansh Shah says they decided to be doubly careful this time. "Reporters used to hold their stories till they were absolutely sure. The result was we were printing mainly follow-up reports. Even the police atrocities in Gomtipur were first reported in another paper but only the *Gujarat Samachar* is

Gujarat Samachar's rebirth: fascimile of the May 8 edition

ગુજરાત સમાચારે હજુ સુરંગો પાથરેલી સડક ઉપર દોડવાનું છે

ગુજરાત સમાચાર

હડતાલના અંત અને સમાચારના પ્રકાશ

કર્મચારીઓની સફળ હડતાળના બીજા દિવસે છિન્નભિન્ન થઈ ગયેલું ગુજરાતનું અર્થતંત્ર

"The AINEC report is a pack of lies written by paid people of the establishment."

SMRUTI SHAH
managing director, Gujarat Samachar

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being blamed."

•The siege mentality of the Shahs is understandable. The April 22 attack could well have taken their lives and those of the employees present who were all trapped on the top floors of the building. Shantibhai Shah, the paper's 66-year-old editor, had to cross over on a makeshift wooden plank and hide with a Parsi family for two hours. Bahubali Shah, Shreyansh's younger brother, jumped out of a window and ran to safety. Smruti Shah and her two sons were choking in the blazing inferno for an hour and had started on the *naukarwali* (counting beads, which the Jains do when they are dying) when they were rescued. Sitting in her office, Smruti Shah draws herself together as she recalls the day's incidents and shudders as she says: "I still tremble when I think of that day. Tell me, can any other chief minister or government be that perverted?"

Patel in the gutted *Western Times* office

Shah's sentiments are clearly not shared by the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference (AINEC). AINEC was one of the five media bodies which rushed teams to the state to inquire if the Gujarat media, and the *Gujarat Samachar* in particular, had done anything to provoke a violent reprisal. All the reports agree that no provocation, however grave, could justify the attack, but the AINEC report cuts a lone furrow in blaming the press for its coverage of police excesses. There is no denying, it says, that the Gujarat press sees itself as a "propagator of certain vested opposition interests .... In the process the media seems to have followed the dictum of 'publish and be damned' irrespective of its impact on the general public." However, the report of the team of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) arrives at just the opposite conclusion: "It is not worth having a press if it does not reflect the events as they happen. The press in Gujarat was only fulfilling its professional and social obligations to the people."

Similarly, the AINEC report also accuses the *Gujarat Samachar* of publishing "slanted" reports of police atrocities and substantiating them with photographs said to have been "doctored", a charge which Shreyansh Shah hotly refutes. "The AINEC report is a pack of lies written by paid people of the establishment," charges Smruti Shah. Her reference is to the fact that all three members of the team belong to papers owned by Congress(I) MP's: Vishwabandhu Gupta of the *Tej* group, Tushar Kanti Ghosh of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and K.K. Birla of *The Hindustan Times* group.

The NUJ team conducted its own investigations into the reports on police excesses and concluded that none of them had malafide intentions. As their report notes: "If the police had not committed atrocities, the press would not have reported them." The real tragedy was that neither the state Government nor the police showed any finesse in handling the press. Not only did they make themselves virtually incommunicado, not a single specific rebuttal was sent to the press challenging its reports of police atrocities. Further, as the combined team of the Indian and Eastern Newspapers' Society and the Indian Language Newspapers' Association told Solanki, the *Gujarat Samachar* was entitled to its opinion that the Government's reservations policy was wrong and to campaign against it; that if the paper's reporting was not fair and accurate the Government could have gone to the Press Council and that if it felt the paper's coverage was inciting violence it could have filed a criminal suit against it.

Vishwabandhu Gupta: differing note

Yet the Shahs have the consolation that their travails have become a *cause célèbre*. The gutting of the press and offices of the *Western Times*, a much smaller English daily (circulation: 13,000) which was devastated only because it was housed in the premises of the *Gujarat Samachar*, has not been mentioned in passing even in the local media. Its editor-proprietor, Ramu Mamlal Patel, 54, one of the few journalists running his own paper, today sits under a tarpaulin on the pathway separating the machine rooms (which also had 2,000 precious hand types) and his offices (where he had also kept his stock of over 4,000 books). "I am shocked out of my wits," says Patel, "and for the first time in my life do not know what to do." Patel claims that his losses amount to Rs 40 lakh.

What will be just as painful to restore is trust between the Gujarat Government and the state's most powerful paper. A beginning had yet to be made and clearly Solanki was not about to take the initiative. Talking to the NUJ team, he narrated the story of Evelyn Waugh's novel *Scoop* in which mediamen 'create' a war in the Balkan states by collectively concocting reports of one. Solanki's implications do not even need to be spelt out. There were other ominous signals. A senior government officer issued a veiled warning to the *Indian Express* and *Jansatta* which had been spared the *Gujarat Samachar's* fate by the timely arrival of the army.

The state Government seems surprisingly unaware that it is its duty to aid the media in carrying out its legitimate function of communicating and interpreting the day's events to its readers no matter how much that upsets it. Says George Verghese, editor of the *Indian Express* and president of the Editors' Guild (which too sent its team but whose report was awaited): "Pressmen are not busybodies poking their nose into other people's business. The press has a legitimate role in any civilised society and this role needs to be emphasised, not abdicated." Solanki, a former journalist, was yet to show he was sufficiently appreciative of the media's role.

—AJAY KUMAR

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WEST BENGAL

The Koran Controversy

CALCUTTA thrives on political and ideological controversy, but last month religion in the Marxist state had the administration in a panic when the high court admitted a writ petition seeking a 'ban' on the Koran and asking the West Bengal Government to forfeit all copies of the holy scripture in original Arabic or its translation in any other language. As Muslim organisations expressed anguish over the 'admission' of the petition by the high court and a wave of indignation went up nationwide, last week the Centre announced its decision to intervene in the matter and get the petition dismissed.

The controversy followed a 14-page writ petition moved by Chandmal Chopra and Setal Singh on April 14, in the court of Justice Padma Khastagir, under Article 226 of the Constitution, Section 95 of the CRPC, and sections 153(A) and 295(A) of the Indian Penal Code. Justice Khastagir issued a notice to the state Government, in the process stirring a hornet's nest. "Everything seems insane and absurd. No mortal on earth can challenge the holy scripture and no court in the world has any authority over it," said senior advocate Alhaj C.F. Ali. Court sources explained Khastagir's role by holding that she merely 'entertained' the petition, it was not admitted, and issued direction as she felt she should not turn down any petition.

What irked Muslims and non-Muslims alike was the way the petition was worded—it described the Koran as the "so-called religious book of the Muslims" and accused it of being "ex-facie guilty" of "inciting violence, disturbing public tranquillity, promoting, on ground of religion, feelings of enmity, hatred and ill-will between different religious communities". The petition quoted extensively from the text to support its contention. Muslim scholars and intellectuals, however, felt the references were taken out of context and mutilated in order to create confusion.

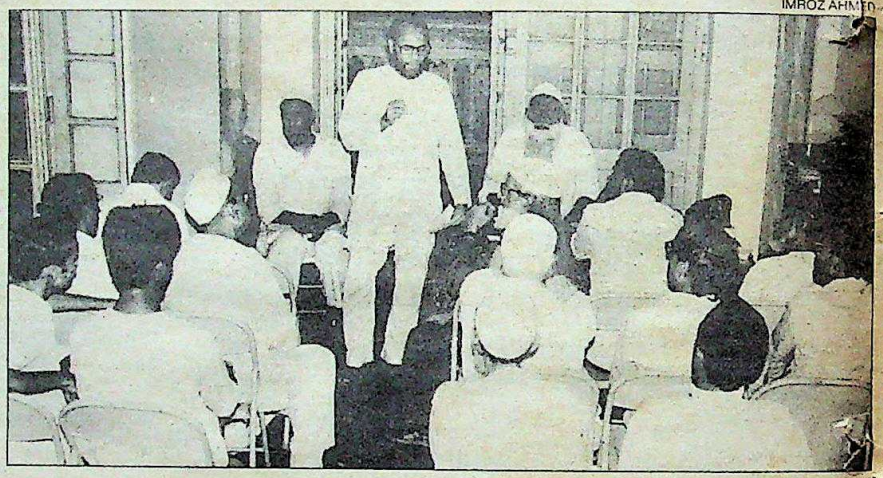
According to advocate Ali the reaction to the petition was spontaneous and about a hundred lawyers boycotted Khastagir's court. A move by over 70 advocates—both Muslim and non-Muslim—to pass an official resolution at the bar association asking all lawyers to boycott her court on May 6, however, ended in fiasco for want of support.

With tension mounting within the various Muslim organisations in Calcutta, the Jamait-e-Islami, a fundamentalist organisation, stepped in. Under the aegis of the Kerala Muslim Association of Calcutta, it convened a meeting of scholars and intellectuals from various organisations to consider the matter and decided to set up a Koran Defence Committee to spearhead the movement. The committee, however, decided not to become a party in the case. Committee General Secretary and Jamait President Syed Ali said: "We thought the case against the holy Koran being a sensitive subject should not be allowed to be handled by common Muslims. There are pressures to turn it into a public movement but we know how dangerous that could be, so we've tried to control the situation and contain it." Added Kerala Muslim Association chief K.A. Makkar: "Muslims in Calcutta are afraid that if they protest openly they would be harassed. This was why we have kept the movement away from the Muslim masses." While committee members were divided over the question of opposing the case in court, they did decide to counter the petition point-wise and educate the people on the teachings of the Koran to remove misunderstandings.

The state Government, on the other hand, took a clear stand. According to a spokesman of the state Judicial Department, the Government prepared an affidavit opposing the case saying that "the court has no jurisdiction to pronounce a judgement on the Koran, the holy scripture of the Muslims the world over, each and every word of which, according to Islamic belief, is unalterable". While seeking outright dismissal of the petition, the department maintained that there had never been such an application in existence in India and the writ had been filed with malafide motives.

What appeared most curious to Muslim leaders was the fact that when the court listed the petition for consideration on May 2 and called the parties, neither of the two petitioners appeared.

IMROZ AHMED



Syed Ali and the Koran Defence Committee: sensitive subject

Said Syed Ali: "The natural consequences of this should have been that the judge should have dropped the case. Justice Khastagir, however, instead of dropping the case, released it from her list and sent it back to the court of Chief Justice Satish Chandra."

Muslim organisations and a section of the Urdu press in Calcutta see the petition as a part of a wider conspiracy to create turmoil. Pro-Jamait daily *Akhbar-e-Mashrique*, which played up the issue, viewed that for the past some time linguistic and religious minorities were being provoked under an organised conspiracy and "it appears that the Left Front Government is also a party to it". But, according to sources in Calcutta, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has already taken a serious view of it and asked the Law Ministry to intervene immediately. On May 10, following advice from state Advocate-General S.K. Acharyya that the matter be assigned to another bench, Chief Justice Chandra assigned the petition to Justice B.C. Basak who, on May 13, dismissed the petition, thus averting what could have been a serious communal crisis.

—FARZAND AHMED in Calcutta

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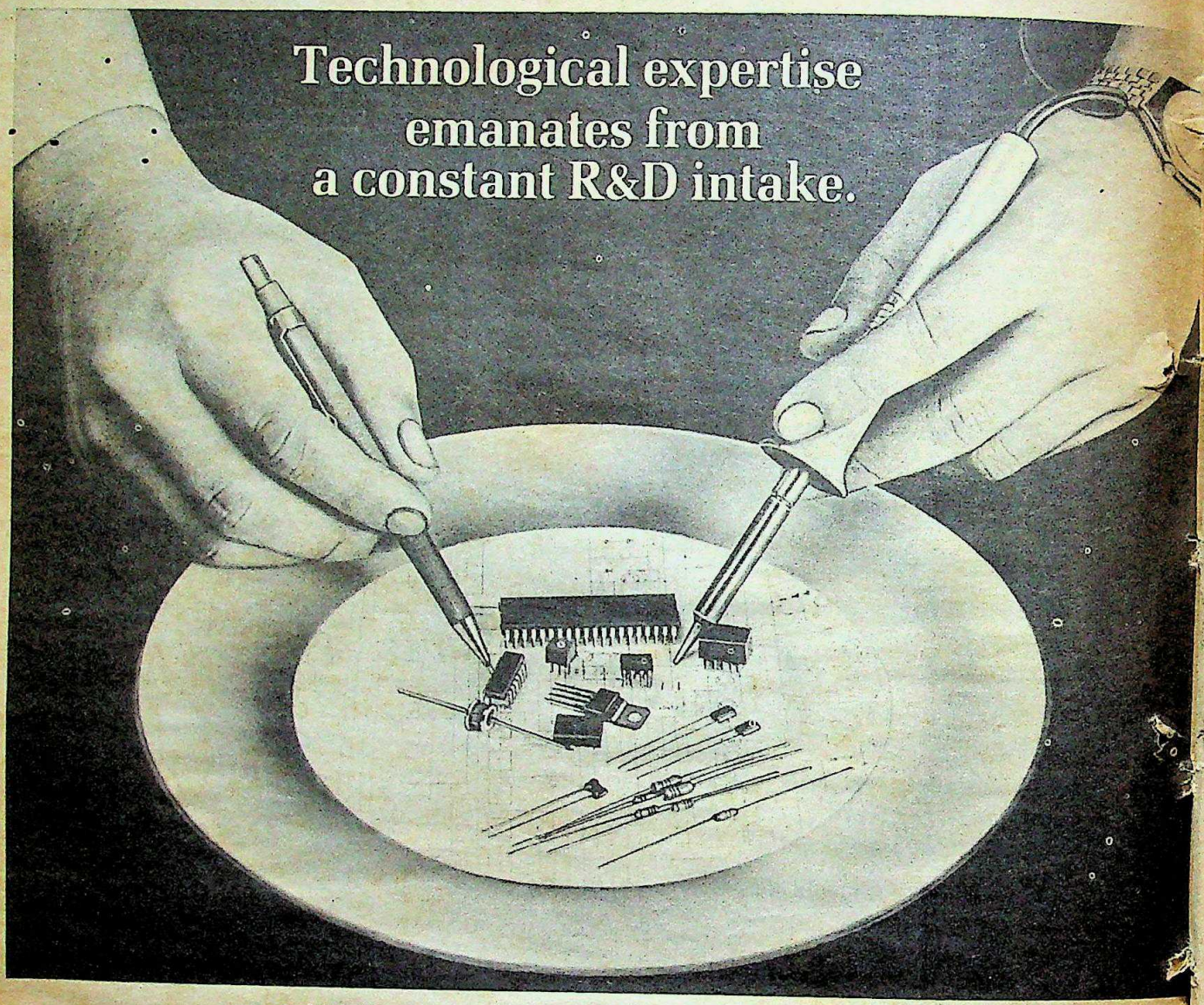

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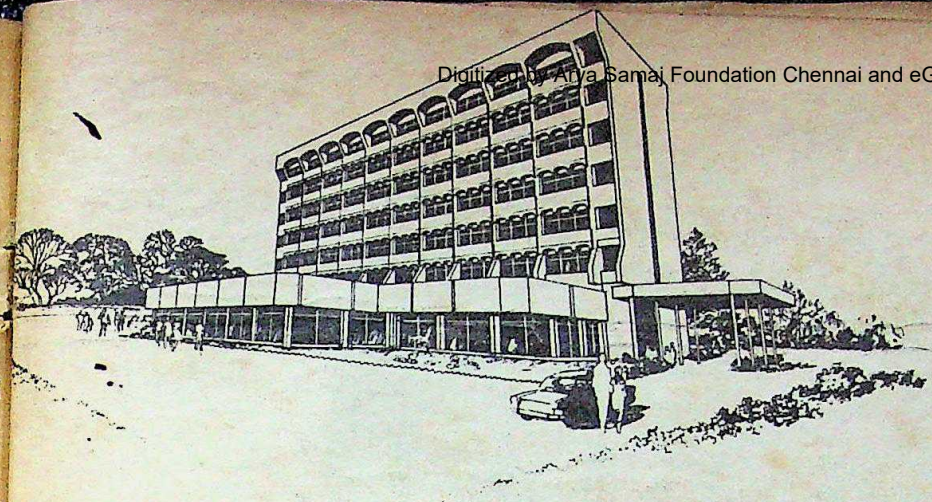

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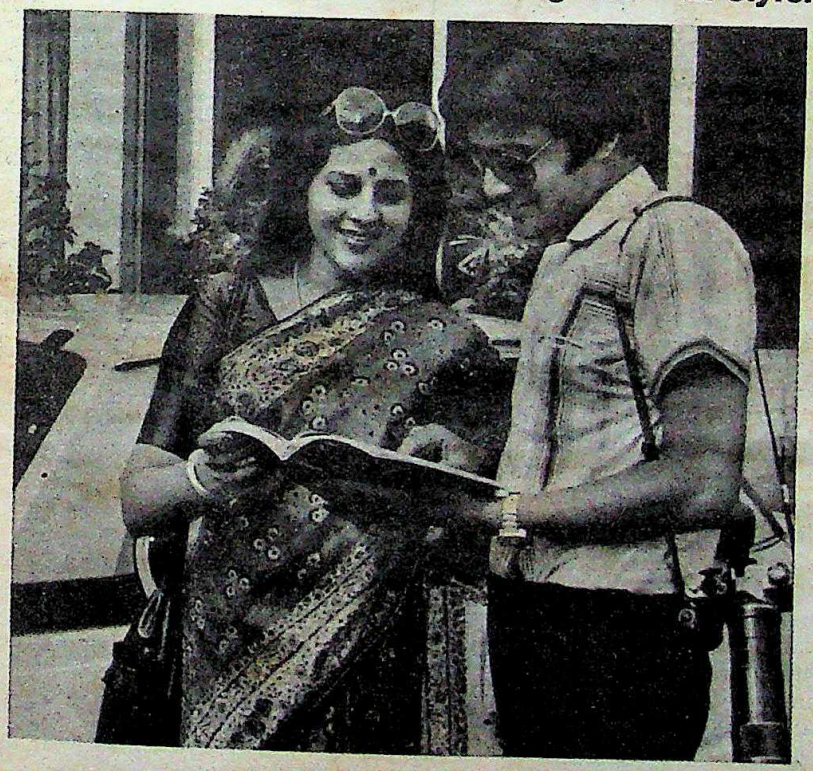

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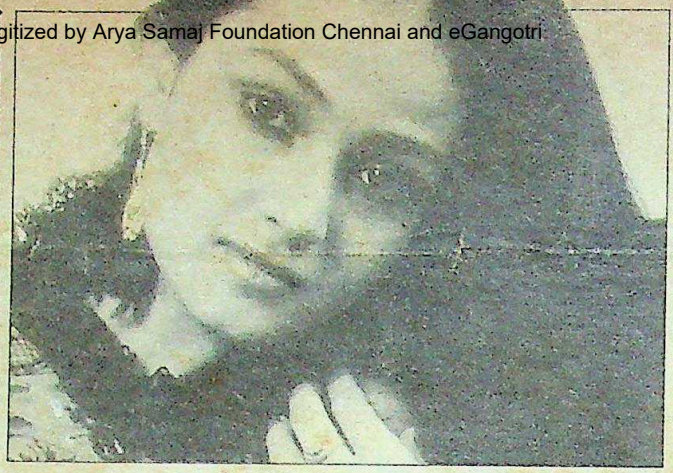
◆ Juan Peron kicked her out of his bed to make way for the bewitching Evita, but **Alisha Chinai**—who played the upstaged mistress in Alyque Padamsee's rock opera on the Argentinian first lady—has returned to the limelight. The part-time actress, spare-time model has blossomed into a full-time singer. This month her first album *Jadoo* will roll into the market. "This is only the beginning," grinned Alisha, "I would like to make a career as a singing actress." She has already sung for two Hindi films now being made —*Tarzan* and Shyam Benegal's Goan melody *Trikal*. "So what happens now, where am I going to?" sang Peron's little reject. With Jadoo on her side —just about anywhere.



Alisha: magic in the air

◆ At a time when he should be pondering over the problems of trigonometry or out playing kabaddi, 14-year- old **K.P. Sudesh** has one and only one thing on his mind: **Amitabh Bachchan** (groan), what else? But even filmi obsessions can do wonderful things to young minds. Sudesh has been compulsively painting his idol for the last two years. "He thinks Amitabh, he talks Amitabh, he's even started looking like Amitabh," said Sudesh's father indulgently. Sudesh has his own reasons: "I feel Amitabh is part of my family." He will be holding an exhibition in Delhi soon to display over a 100 little masterpieces. And then, Sudesh's most treasured dream may just come true: why, if he asks him very nicely, Amitabh himself may come and inaugurate the show.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Sudesh: idol mind

◆ At the crack of dawn last fortnight, **Raj Narain**, the impish president of the Rashtriya Janata Party left home for a party meet in Meerut. But the same night, when he drove back through the gates of 6, Teen Murti Lane, everything had changed. His precious party papers, battered-down cupboards, a forlorn portrait of himself and an assortment of other skeletons had been thrown into the lawns. Officials of the estate directorate had emptied the house of its last *gao-takiya* on the grounds that he no longer had the right to be there. "I arrived home only to find that Nadir Shah had been here before me," said the evicted netaji, who could have hit the ceiling if there had been a ceiling to hit. "I would have happily vacated if I had been given proper notice and alternative accommodation as a freedom fighter. Now I'll go to court." He has learned to live with power cuts, true, but he obviously still does not know that home is where the *haath* is.

Raj Narain: out in the open

◆ Dressed in a terrycot kurta-pyjama, his face freshly shaved, he looked like any other bridegroom. But that's where the resemblance ended. Last month, when **Malkhan Singh**—the dacoit who once terrorised the entire Chambal region—left Gwalior Central Jail to get married to Nirmala Devi, 25—it was a wedding the likes of which the city had never seen before. The bridegroom arrived accompanied by a 100-strong *baraat* of armed men. Instead of shehnais, gunshots rang out in celebration. And the wedding over, it was b[illegible] behind the iron curtain [illegible] Malkhan. He has left his [illegible] bride a small wedding pre[illegible] though: his seven-year [illegible] son Bahoran who had [illegible] living with his father in [illegible] ever since the dacoit's [illegible] wife died a year ago.

Malkhan Singh: bang-up affair

◆ Name: **Munna**
Age: Seven
Occupation: Dancer

When the visa officer in [illegible] French Embassy looked u[illegible] see his visitor, he was [illegible] prised to find a cuddly li[illegible] bear standing with a passp[illegible] For little Munna, it wa[illegible] biggest day in his life. La[illegible] night, the 38-inch tall bea[illegible] his cocoon in Jaipur to c[illegible] plete official formalities [illegible] New Delhi before he flies o[illegible] gay Paree for the Festiva[illegible] India. To be able to put his[illegible] paw forward, Munna is p[illegible] ently learning to cha-cha-[illegible] to French music. That d[illegible]

Munna: coming out part[illegible]

he will hop onto a Pa[illegible] bound 747 and enterta[illegible] French audiences in front [illegible] the Indian food stalls at [illegible] festival. After all, noth[illegible] goes as well with spicy foo[illegible] a little bear.

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARG[illegible]

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